

The Administrator's Role in Making Ed Tech Successful in Our Schools: Do Standards Really Help?

For the past three years I have been deeply involved in the development of national technology standards for school administrators as chairperson of the consortium that produced the standards. The official title of this Project is Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA). This project is being led by a collaboration of thirteen organizations. In addition to the organizations in the consortium, there are twenty state and regional Participating Organizations working with us. We are particularly pleased that CUE is one of these organizations. ISTE, which has done exemplary work pertaining to technology standards for teachers and students with the NETS projects, has served as the management organization for TSSA. Don Knezek is the Project Director and Heidi Rogers is the Project Co-Director.

The Old and Hopefully Discarded Way to Think About the Role of the Administrator

In the early days of technology in schools, it was common for administrators to see the totality of their role with regard to educational technology as that of getting equipment into the classrooms. Perhaps the most unfortunate expression of this approach was when the hardware was provided without software, supportive technical personnel, or professional development for those expected to use the technology. As a result there were schools where equipment sat unused because there were no applications with it, because the teachers just didn't know how to use it, or because no one was available to the teacher to help them fix a problem.

The distance which some administrators put between themselves and the technology was often a result of the belief on the part of the administrator that this was better left to the "technology people!" The techie lingo with all of the acronyms and jargon left many administrators feeling that technology was another world and it often seemed clear to them that they did not have the passport for that world.

Recognizing the Obvious – Administrators Matter

The TSSA Project was begun as a result of what is for any of us who work in or with schools an obvious fact: What administrators know and do with regard to education technology is critical in efforts to make effective use of technology in our schools. Certainly, teachers – as the persons who come into direct contact with kids in the classroom – are the "make-it-break-it" persons in determining if ed tech really does improve the environment for learning in the classroom. Yet,

administrators have a pivotal role in determining the consequences of technology in schools.

The importance of the role that administrators can play becomes particularly clear when we see the positive impact of administrators who have stepped “to the plate.” The impact of such administrators is very evident when one visits their schools, talk with teachers, and see the ways in which technology is being used. Administrators eliminate road blocks, provide the support which is required for the teacher to make the best possible use of the technology resources which are available to them. Administrators who know how to use technology also find good ways to make use of the technology to improve the efficiency of school operations and services. Thus, one can find examples of situations where administrators constrain and reduce the potential benefits of technology and examples where administrators play a role in deriving a full measure of value from the district investment in technology.

Can the Development of Standards Help?

Those of us who initiated the TSSA Project felt that we needed to move beyond nice sounding words such as “leadership is important” or “what administrators do or don’t do matters” to define the content of effective performance of administrators as it pertains to the use of IT in our schools. We have taken the position that a good way to get beyond the slogans is to define the content of effective performance in terms of standards. In essence, our task was to clarify what really constitutes the performance of those “good example” administrators.

Standards as a means of educational improvement remains a rather controversial topic. While some educators strongly support the formation of standards others see such as a waste of time or even offensive. I believe it makes less sense to be for or against standards *per se* than it does to take a position for any particular set of standards based on how those standards were developed and implemented . I offer four principles with regard to the effective use of standards.

- *Standards should be “something we do” rather than something we just read about.* When standards are developed, It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing the task as that of producing a document. If, however, one is concerned about standards as a basis for improvement in performance and services, it should be evident that producing a document which lists the standards is only an intermediary step. The process of creating the standards needs done in ways which will generate a determination to implement the standards.

- *The constituency for the standards should own the standards rather than having them imposed on them.* This principle is not a reflection of soft-heartedness or soft-headedness but reflects cold reality. It is hard to find any good examples where the use of standards as a bludgeon in education has produced the result of improvement in programs or personnel. In order for persons to have ownership of standards, they should be involved in the creation of them.
- *Resources and support to accomplish the standards needs to be provided.* It does little good to convince and motivate any of us that we should achieve a higher or better level of functioning in any domain of our professional lives if there are not resources to enable us to do so. The provision of the resources and means to achieve the standards is the necessary concomitant of requesting or requiring that the standards be met.
- *Standards pertaining to the effective use of information technology by school personnel should always be a work-in-progress.* Given the rapid pace of change of information technology, what is today exemplary behavior may be routine tomorrow.. When such standards become ossified their value has ended.

The Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA)

When this article appears in OnCUE, the Technology Standards for School Administrators will have been released. You can find the Standards on the TSSA website which is <http://cnets.iste.org/tssa/> You will see that we focused on three role types – superintendents, principals, and program directors and for those three role types we have provided descriptions.

The TSSA Standards adhere quite closely to the principles articulated above. They were not developed as a result of a small group of “experts.” They were developed as a result of meetings with hundreds of administrators, teachers, representatives of stakeholder organizations, state officials, and stakeholders from the private sector. Along the same lines, we have strongly recommended that districts, states, or other organizations and agencies who make use of the Standards provide opportunities for modification of the Standards to fit the local situation as well as real “buy-in” from those to whom these Standards apply.

By involving organizations which have an on-going capability and commitment to improve the use of IT in our schools and who have established networks and procedures for professional development we have met our commitment to help mobilize resources to attain the standards – rather than to merely articulate them. Also, since this Project as a collaborative effort with many organizations that will

be involved in implementing the standards we will have feedback loops that can enable us to continue the evolution of the standards.

Standards and Assessment

The theme of this issue of OnCUE is Assessment. There is a clear and important relationship between assessment and standards. Standards can provide a basis for the development of assessment procedures and instruments. This is particularly true when there is reasonable consensus among the target audience for the assessment that the standards are valid. The standards become the targets or criteria for the