



SCHOOL DISTRICT 12

JOHNSBURG
INSPIRING OUR STUDENTS

2012 Spring Semester Instructional Technology Status Report

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Instructional Technology Status Report: 2012 Spring Semester

In April 2012 I will celebrate my second anniversary of working for Johnsbury School District 12. Each and every month that I have had the opportunity to serve the parents, students and staff members of the District, I have been dedicated to enhancing the presence and effective use of technology in our classrooms and offices. Through proper acquisition and maintenance of technology items, professional development and a strong support system, we continue to “live” our mission to provide a safe and challenging learning environment for our students. While the confines of our classrooms and buildings may maintain the same physical appearance to the naked eye, the activities within our classrooms, the learning styles of our students and the teaching methods of our faculty are continually changing and evolving. Instructional technology services and hardware are but only a few of the tools that our faculty uses each day to support our student’s needs, and to reach every child so that they can do their best in school. But unlike any other tool, technology is limitless and continually evolving through the development of affordable multi-function devices and accessible online resources.

As I move into my third year with Johnsbury Schools I am looking forward to continuing my personal mission of introducing our faculty members to new ways of utilizing instructional technology resources, and exposing faculty members to the world of resources that are out there waiting for us to use. While we still have a ways to go with providing a solid infrastructure (hardware, network and updated software), the District’s promotion of technology use in the classroom continues to expand, and the faculty’s attitude towards learning and trying something new continues to improve due to our professional development efforts. With the excitement and interest of our students and faculty towards technology use in the classroom, the possibilities will be truly endless.

Experiences of Our Parents

Enhanced Use of Building Websites (don’t forget student safety)

Within each of our buildings we have designated a support staff member in the main office to be responsible for routinely updating our school websites (referred to as a webmaster). At Ringwood we have Brenda Kurtz, at Bush we have Gigi Crook, at the Junior High we have Kathy Jayko and at the High School we have Debbie Schmidt. Some of our website updates that are made throughout the year include:

- Replacing and rotating high-interest, student-center pictures at the top of each building’s website;
- Adding and updating new school-wide events to the calendar accessible from the front-page;
- Authoring and publishing high-interest news stories about our students achievements and activities;
- Keeping an accurate roster of all faculty and staff members working in the building for parent accessibility of contact information.

We continue to enhance our website and provide the necessary training and support to each of our webmasters in fulfilling their job responsibilities. And I am grateful for the ability to work with a wonderful group of dedicated employees that are always eager to learn, and are empowered to ask questions and suggest improvements as needed.

Some of the improvements we have made on our site include redesigning the front pages to provide easy-to-view calendar dates, and expanding the visible content for each Parent News story. Now, the most current events show up with a calendar icon graphic along with enhanced text so that parents clearly see the event information. We have also improved our Parent News section that has become a popular destination. Now, we are able to show the five most recent stories (instead of three prior to the updates), as well as provide a summary of the article instead of just pulling the first line of the article.

We have also created a new Student Safety Section that is accessible from every web page on the District website, as well as each building's website. The section will appear different depending on the site (i.e. Ringwood, Bush, Junior High, High School or District), and has some basic information present

at this time. Within this section we also highlight our several ways of contacting our building leaders and Student Services support staff members to report student safety issues including: telephone, email, anonymous voicemail and anonymous text messaging. As we move forward we will be further customizing these information locations to keep parents informed of our student safety efforts.

Our last change took place the first week of February with the upgrading of our Staff Directory pages for each of the buildings. These updated pages now feature all of the traditional building contact information, as well as pictures of our staff members, clear links to their web pages, and a web-based email form. This new web-based email form streamlines the process for our parents and students to email their teachers. They now will simply be able to click on the link that contains the teacher's email address and fill in a form. In addition through the incorporation of staff pictures, we continue Johnsbury's historical tradition of placing a name with a face, which can be extremely helpful for those who are new to the District, or for those parents that have students transitioning between buildings.

As we continue the use of our websites and focus on communicating electronically, we still struggle with the need for us to get our customers (parents, students and community members) to seek-out the wealth of information that is posted online. Oftentimes we will use AlertNow automated phone messages to remind parents to visit our website for more information on a topic. Other times we will send an email reminder through use of the Skyward Message center. We are working with our building leaders and advisory groups to identify other methods that we can utilize to remind our parents to check out our websites for current and pertinent information.

Efficient Use of Skyward Message Center Emails

Sending emails through the Skyward Student Information System continues to be a popular method of communication for both our school offices and individual classroom teachers. However one of the requests we have received from parents has been for us to send fewer messages with more content (ex. one email a week with multiple items, instead of five emails in one week with minimal information). This is prompted by two reasons: first, to limit the amount of email a parent has to review on a daily or weekly basis; second, to limit the likelihood of school-related communication finding its way into a bulk-email box or being marked as SPAM.

Since December we have been working with each of our building leaders and department heads to streamline the communication process. This includes communication from affiliated and outside organizations. As part of this effort, we have attempted to decrease the mass emails to only one-per-day, or in some situations, one-per-week. While we know that we have not addressed this situation fully, we believe that we are making strides to reduce the burden of multiple emails on a single day to parents.

Planned Expansion of Faculty Voicemail Service

While written electronic communication is a quick, efficient route to communicating with a faculty member, it is not always the preferred method. Sometimes the ability to speak your message through a voicemail provides a parent the ability to effectively communicate their questions, feelings or thoughts on a particular topic. At the current time, our telephone infrastructure in some buildings gives us the ability to provide a voice mailbox to a teacher. However since we do not have phones in our classrooms, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to routinely check their voice mailbox to see if there are messages. As one can imagine, this can be a difficult process at the end of the day with only 1 or 2 publically accessible phones in our staff workrooms or offices.

Therefore we are currently investigating the possibility of improving our telephone systems to provide faculty the ability to receive a notification, transcript and audio file of a parent voicemail through their Google email. This function is fairly common amongst business, education and non-profit organizations, and is relatively inexpensive to provide. We believe that by providing our faculty this functionality they will be able to continue to provide multiple different forms of communication to their parents and further strengthen the parent-teacher-student relationship.

Experiences of Our Students

One Username • One Password

In August the iTech Department implemented a new initiative dubbed, One Username • One Password. The purpose of this initiative was to reduce our student's reliance on several usernames and passwords, and instead issue only one username and password. After an initial trial period we implemented the system for all students in the District. This allows them to utilize their J-ID and password to access the following systems:

- Skyward Student Access
- District Computers Running Windows
- District Computers Running Mac OS X
- Google Apps for Education (Coming Soon)

The implementation of One Username • One Password has allowed our students to only memorize one username and one password, compared to two, three or even four sets of information that was necessary in previous years. The decrease in usernames and passwords has also led to a reciprocal decrease in the need for faculty to reset student passwords, which ultimately has limited downtime in classrooms while the students with password issues were assisted.

Upgraded Lab Facilities and Classroom Software

This year we completed the renovation of the remaining labs in the District. As of today I can officially say that every computer lab in the District has computers that are at most three years old and are capable of handling a high-level of use (and abuse) of an active learning environment. Whenever we purchase technology we look at the needs of our students and faculty both today and five years from today. This ensures that we are purchasing devices and equipment that will be able to meet our needs in the future as technology changes and developers update software.

In addition to our expansion and improvement of lab facilities, we are also looking closely at all of the software we use in each of our classrooms. With our aging operating system (Windows XP) we have a need to look at upgrading the majority of our software programs that have been purchased over the last 10 years to ensure that they will be compatible with Windows 7. In addition, as the Internet continues to grow and become more conducive to web-applications, we are starting to strongly consider web-based applications instead of desktop applications when purchasing new software licenses. This limits the amount of labor necessary to install software, and it also opens the possibility for students to be able to access their software anytime, anywhere (based on licensing).

Use of Mobile Devices at School (Personal and School-Owned)

During our Parent and Student Handbook committee meetings in the spring of last year we adopted a formal procedure on mobile device usage in our school buildings. This procedure was necessary with the continued explosion of mobile devices throughout society and the desire of our students to utilize mobile devices in the school setting. Since the adoption of this procedure, several of our faculty members have permitted the use of mobile devices in the classroom for educational purposes. This has assisted us in situations of limited accessibility to devices such as iPads and iPods that are school-owned. We have also received positive feedback from parents of children who are avid readers and appreciate the ability to utilize their eReaders in the school setting. For those that are not familiar with our new procedure, it is listed below.

Parent and Student Handbook, 2011-2012, p. 35

Use of Personal Technology Devices

Johnsburg School District 12 operates a wired and wireless local area network that provides access to the external Internet. Access to these networks is provided primarily through District-owned resources. Students that are permitted by the classroom teachers and school administration to utilize their own personal technology devices for curricular purposes must abide by the following policies:

- For reading purposes, students are permitted to possess and utilize single-function devices such as the Amazon Kindle.
- For curricular purposes only, students may be permitted to possess multifunction devices such as the Barnes and Noble Nook or Apple iPad or iPod with the permission of their classroom teacher(s) and school administration.
- Students are not permitted to utilize a multifunction device (iPhone, Blackberry, Android Device, etc.) during the school day with cellular capability that may be distracting to the educational environment.
- Students are not permitted to access the school's wireless network (known as Johnsbury Wireless), without the permission of the Instructional Technology Department. Students are never permitted to access the school's wired local area network without the express permission of the Director of Instructional Technology.

Students, who choose to bring and/or use personal technology devices to/in school, do so at their own risk; the District and school will not assume any responsibility if these items are lost, stolen, damaged or corrupted. In no situation are students required to bring personal technology devices to school.

Experiences of Our Staff

New "Tech Request Process" Instituted in March, 2011

Each year faculty members have the opportunity to submit requests to iTech, the Johnsbury Educational Partnership Foundation and the Johnsbury Parent-Teacher Organization in an effort to purchase technology equipment and services for use in the following year. Some of the more common hardware items requested include: document cameras (referred to as ELMOs); ceiling-mounted projectors (referred to as Proximas); interactive white boards (referred to as SMART Boards). Alternatively, some staff members request software applications or subscriptions to web-based services such as Discovery Education (formerly known as United Streaming) or Scholastic Classroom News.

As Johnsbury School District continues to streamline the purchasing process, and as necessary procedures for the standardization of equipment are developed for all schools in the District, a new request process was instituted this past year. The process was designed to ensure that instructional technology funds are maximized, distributed equitably between our four educational facilities and that each request was supported by standards-based rationale.

Faculty members desiring new instructional technology hardware, software or subscriptions to web-based services were asked to fill out an Enhancing the Curriculum through Technology Request Form. This form was divided into the following sections:

Overview of the Project	Project Title Project Participants (Faculty, Staff, Administrators) Principal Approval
	Project Grade Levels Project Subject Matter
Project Description	Brief Summary Goals of the Project Requested Hardware / Software / Subscription Proposed Student Activities / Timeline
Assessment / Evaluation Plan	Identification of Assessment Methods

Through the implementation of a streamlined and thorough process, we received many quality requests with academic justification that were all reviewed individually. While we were not able to grant all requests, the administration felt very confident in approving over \$200,000 in technology requests.

Professional Development Sessions for Every New Tool (and Old Tool)

Every month the Curriculum and Instructional Technology Departments work together to create a series of professional development sessions that faculty and staff members can attend to strengthen existing, or learn new skills, for use in the classroom and office settings. One area of professional development that we have been addressing is the need for our faculty to receive formalized instruction on the use of interactive whiteboards (in Johnsbury Schools, SMART Boards). While many of our faculty members have utilized SMART Boards for years, few, if any, have completed the formal training program designed by SMART Technologies (the manufacturers and software developers of SMART products). This means that they have never received the training necessary to effectively take full advantage of the SMART Notebook software program, nor have they been trained in the best practices of facilitating an interactive classroom. Through grant funds this past summer I was able to attend the SMART Certified Trainer program to be able to offer our staff members this programming in their own schools and classrooms. This has allowed us to provide training that would normally cost a minimum of \$250 per teacher if we were not able to teach the course in-district. Since August, I am pleased to report, I have formally certified over 30 certified staff members in SMART Notebook Level 1 training. (As a quick side note: In every training we have had novice and experienced SMART Board users and, in every training, every staff member left sharing that they have learned new things that they can do with the technology in their classroom.)

In addition to SMART Training, we have offered training sessions on almost every piece of technology hardware and software that we have adopted for use in the District. Our training sessions are designed to offer users an overview of the tool (whether hardware or software), and then go further in-depth as to how the tool can be utilized within the classroom to inspire and engage our students. To encourage attendance at our sessions, we try to meet our faculty when and where their schedule permits. So for instance, we often will offer training sessions before and after school, and even during lunch hours. We hope to continue to expand our professional development opportunities in the future by expanding our offerings to include graduate credit-eligible course offerings through a partnership with Aurora University. Our faculty is eager to learn, and have scored most of professional development sessions as "Excellent" (based on their post-participation surveys). So we most certainly hope to keep them coming through a diverse range of course offerings, with a variety of benefits for their time.

Expanded Support in the Buildings

For several years, the District has employed staff members distributed amongst the four school buildings that each have a range of responsibilities for their given assignment. As of the summer, there was limited consistency in positions with regard to responsibilities, and several of these positions did not have a defined supervisor. What was consistent amongst the positions is that each staff member is assigned to a particular workspace (computer lab facility) in their building.

After reviewing the roles and responsibilities of each school building technology staff member, it was determined that the District would define two classifications for these staff members: Technology Skills Instructional Assistant; Technology Facilitator. By creating these roles, iTech has been able to demonstrate a clear presence in each building and a defined individual or set of individuals for faculty and staff to consult when they need just-in-time support. Additionally, these staff members also are assigned several tasks to assist with new upgrade and maintenance procedures for the District. This includes: dusting and cleaning of microcomputers; cleaning of ceiling-mounted projector air filters; installation of specialized software; replacement of toner cartridges; trouble-shooting common user-error issues. The new position descriptions are as follows:

Technology Skills Instructional Assistant

Under the daily supervision of the Building Principal, and responsible to the Director of Instructional Technology, the Technology Skills Instructional Assistant will be responsible for:

- Facilitating technology skills training for students;

- Supporting the Learning Center Director in defined lessons that prepare students for effective use of technology in their coursework;
- Providing support for faculty members with minor technology issues as needed;
- Maintaining the Instructional Technology facility and requesting advanced technical support when needed from iTech;
- Ordering supplies from iTech as needed;
- Collaborating with the Director of Instructional Technology regarding needs and facility concerns and suggestions.

Technology Facilitator

Under the daily supervision of the Building Principal, and responsible to the Director of Instructional Technology, the Technology Facilitator will be responsible for:

- Supporting faculty members utilizing the Instructional Technology facility through assigned Help Desk Tickets;
- Providing support for faculty members with minor technology issues as needed;
- Maintaining the Instructional Technology facility and requesting advanced technical support when needed from iTech;
- Ordering supplies from iTech as needed;
- Collaborating with the Director of Instructional Technology regarding needs and facility concerns and suggestions.

Through the restructuring of the iTech Department we have been able to provide an increased level of support, which has led to the majority of Help Desk tickets being solved in 0 – 48 hours. (This is compared to 0 – 96 hours last year.)

Instructional Technology Advisory Committee

Over the past two years we have been working to transition our faculty and staff, parents and students understanding of technology in Johnsbury School District 12. One of our first efforts to make this transition was the renaming of our technology department to the Department of Instructional Technology. The name change served as our first public acknowledgement that technology is no longer isolated in its own area outside of curriculum and instruction. We utilize technology tools and resources daily in almost all of our District's operations, and in many aspects of our individual classroom's activities. Therefore in every decision that is made with technology, we take into consideration how it effects and impacts instruction, our student's experiences and how it aligns with the mission and vision of the District.

In November we identified that we were ready to further expand our conversation about the benefits and considerations of implementing technology into instruction, and are calling together a group of faculty and staff members to serve as an advisory committee for instructional technology.

In December we solicited nominations from each of the building principals, and several individuals were identified as dedicated faculty members who embrace the use of technology in the classroom, and support its use throughout their building. From the nominations, 3 representatives were selected from each building to serve a one-year term.

The purpose of this committee, who will meet monthly, will be to serve in an advisory capacity to the Curriculum Director and the Director of Instructional Technology regarding instructional technology topics and trends that are presented for discussion. It is also our hope to utilize our committee meeting time to hold open conversations regarding faculty and student needs that exist in each of our buildings, as well as an opportunity to discuss and preview upcoming technology changes that might impact our classrooms.