

Leveraging the Business Teacher

Strategic partnerships can help business teachers stay current on technology while they provide valuable support to the rest of the staff

Technology is a part of most teacher education programs, but once teachers are in the classroom, they often discover it is difficult to find time to learn new things. Technology changes so fast that it is hard to keep up. Especially for elementary-level teachers, this problem simply means that it is difficult or impossible to efficiently integrate technology. For middle and high school business teachers, the need to stay current on technology is a vital job requirement.

A partnership between these two levels of

teachers can satisfy both groups needs for continuing technology development. Working with students and teachers in other curricular areas and grade levels can enrich a business teacher's overall technology knowledge and provide a larger technology support system for the district as a whole. Why not implement strategic partnerships to benefit the school district and forge strong relationships between teachers?

Many elementary teachers are expected to troubleshoot equipment issues, install new software, upgrade hardware, troubleshoot network issues, and maintain secure Internet access. Although many school districts are implementing technology coordinator positions, it often takes a great deal of time before anyone comes to help with routine maintenance issues.

In middle or high schools it is common for teachers to call on students to help them deal with the technology in their classroom. This, of course, isn't a viable option for elementary level teachers. These teachers often have limited options for getting technology training as well as assistance in maintaining the equipment they have.

Potential roadblocks to implementing a program across grade levels are mostly logistical in nature. The physical location of elementary schools and middle or high schools is the first concern. The second is timing. Finding a common time to set up workshops or consultation time can be tricky. Arranging transportation and adjusting schedules, especially across schools, is difficult to accomplish from the classroom. For this reason, I suggest that you begin by convincing administration to endorse the program. Once they understand the benefits to the entire district, many of

the logistical hurdles can easily be overcome. Here is a list of suggested benefit statements to offer to help gain support from administration:

- Elementary school teachers will be more likely to use the technology they have if they understand it.
- Elementary students will benefit from classroom instruction that incorporates technology to address visual, auditory, and tactile learning styles.
- Elementary school teachers could potentially save money by installing or upgrading their own hardware or software.
- High school business teachers will be able to learn new technology and share what they learn at the same time.
- High school students can participate in collaborative projects with elementary students to reinforce their own knowledge.
- Enriching teachers with technology knowledge provides a larger technology support system for the district.

Collaboration Examples

These collaborative ideas were submitted by business teachers based on their experiences implementing effective strategic partnerships.

Class Projects. When high school business students complete a unit of study in a particular area, have them go to an elementary classroom to get "help" from younger students in implementing a project using that technology. For example, after learning how to create presentations using PowerPoint, have the students complete a project that requires them to design and create a presentation about the classroom activities in an elementary classroom. The younger students put their ideas on paper with crayons, markers, or colored pens, then the older students

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show them how to use the drawing tools to recreate their work in PowerPoint. Having high school students teach younger students reinforces their knowledge of the software. Take digital photos of the students as they work and include the pictures in the presentation. Have the students deliver the presentations together at the next open house for parents.

Teacher Exchange Program. Schedule a day where teachers switch classrooms. In the elementary classroom, the “exchange” teacher works with students on a software project related to the subject they are studying at the time. In the high school classroom, the class participates in a group project to show the visiting teacher what they have learned about hardware or software.

Mentoring/Partnerships. At the beginning of each school year, pair a business teacher and an elementary teacher. Provide a secure area on the school Web site where discussion questions can be posted and answered. Partners could have monthly meetings to share ideas for enhancing technology education in the classroom.

Collaborative Projects. Create a districtwide newsletter that focuses on technology tips for students, teachers, and parents. Have both elementary and high school students serve on the “editing team.”

Field Trips. Have elementary students spend time in high school computer labs each quarter. Have high school students demonstrate projects they have completed using technology. In addition, high school students can visit elementary classrooms to talk about computers and give ideas for how to create fun projects related to math, science, and reading.

Technology Pen Pals. Business students and elementary students could correspond as technology pen pals using e-mail and a district-sponsored discussion area. At the end of the school year, students meet and talk about technology.

Workshops. High school teachers and students could conduct free workshops on different software packages and hardware troubleshooting techniques for elementary teachers. Participating students would receive extra credit points. Try to design the classes to be relevant to the content that will be taught by the elementary teachers. Topics could include:

- Using spreadsheets to teach concepts of graphing
- Using spreadsheets to teach basic math skills—mathematical order, percentages, working with negative numbers
- Using publishing software to create a newsletter
- Using a word processor to help with grammar errors
- Using a database to keep student information for mailings

Summary

No matter what grade level or subject they are certified in, all teachers are required to keep their content area knowledge current. The influx of new technology in schools compounds this by adding pressure for teachers to also effectively implement it in their classrooms. For many teachers, this can be time-consuming and stressful. Although certified business teachers have chosen a content area that generally requires them to stay current in hardware and software trends, not all other teachers have the interest, de-

sire, time, or knowledge to handle this challenge. For these teachers, a partnership with a business teacher can be a very successful solution.



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