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Advice for educators seeking a smooth transition to the cloud

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For administrators looking to take the focus of edtech away from upkeep and back to learning, moving to the cloud could be the answer.

In the early days of the edtech wave, superintendents saw many benefits from using digital resources in the classroom, but they also saw a large number of resources being committed to just this one aspect of education. Space for server farms, money for hardware and software

upgrades, and overworked personnel made for a challenging environment.

District IT offices were taking on the same tasks as Fortune 500 companies but without the ability to implement the technologies as effectively. In a recent webinar hosted by edWeb.net, presenters shared their reasons for switching to the cloud, how it has helped their schools, and their advice when making the transition.

The presenters named several reasons they chose to move to the cloud, the top reason being that it provided equal access to and quality of edtech for students and teachers.

Before the cloud, it was possible that each third grade classroom would have a science app of varying quality. With the cloud, teachers select the most effective program, and it's available to all.

In addition, students don't need specific devices or operating systems to use digital resources. If they can get to the web, then they can do homework, see teacher comments, and do anything else they might in the classroom.

Other reasons for migrating to the cloud include potential cost-savings, the simplicity of having all resources in one place, and increased reliability and decreased outages.

Once they moved their educational resources to the cloud, the presenters found several key benefits:

- Staff efficiencies: Initially, IT staff worried about losing their jobs. In actuality, moving software maintenance off-site meant they could focus more on working with students and teachers to get the most out of the digital resources. Teachers also spent less time troubleshooting tech issues.
- Cost-effectiveness: Presenters saw projected cost savings become real cost savings, especially since there are no more one-use, one-classroom programs. Now, when the school adds a program, it benefits a wide range of users.
- Elasticity: User licenses, storage, and services can be added and subtracted as needed.
- Analytics: Now, administrators know how many teachers and students are using a program, how often, and how effectively. The detailed data helps administrators make informed purchasing decisions.

Each presenter also offered a key piece of advice for a smoother transition to the cloud:

- IT personnel should plan for more bandwidth than they think they'll ever need. They'll catch up to the limit faster than they think.
- Have more than one pathway to the Internet. Then if one pathway goes down, students and teachers will still have access.

- Schools should provide families with full disclosure regarding what programs they're using, what data they collect, and how it's used. They should be up-front about potential breaches. Parents are more understanding when they don't think the administration is keeping secrets. Develop security benchmarks, and don't use any program that doesn't meet them. Student privacy is more important than any program.
- Study best practices. Other schools and districts have already gone through the process of figuring out what works best. Find out what did and didn't work for them to guide the transition.

Most important, though, is for the administrators to understand the user experience, what's working, and where the frustrations might be for all constituents.

"I think the best thing you can do as a leader moving in that way is to actually use the tool," said Dr. Hank Thiele, the superintendent of Community HS District 99 in Illinois. "I believe strongly if you're going to make the kids use it, you better use it too. You better know what their experience is, and you better be able to operate in that world. You're much better able to help if you're living in that world."

About the presenters

Dr. Doug Brubaker has served as superintendent of Fort Smith Public Schools, an Arkansas district with over 14,000 students, since January 2017. The district is now in the process of implementing Vision 2023, a new five-year strategic plan developed by hundreds of parents, students, educators, and members of the community. In May 2018, district residents approved the first millage increase in 31 years for upgrades related to instructional innovation, school safety, technology access, and career development. Prior to Fort Smith, Dr. Brubaker served for over 20 years as a teacher and leader at the campus and district levels in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He holds a doctorate in educational computing from the University of North Texas, an M.Ed. from Texas Christian University, a B.A. from the University of Kansas, and CoSN CETL certification.

Dr. Henry (Hank) Thiele is the superintendent of Community High School District 99 in Illinois, which serves over 5,000 students, drawing from several area communities. District 99 is recognized as one of the first districts to fully close the "Homework Gap" by ensuring every student has access at school and home to a computer, digital resources, and Internet access. Dr. Thiele is well known for his expertise in educational technology with a focus on personalizing education through the lens of care. Throughout his career he has led others through the deployment of several large-scale initiatives related to teaching, learning, and technology. Examples include working with Google to bring Google for Education into many K-12 settings (including the first deployment of Google in the K-12 setting), launching full-scale 1:1 learning programs, transitioning print resources to digital platforms, and leading the districts to be recognized nationally for innovations in technology and learning.

Frankie Jackson has served public education for 25 years as a chief technology officer. Starting the first 10 years of her career in software engineering at NASA supporting the Space Shuttle and Station contracts, she brings a highly technical perspective to education. As a Baldrige quality examiner while working at NASA, she transitioned to K-12 because of her love of children, education, performance excellence and technology leadership. Working at the highest level in the nation including the Association for School Business and CoSN, she's the information technology content leader, CoSN's SMART Education Network by Design (SEND) advisor and a member of CoSN's Policy committee. She was named CoSN's volunteer of the year in 2018. She is most proud to serve as a trainer for the CoSN's Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL) program where she is helping aspiring CTOs be all they can be. Her new book, *Emergent Technology Leadership*, will be available in 2019.

About the host

Ann McMullan is a 34-year veteran educator who served as the executive director for educational technology in the Klein Independent School District, located just outside Houston, Texas until September 2013, when she and her family moved to Los Angeles, California. For 16 years Ann led the team in Klein ISD that provided professional development on technology and 21st century instructional strategies to over 4,000 professional educators serving over 50,000 students. During that time Ann also co-chaired the Texas Education Technology Advisory Committee which developed the Texas Education Agency's Long Range Plan for Technology, 2006-2020.

Today, she is based in Los Angeles, California working as a public speaker, writer, and independent education consultant focused on supporting leadership, visioning and planning to meet the needs of today's students. She is a frequent presenter at state, national and international education conferences. Ann serves as project director for CoSN's Empowered Superintendents Program. She serves on the board of PowerMyLearning Los Angeles and on the advisory board of Project Tomorrow. In the fall of 2016 Ann co-authored and published *Life Lessons in Leadership: The Way of the Wallaby*.

Join the Community

Super-Connected is a free professional learning community on edWeb.net for school superintendents, district leadership, and aspiring district leaders.

The edWeb webinar referenced above, sponsored by ClassLink and co-hosted by CoSN, can be found here.

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