

Technology Services
Listen and Learn Tour
November/December 2014

In November and December Technology Services held open meetings for staff regarding their vision, ideas and concerns about integrating technology in support of teaching and learning. We visited Lakeridge, Nelsen and Honey Dew in November and Renton High School in December. Over 25 staff took time out of their busy schedule to share their thoughts. The following is a summary of their views and ideas illustrated by their comments (not all of the following are direct quotes, but capture the essence of their remarks).

Access to Devices

Staff expressed appreciation for the additional laptops that were deployed in October, but requested students have access to laptops or a connected device throughout the day. Comments included:

- ...like to see grade-level implementation of one-to-one versus expense of adding additional carts
- ...be ideal if each classroom had a COW. With the current set-up it is difficult and time-consuming to use them.
- ...high school labs are constantly full. The equipment works, but we need additional devices.
- ...when we have one-to-one the kids will write and read more. Immediate feed-back changes performance! Students generally don't want to write with a pencil... they are eager to use the computer. E-books appear to attract kids to reading more. Savings in costs by not purchasing or maintaining books would be large. If all kids could read [the same book] at the same time, learning just skyrockets...my vision is for 3rd-5th graders to have their own device at school.
- ...laptops are not kid-proof. There are several teachers who don't want to be responsible to track and inventory the devices... asked that Tech Services please do a survey and gather teacher input before going one-to-one...need to have teacher buy-in for it to be successful.
- ...need to upgrade our technology. Half of my students have phones, and when they can use a device they are much more engaged with learning. Need to keep the kids interested and engaged in their education, and I feel technology is at least a partial answer to this...vision is to go paperless and one-to-one as soon as possible. Most of my students would flourish with their own devices.
- ...who is liable for the devices if they are broken or lost when using for school work?
- ... big concern is for students to have computer access during the day. After school hours is not as big of a concern at this time because very little homework is assigned. When students have a device, there will be no excuses for not being prepared to learn.
- ...although not practical for the school environment...a desk with a laptop for each student.
- [from a high school]...teachers would love one-to-one...though there is concern about laptops being damaged or not charged and not being available for student use when needed

Computers on Wheels (COWs)

The reaction to the COWs was very mixed. Teachers understood that this was a step forward in providing access, but that other approaches needed to be considered.

- ...when more COW carts were announced, teachers groaned. One-to-one using COW's is not the answer. Kids should have their own... kids will have the ownership & will take care of the laptop
- ...difficulties experienced with moving COWs to & from the portables. So many factors (weather/weight/surface of the ground/time/disrupting to neighboring classrooms...) Kids are still moving the COWS to the portables even though they are not supposed to. Hard to discourage them from doing so because they want to help.

- ...teachers don't have time to maintain the COW carts. Big problem now is the carts really don't belong to anyone. They periodically wander from room to room which requires extra time for teachers to move them or plug them in, inventory them, etc. Very time consuming for staff.
- ... COWs are very noisy. No training provided on the new COWs. Teachers agreed it is very stressful and exhausting on days they need to use the technology the way it is currently set-up. So many log-ins to deal with and consequently very little instruction occurs. Common to take upwards of 20 minutes for entire classroom to log in and when class lasts only 45 minutes, we are NOT using instruction time efficiently.
- ...only two days the COWs were not used this year [at a high school].

Curriculum Resources

Since the focus of the discussion was on technology, curriculum was not mentioned much except in a couple of cases and even then the teachers commented that this was not necessarily the responsibility of Technology Services.

- STAR and Dreambox. Frustration with the lack of knowledge of the STAR test and Dreambox. Are they related? Dreambox can be a distance-learning option. Not fully clear on how that works though.
- ...STAR, don't understand what scale scores are. What are the ranges? Would appreciate additional explanation of how it works... not just by reviewing the manual on their own.
- ...some new teachers didn't receive training with Skyward.... Just to be able to navigate. Should be a part of new teacher orientation.
- ...IB program requires use of TurnItIn.com
- ...more computers needed for Credit Recovery program
- AP Computer Science classes require computer access and some students have no computer access outside of class – can we provide computers for them to use?
- ...when kids go to a search engine, it's extremely frustrating when the site is blocked...my vision is for the teacher to say whether or not sites should be accessible so student learning isn't stopped. Also frustrating when sites are finally unblocked, they often times end up being blocked again the next school year...requested a quicker process for unblocking sites.

Customer Service and support for classroom technology

Though there was appreciation for many of the Technology Services staff and their work in the field, frustration was expressed with lack of timeliness and uneven service among buildings and in some cases lack of follow-through on Helpdesk tickets submitted.

- ...a lot of tech equipment we have doesn't work properly.
- ...currently, when there is an issue with a laptop within a COW, a sticky note is attached to the laptop, but it isn't always clear if a ticket has been submitted. Someone needs to maintain & monitor this.
- ... A staff member present commended [the TS staff] for their efforts. Often times it takes several calls to reach someone, but for most part they are communicative with her.
- ...frustration is that once a ticket is submitted, it will take 3+ weeks to get fixed properly. No immediate help is anticipated any longer.
- ...shared concern that there needs to be support for the equipment as well. Someone needs to maintain it, otherwise it just sits there. Teachers are busy teaching so need assistance by someone supporting the equipment.

- ...would like for tech staff to be more aware of what is going on in the classroom and offer assistance/advice for integrating technology...tech staff should spend time in the classroom and in the PLC... having a tech person on-site would be helpful in troubleshooting issues immediately.
- ...still doesn't have an overhead projector and is concerned with the apparent lack of understanding and communication from Tech Services.
- ...VGA cables and speaker cables are often needed. These items should be readily available and in stock. They always have to be ordered and this involves a long wait time to receive in the classroom.
- ...Tech Services needs to establish a relationship with staff in the labs, the librarians and the tech people so everyone can be on the same page.
- ...new teachers have five or six new technologies to learn in the classroom. Would be very helpful (and make the teachers' life easier) if they had some instruction on the various devices they are expected to use.

Audio-Visual Equipment, Presentation Stations

Teachers expressed concerns with timely repair of audio visual equipment in the classroom presentation systems as well as upgrades to the systems. Buildings that do not have ceiling or wall mounted projectors want the projectors from the floor to up above. A few teachers mentioned that audio systems can help their voices be heard and are especially important for students with hearing needs.

- Ceiling mounted projectors often times have to be maintained by school staff. If it's not, then it's not available for staff to use each day. She reported that issues occur continually.
- ...teachers have ceiling mounted projectors that are unusable. In order to use a projector, they have to have a projector on a cart sitting in the middle of their classrooms.
- ...was shocked when she came to Renton that 'smartboards' were not readily available here. 'Smartboards' and Mimeo are incredibly engaging for the students. Felt that I was immediately behind staff from most other districts by not having access to this type of current technology...it changes how you can teach and how students respond.
- ...lot of projectors breaking down and document cameras are breaking. I would love to see the doc cams replaced...everyone wants to have the same models (efficient, easy to use models).
- ...agrees with concerns previously mentioned and experiences issues with projectors and docking equipment, setting sound, etc.
- ...explained that during the last few years there has been a big push to build up the infrastructure. It has been fantastic and staff is pleased; Going forward would like to see an emphasis on the classroom needs. Seems many of the policies/procedures/ purchases have not been for what is most important in the classroom (equipment that is easy to use, reliable, not high-maintenance).

Log-in, email names, and passwords

A number of staff expressed frustration with logging on, email names and the process for changing passwords, which occurs when students forget their password.

- ...concerns with long log-in times for students. Some classes have taken 45 minutes to get all logged in!
- ...email name kids are required to use is ridiculous...so long & very cumbersome...wastes valuable class time
- ...excited about Dreambox and other programs, but it is difficult to get the kids access in a sensible, efficient manner. Too much valuable instruction time is spent assisting kids with their log-ins to various programs.
- ...would like to see the kids more comfortable logging in and it taking much less time to do so.

- ...Dreambox, DIBELS, Successmaker, etc. Programs involve too many sign-ins and points of contact for troubleshooting. Have had parents call for access codes, but teachers don't have access to that.
- ...over 300 students a week ask for a password reset [at a high school]

Technology Services processes, transparency and inclusion of staff input

Teachers expressed a range of needs to understand the District's future plans to better allow inclusion of teacher input. Teachers that had been involved with technology decisions beginning about 15 years ago believe that concern for teacher input has decreased dramatically over the last years.

- ...is requesting info on the district's plan for going one-to-one. Also requesting info on any money available for equipment in the classroom...
- ...teacher voices don't seem to be heard any longer. Buildings previously had a tech committee, but in the past 10 years or so, that voice has disappeared. Decisions don't seem to include teachers any longer...need to find ways to get teachers voice recognized again. Major outcome would be that teachers buy-in and buildings buy-in.
- ...many staff are feeling alienated from the decision making process for school technology. Many have resigned from the Renton Technology Coordinating Council [RTCC] because they didn't feel included or their input valued. Expressed appreciation that Tech Services staff took time to visit and hear their concerns.

Printing, Copying, and Print Shop

There were a number of issues with building printing and copying as well as the timeliness of Print Shop turn-around in September and October. The need for many teachers to print their curriculum was an added burden that the District had not responded to quickly enough. Though many of the issues from the start of the school year had been resolved there were ongoing problems, including not being able to print from some COWs or a local printer.

- ...huge issues with Print Shop for a lot of teachers. Teachers have had to create their own curriculum. Biggest concern is that they are not being listened to any longer...very important for everyone to understand each other's role.
- ...issues with already-created pdf's. Continue having space/font issues when submitting through the website [to the Print Shop].
- ... Tech staff look should look at possibly adding printers to a building because of additional rooms being added, or because building needs have changed. Suggested including this info in a survey to the buildings to see what current needs are ... emphasized that not all schools have the same needs.
- ...need group policy so that COW computers can link to COW printer

Social Media

There were only a couple of comments expressed on these topics in the meetings, more conversation took place outside of the 'formal' meeting setting. Questions were asked about District policy and appropriateness of various tools. Some teachers use text messaging or Twitter to communicate with students about assignment or sport team activities and some parents want to communicate using text messaging. What can the District provide to support these types of communication rather than teachers, students and parents using their personal accounts?