# School IT support:

## Overworked … and understaffed

### *Challenges create barriers to instruction*

The figures pulled from his district's help-desk logs tell Charlie Reisiger that his technology team spends about 70 percent of its time fixing faulty machines or grappling with software questions from teachers and administrators.

That doesn't leave much time for other activities, such as planning new projects or helping teachers weave technology into their instruction.

"Waving a magic wand would let me flip that ratio, so my team is spending 70 percent or more [of its] time on classroom [integration]," said Reisiger, director of technology for the Penn Manor School District in Pennsylvania.

Reisiger's plight is common to many schools, where research suggests overworked and understaffed IT departments are spending too much time reacting to technology problems—and not enough time on training and integration.

One year after a landmark survey first revealed the extent of the problem, IT staffing shortages continue to plague schools, according to the latest version of the survey. What's more, these shortages are keeping many schools from realizing technology's full potential as a learning tool.

Conducted by *eSchool News* and SchoolDude.com Inc. in partnership with the Consortium for School Networking, our 2nd annual School IT Survey polled more than 600 school district leaders and technology administrators in November and December 2008.

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## Key findings from our 2008-09 School IT Survey

- The ratio of computer users to total IT staff in U.S. schools is nearly 500 to 1; industry best practices say it should be no more than 150 to 1.
- Only 28 percent of respondents said they have enough IT staff to integrate technology into their classrooms effectively. Only 29 percent said they have enough IT staff to implement new technologies, and only 31 percent said they have enough staff to support their needs overall.
- 68 percent of respondents said the number of technology devices in their schools has increased in the last year, but 66 percent said IT staffing hasn't kept pace with these changes.
- When asked what kind of IT help they need, the top answer among respondents was more instructional technologists (85 percent), followed by technicians (84 percent) and web specialists (72 percent).
- 55 percent of respondents said more than half of their workload is reactive, rather than proactive. This takes a toll on innovation in schools.
- School IT personnel are forced to wear several hats, especially in smaller school districts. Most respondents said their districts don't have separate staff members for positions such as network engineer or help-desk manager.
- Schools are turning to strategies such as Software as a Service (SaaS) and outsourcing for their IT help—but data security is a rising concern.
- Funding remains a key challenge to supporting schools' IT needs. But a new challenge also is emerging: Rapidly escalating bandwidth needs are placing a huge strain on school network infrastructures.
- Nearly half of survey respondents haven't implemented a software-based help desk. The lack of a help desk is most common among private schools.

# IT support ...

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The results were similar to findings from our first such survey in 2007, but added new insights.

Only 31 percent of respondents said their districts have enough IT staff to satisfy their needs; that's up only marginally from 27 percent in last year's survey. And 55 percent of those polled—the same percentage as last year—said they spend more than half their time reacting to technical problems, instead of working proactively on long-range planning and projects (see Figure 1).

School IT departments "still have more work to do than they have staff," said Carolyn Stone, an independent analyst who helped with the research.

Stone's observation was supported by yet another finding from the survey: 68 percent of respondents said the number of technology devices in their schools has increased in the last year, but only 2 percent said they've added a commensurate number of IT staff to keep pace with these changes.

The burdens placed on school IT departments are taking a heavy toll on innovation, our survey suggests.

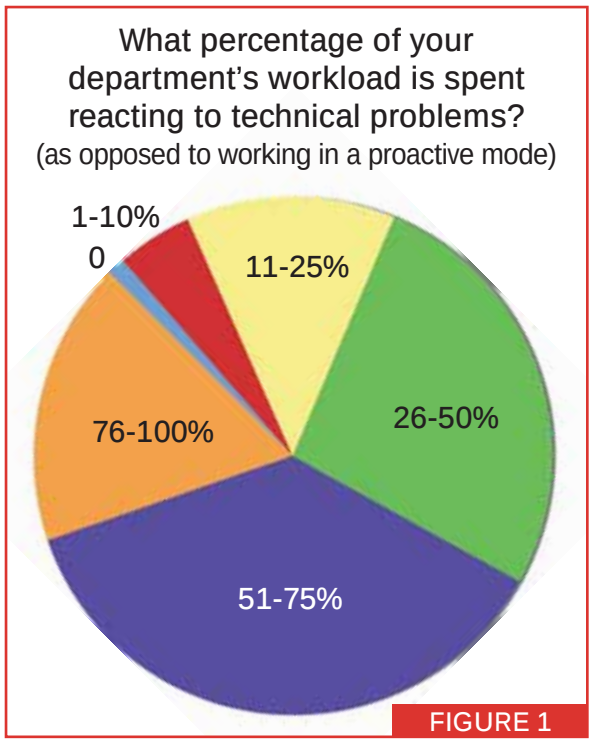


FIGURE 1

"Our IT staff members … need more training, and we need more time to explore new technologies. We spend all our time fixing the old [equipment]," said one respondent. "I want to get out on the cutting edge of educational technology and impact student learning and train students and staff. Instead, I'm troubleshooting network, hardware, and software problems."

## Wearing many hats

This year, for the first time, we asked participants how many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members they employ for various IT positions—and how many more staff members they thought they needed to meet their objectives.

The answers to these questions revealed a great deal about the challenges that school districts face in supporting technology.

Ninety percent of respondents said their districts have at least one full-time technology leader, such as a chief information officer or IT director, and 76 percent said they have at least one full-time technician. But only 60 percent said they have at least one full-time instructional technology specialist, 40 percent said they have a full-time network engineer, and just 35 percent have a full-time help desk manager.

It's clear from these responses that many school IT personnel are forced to fill several roles simultaneously, especially in smaller school districts.

Take the experience of Gary Kohl, technology coordinator for the 989-student Ladysmith-Hawkins School District in Wisconsin.

"I wear the hats of technology coordinator, network engineer, long-range planner, hardware repair, software support, electrician, phone systems [support], fire alarm [support], … et cetera," said Kohl, who—like Reisiger—agreed to be part of a virtual focus group we convened to discuss the challenges of school IT support in greater detail (see pages 34-35).

"This is a typical arrangement in the smaller K-12 districts," Kohl added. "We have over 700 computers with 19 servers in three remote buildings. I have to stay very creative and work long days to keep our equipment in a usable state."

Some respondents cited fractional numbers when asked how many FTE staff members they employ in various positions, but others indicated "zero" for many positions (see Figure 2).

The job titles with the highest percentage of respondents saying their districts had zero FTE staff members filling these roles were help-desk manager (59 percent) and network engineer (52 percent).

"It's not like we're talking about positions that a district can live without," said Nick Mirisis, marketing manager for SchoolDude.com. "These are mission-critical [areas] for schools."

## Classroom integration

According to our survey, the average ratio of students to district IT staff members is 491 to 1. When limited just to technicians and tech-support staff—the people responsible for fixing machines and keeping them running—the ratio is even higher: 1,021 students for every one technician. That's a far cry from the private-industry standard of no more than 150 to 1 recommended by Gartner and other IT research firms.

It's no surprise, then, that 84 percent of respondents said they need more technicians in their schools.

Given that most school IT departments already are working in reactive mode most of the time, "that's a recipe for disaster," said Betsy Graham, K-12 IT marketing manager for SchoolDude.

But "technician" wasn't even the most popular response when we asked where school leaders could use more IT help.

Topping the list was instructional technologist, which was cited by 85 percent of respondents. And that speaks to a key area where IT staffing shortfalls really hurt schools: If keeping technology systems up and running is a challenge, helping teachers use the technology to improve their instruction is an even taller hurdle.

Only 28 percent of respondents said they have enough IT staff to integrate technology into their classrooms effectively (see Figure 3).

"Most of my staff's time is spent on end-user [or] workstation support. I would [like to] reprioritize my staff's time to be used for training and working with [teachers] on projects using technology," said Jan Hartmann, technology director for Montana's Colstrip Public Schools and another focus-group participant.

"Until districts become serious about conducting proper professional development, they simply can't expect reform initiatives … to succeed," said Reisiger.

## Funding—and other challenges

As in last year's survey, school leaders indicated that funding is the No. 1 challenge facing their IT departments—and the source of many of their staffing problems, too.

The unpredictability of school funding makes it hard to plan and budget for technology needs, respondents said.

Funding "is a moving target in Wisconsin, because the budgets have to be set many months before the state tells us how much funding we will get," explained Kohl. "Even a small negative adjustment places a huge damper on future planning."

And though grants are useful for helping schools obtain equipment, they can actually cause problems down

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# IT support ...

*continued from page 30*

the road.

"Our district was granted about $600,000 for laptops. The award is both a blessing and a curse," said Reisiger. "On one hand, we have received a huge infusion of equipment. On the other hand, our board is now faced with a $600,000 replacement/upgrade every few years to sustain the project after the grant money has dried up. Add to that the current freeze on new spending … and we have the makings of a significant long-range equipment replacement problem."

Funding is an obvious problem, but our survey indicated that another key challenge to school IT departments is emerging: Rapidly growing bandwidth needs, driven by the rise of video applications, are placing a huge strain on school network infrastructures.

"Video streaming, YouTube, [and] TeacherTube … are killing our networks," one respondent said. "In order for us to use these tools, we need bandwidth—and lots of it."

## SaaS ... and other solutions

Even with tight budgets that put a real squeeze on their IT departments, school districts are still managing to achieve some impressive ed-tech goals.

Two-thirds of respondents said their districts have a faculty intranet in place or are working toward this goal; 78 percent now offer secure remote network access, or soon will; 81 percent have implemented a web-content management system, or are in the process of implementing one; and 84 percent have a student, parent, and teacher web portal or soon will.

In addition, slightly more than half (51 percent) of respondents say their districts have implemented a software-based help desk, and another 8 percent are pursuing this goal. But there is a big disparity between public and private schools in this area: While 59 percent of public school districts reportedly have implemented a help-desk solution, only 23 percent of private schools have.

School district IT departments are taking creative steps to overcome their challenges.

These strategies include teaming up with neighboring districts and pooling IT staff time and resources; identifying secondary support personnel (teachers) who know how to solve technology-related problems and offering them rewards and stipends for their contributions; and recruiting community-based IT experts to volunteer their services in local schools.

To make software easier to deploy, freeing up valuable IT staff time for other tasks, 47 percent of respondents said they've implemented at least some of their software using a Software as a Service (SaaS) model, in which applications are hosted by the service provider and delivered to users over the internet.

But concerns about the security of information delivered through this software model seem to have exploded in the last year, our survey suggests. Last year, 40 percent of respondents said they had some data-security concerns about SaaS applications; this year, the number was 72 percent (see Figure 4).

Security concerns aside, many district leaders credited SaaS with saving time and improving their IT efficiency.

Focus-group participant David Palme, technology director for Michigan's Portland Public Schools, said his district uses a provider of SaaS for its reading, gradebook, and financial software.

"System uptime is higher, allowing staff to trust the technology more—[which means they] use it more," Palme said. "We believe these applications help the staff save time that can be devoted to more instruction."

LINK:

2008-09 School IT Survey (full results)

http://www.eschoolnews.com/sdsurvey09

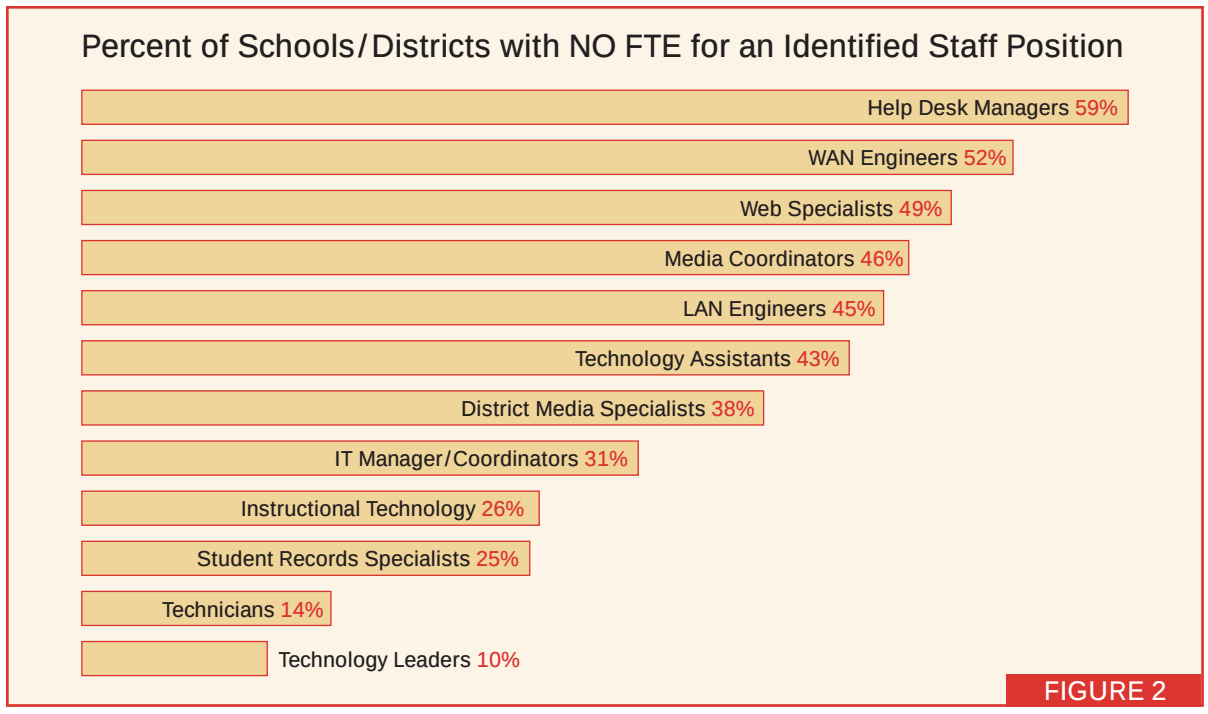


FIGURE 2

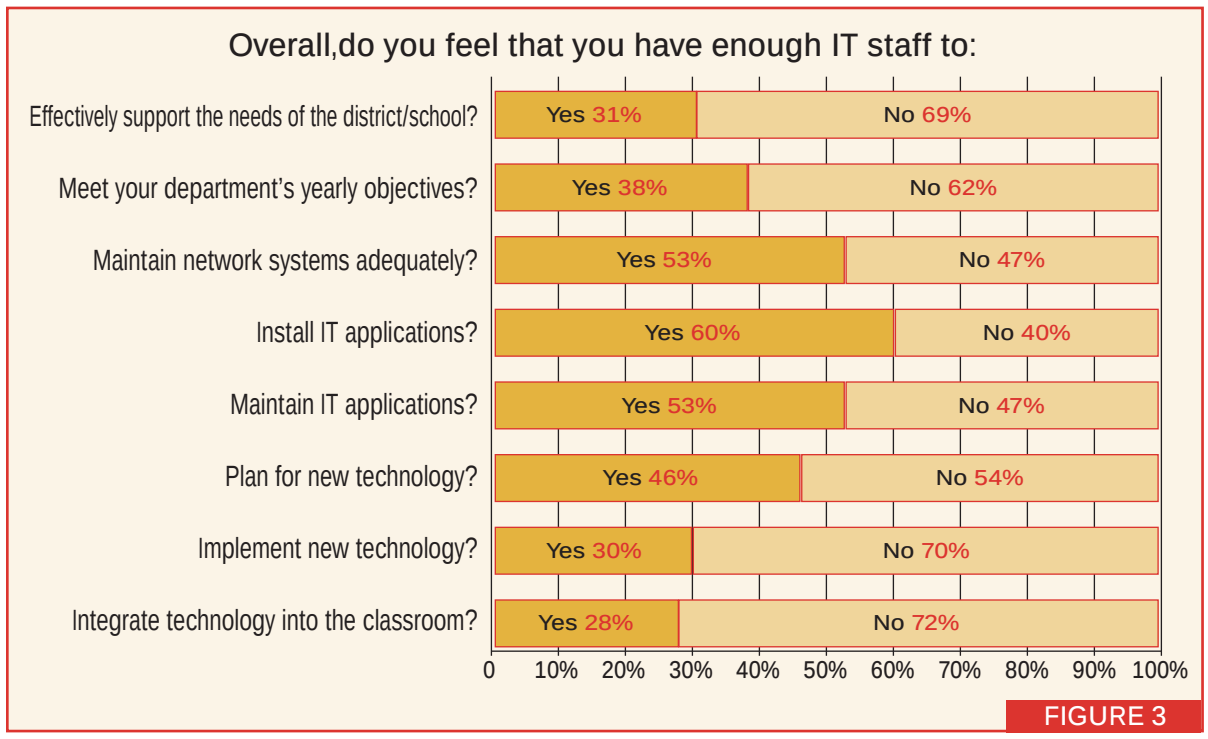


FIGURE 3

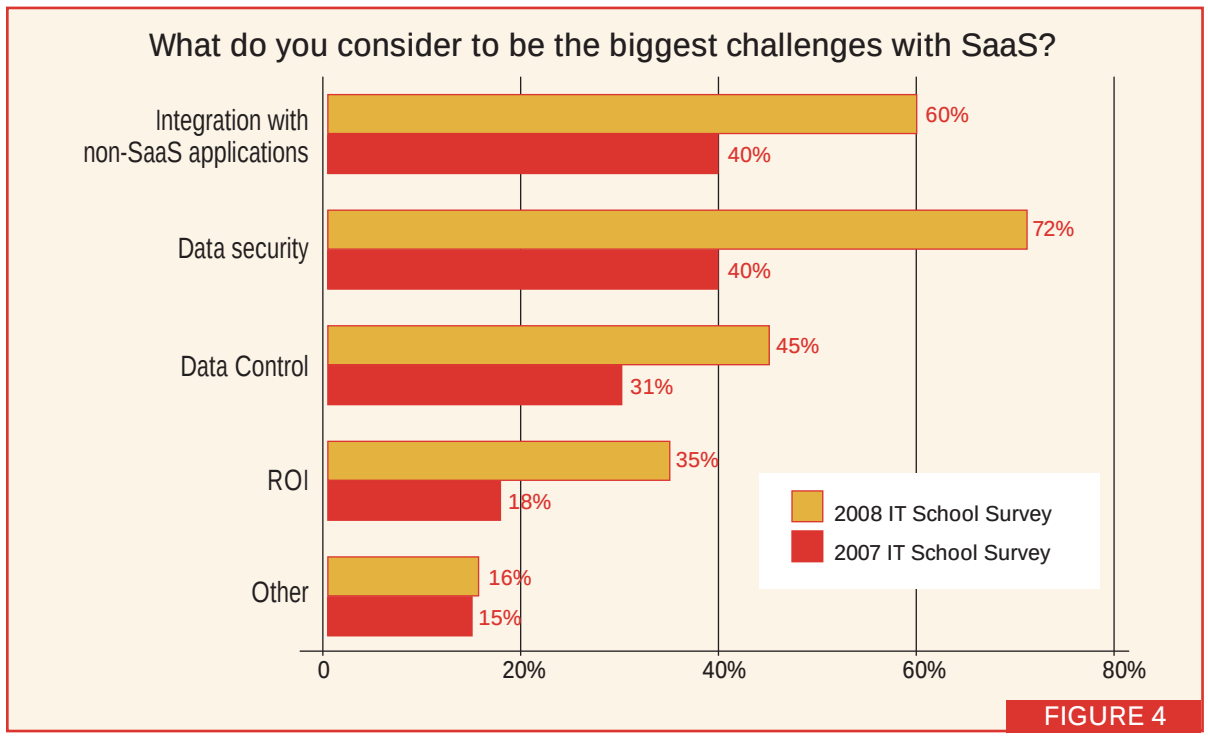


FIGURE 4

# Why Worry?

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* This figure represents the 90th percentile of our sample.

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# The challenges of providing school IT support

## *Those on the front lines offer their perspective*

As part of our 2008-09 School IT Survey, *eSchool News* and SchoolDude.com conducted a virtual focus group to learn more about the particular challenges of school IT support—and how district IT managers are coping with these challenges.

Participants were recruited from among respondents to our national survey, and they were chosen to reflect a variety of perspectives. They're all district-level technology directors at public school systems or regional service centers. Here are the panel members:

- **Douglas Casey**, Capitol Region Education Council, Conn.;
- **Jan Hartmann**, Colstrip Public Schools, Mont.;
- **Gary Kohl**, Ladysmith-Hawkins School District, Wis.;
- **David Oakes**, Gallup McKinley County Schools, N.M.;
- **David Palme**, Portland Public Schools, Mich.;
- **Charlie Reisiger**, Penn Manor School District, Pa.;
- **Vern Richardson**, Animas Public Schools, N.M.; and
- **David Silverstein**, Miller School District, S.D.

What follows is an excerpt from the discussion. To read the entire transcript, go to http://www.eschool-news.com/news/special-reports.

***Q:** Which IT-related issues are most important for your district to resolve to ensure its strategic success?*

**Gary:** In a K-12 environment, funding is always the first and last topic of discussion. It is a moving target in Wisconsin, because the budgets have to be set many months before the state tells us how much funding we will get. Even a small negative adjustment places a huge damper on future planning.

**Douglas:** This one is easy: Funding. Funding drives professional development, support, and strategic planning. Without adequate funding, we cannot afford the costs of training—both direct [and] indirect costs, such as getting substitute teachers and aligning training needs to district performance objectives. Support also takes a hit with reduced funding, given the likely reduction in force that we will see if we pass over a [certain] threshold. Strategic planning should produce results, and those results always demand human and capital resources, both of which take money.

**Vern:** Funding IT is our biggest problem. As the technology coordinator of a very small district, I have one hour designated for tech work. We have a technology specialist who gets to do tech work about an hour a day, also. She has other duties such as e-Rate [coordinator], transportation coordinator, free and reduced lunch coordinator, and grant administrator. My [other] duties include high school math and computer tech teacher, coaching duties, and activities bus driver. … Strategic and long-term planning is made more difficult by not having clear and adequate funding for IT. We forge ahead, anyway.

**David S.:** Wow, is there any school in which funding is not critical? We receive state funding by the number of students, and the local funding comes from property taxes. Unfortunately, we are in a rural area with a decreasing population, so our state funds decrease yearly and the property taxes are capped by state law. With decreasing budgets, prioritizing becomes the biggest item. Much of [our] technology budget goes for non-capital items, like salaries … which need to be increased. The purchase of hardware can come out of our capital outlay, which is a different fund and in this district is sufficient.

**Charlie:** Funding is of critical importance to our district. In addition to the existing budget issues we all face, Pennsylvania school districts are also wrestling with sustainability issues surrounding the [state's] Classrooms for the Future project. [This] project has provided millions of dollars to deploy laptops into high school core subject classrooms. Our district was granted about $600,000 for laptops. The award is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, we have received a huge infusion of equipment. On the other hand, our board is now faced with a $600,000 replacement/upgrade every few years to sustain the project after the grant money has dried up. Add to that the current freeze on new spending (due to the wounded economy) and we have the makings of a significant long-range equipment replacement problem.

Challenge: Securing IT funding to provide adequate tech support in the classroom.

**Jan:** Strategic and long-term planning seems to be in a constant adjustment mode. Just when you think you have what you need, something else pops up. It is hard to know what will happen when technology is evolving at such a rapid rate.

**David O.:** Even though technology has been used in classrooms for 25 to 30 years, teachers are still at various levels of comfort. Even recent university graduates do not have a strong skill set for using the technology effectively in the classroom. Constant availability of professional development, from large group training to one-on-one instruction, is needed throughout the school year. I have two staff members assigned to fill this need. I could use two or three more.

**Charlie:** End-user support [also] remains a critical area of need. Tech staffing in our district … has simply not kept pace with new initiatives, projects, and hardware.

***Q:** Which IT-related issues have the potential to become much more significant in the coming year?*

**David O.:** As classroom applications move toward [being] web-based, the infrastructure necessary to support them must be at the top of every school district IT department's list. Bandwidth must be available and manageable for effective and meaningful use of [IT] resources.

**David S.:** The most significant factor [for us] in the future is professional development. If staff members are not trained properly or are not enthusiastic about the use of technology in the classroom, it will fail. … Teaching 21st-century skills, especially cooperative and project-based learning, takes additional staff training if it is to be effective.

**Vern:** End-user support is probably going to be the most significant issue facing us. With such limited time for tech work and with an ever-increasing quantity of technology installed, we just do not have adequate time to devote to all the problems that accompany these gains.

**Gary:** Funding will always be the top issue, but all the funding in the world is useless if we are unable to train the staff or have enough flexibility in our long-range plans for the adoption of new tools and techniques for the classroom. Many (but not all) administrators will profess the need for technology integration and [staff] training, but are unwilling to try it themselves. The result is always the same: a totally unrealistic plan to "magically" instill wisdom and adoption of new ideas, methods, and technologies. If they are unwilling to try new software or learn how to use new technology, how can they even think about a plan to have others do it? Typically they … assume that if someone is shown how to do something in a one-hour staff development [session], that means [he or she is] totally trained and needs no more [instruction]. Try that in a classroom with students, and see how far it goes!

**Charlie:** Gary is spot on: Real change is not accomplished in a one- (or three-) hour workshop. Professional development delivery must become fluid and ongoing. Barriers to this model are varied: budgets, calendars, union expectations, et cetera. However, until districts become serious about conducting proper professional development, they simply can't expect reform initiatives (technology or otherwise) to succeed.

**Jan:** Faculty professional development is always a difficult thing to get accomplished. Our teaching staff members have many demands on them, and finding the time and energy to stay after hours or preparing for a substitute is very hard. We are a rural school and [often] have trouble getting enough subs. … There is usually one teacher who learns the ins and outs of a [particular] software program. That teacher then becomes the mentor for other teaching staff.

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# Challenges ...

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***Q:** Where is your IT department spending most of its staff time? If you could reprioritize staff time to focus on other areas, where would you have them spend the time?*

**Charlie:** This is an easy one—my team members spend about 70 percent of their work week on hardware or software desk-side support. This figure is derived from help-desk data. The balance of [their] time is spent proactively working on large-scale projects or with teachers on classrooms projects. Waving a magic wand would let me flip that ratio so my team is spending 70 percent or more time on classroom technology [integration] and innovative new projects that would create better internal efficiency.

**Jan:** Most of my staff's time is spent on end-user [or] workstation support. I would reprioritize my staff's time to be used for training and working with [teachers] on projects using technology. … My staff members could teach a class and model how to use technology to enhance the learning process. At the same time [they] are teaching the class, [they] can teach troubleshooting to the teaching staff and students. In the long run, this could lessen the help-desk tickets.

***Q:** What communication strategies have proven successful to ensure that your superintendent and other district leaders are informed about the potential strategic roles of technology, as well as your IT budget and staffing needs?*

**Charlie:** As a district administrator, I feel it is my role to actively inform and educate other district leaders (including the superintendent and school board) on the strategic and educational advantages of IT. This communication takes the form of regular school board briefings and presentations, discussions at cabinet meetings, presentations at administrative council meetings, mass eMails, letters in our district newsletter, blog postings, web-site updates, and just about any usual communication channel. … A little bit of up-front communication and education go a long way toward communicating the importance of IT—from both an operational and educational perspective.

**Jan:** Our school district has embraced technology as an integral part of meeting the students' curriculum needs. I have biweekly meetings with the superintendent. The technology committee meets on a bimonthly basis. With the No Child Left Behind requirements, technology is [seen as] a way to meet the needs of students—especially in a rural setting.

**David P.:** Every few years, we update our district's long-range technology plan. Traditionally, input has been limited—and access from the community even more so. This year, we tried something different: a wiki. I put our tech plan on the web at http://ppstechplan.wetpaint.com/?t=anon. The wiki [gives] anyone the ability to modify our tech plan. Of course, all input is subject to review before being written in permanently.

***Q:** What approaches have proved successful to retain as much of your IT budget as possible? Is it possible to cut costs without affecting IT service and quality? If so, what strategies have proven effective?*

**Jan:** One way we have tried to meet [our] rural districts' needs for support is for the area districts to share their [IT] experts to help each other out. We have created a co-op of school districts, and [we] try to address each others' needs.

**Douglas:** I would love to have a ratio of computers to support staff lower than 600 to 1, but that's my reality and it won't get better any time soon. So I need to look at building other resources, such as identifying those teachers on whom their peers rely because they know how to get things done. In most educational environments … there exist informal, secondary support personnel who just know how to solve problems as mundane as changing toner to slinging back-end application code to get their peers up and working. We are looking at providing rewards and stipends to these folks, who not only provide value through their capacity but also the unique perspective of educators. As much as we know technology, we IT specialists don't know on a visceral level what teachers need, so drawing on educators to help each other … provides a great mix of functional and technical expertise.

**Charlie:** Our general-fund operating budgets have been flat for a number of years. That said, we are increasingly tasked with more projects and needs than existing funding permits. In terms of cost cutting, [we] employ three primary cost-containment techniques: (1) Open-source software. Moving toward variants of OpenOffice alone [has resulted in] a considerable cost savings. We also utilize Linux where possible on the server side. (2) Minimal outsourcing. High-level work is performed in-house, [and] no consultants are required. Specifically, this includes network and programming work. We invest in our IT team staff, not expensive consultants. (3) Bidding and aggressive vendor negotiations. This is amplified by pursuing alternate vendors such as Allied Telesis over Cisco. (Actually, we love AT gear—[it's] very stable, and much less costly than Cisco.)

**Gary:** I wear the hats of technology coordinator, network engineer, long-range planner, hardware repair, software support, electrician, phone systems [support], fire alarm [support], … et cetera. This is a typical arrangement in the smaller K-12 districts. We have over 700 computers with 19 servers in three remote buildings. I have to stay very creative and work long days to keep our equipment in a usable state.

Nine years ago, 70 percent of our computers were aging Apples. At the time, each staff member was allowed to buy [his or her] own software titles and decide equipment needs. It was a disaster! It was a tough sell, but I was allowed to put policies in place that required all software purchases to have dual-platform capability. I also took the hardware purchasing away from staff and placed them in an advisory role. They had to show a need in their curriculum for the technology and a willingness to learn (and use) new things. The results have been fantastic. In 2001, only 11 staff members used eMail for anything. Today, all 190 staff members use it on a daily basis.

[Our] main approach to the ongoing budget crisis is to balance the technology wants of the students and teachers against the true educational value and usability of the items or software requested, and do as much in-house IT work as possible. Nine years ago, my school district of 1,200 students was spending over $160,000 a year on IT and subcontracted items (not including internet or phones). I am proud to say that I have been able to trim this to a yearly $55,000, with no loss of services or additional downtime on equipment. It has definitely not been easy; but … this allows the money to go where it really belongs—to the education of our students.

***Q:** Are you currently using a Software as a Service (SaaS) provider? If so, for what applications? Has this proved helpful in reducing costs or saving on staff time?*

**Charlie:** Our district does not utilize SaaS to a great extent. We find that maintaining our applications in-house gives us greater control, expanded interoperability, increased security, and a significant cost saving over SaaS models.

**Jan:** We currently have our PowerSchool and PowerTeacher [applications] hosted by Pearson. Other programs we are in the process of starting to use are OdyssyWare … and Apangea [Learning]. With the small number of students using these programs, it is cost-effective to have them hosted online. We do not need to have the hardware space available or use technology staffs' valuable time.

**David P.:** [We use an SaaS provider for our] reading, gradebook and attendance, [and] finance [applications]. … It is one less thing I need to worry about on the local machine. These programs can be updated at one time on one machine, [and] maintenance is the same; if it works for one, it works for all. System uptime is higher, allowing staff members to trust the technology more—[which means they] use it more. We believe these applications help the staff save time that can be devoted to more instruction.

**Gary:** We do not use SaaS and probably will never do it. Our problem is reliability of the internet [and] data connections. Because of the rural area we are located in, the lines are very susceptible to damage from construction and wildlife. We had multiple outages last year [owing] to excavating errors, beavers, and other animal damage. The infrastructure is just not healthy enough yet. I also like the fact that we have better control of our data with an on-site system. It still makes me nervous that someone else has total control over your private, sensitive, and mission-critical data. eSN

*'Funding IT is our biggest problem. As the technology coordinator of a very small district, I have one hour designated for tech work … Strategic and long-term planning is made more difficult by not having clear and adequate funding for IT.'* —Vern Richardson, Animas Public Schools, N.M.

## About the virtual focus group

The online panel discussion took advantage of EDRoom (www.edroom.net), a secure, private web space where district administrators, school-level educators, and others in the academic community can engage in deep discussions on any topic.

When EDRoom is used for research or journalistic purposes, it is modeled after a traditional focus group to generate group interaction. As with a traditional focus group, a moderator presented questions for discussion. A key advantage over a traditional focus group, however, is that the online conversation took place over the course of an entire week, and participants had flexibility as to when and where they logged on. Panel members took part in the discussion by reading and typing at a computer—without ever leaving their seats, and at times that were convenient to them.

Founders Ellen Bialo, Glen McCandless, and Jay Sivin-Kachala have more than 60 combined years of experience in education market research, product development, sales, and marketing. For a demonstration of EdRoom, call (212) 787-6056.

Case study

# SchoolDude Helps Transform IT Department Operations at Susquehanna Valley Central School District

Sometimes IT innovation takes an evolutionary path rather than a revolutionary one. Such was the case at Susquehanna Valley Central School District, a K-12 district in Conklin, N.Y., which has an enrollment of approximately 2,000. Under the tutelage of Don Gerlach, director of technology, the District moved from an antiquated, paper-based incident management system to a homegrown solution centered on a simple Web page with minimal detail. While the system was an improvement, it left much to be desired in terms of speed, information flow, and reporting; other critical features were also lacking.

Gerlach knew that more could be done to improve on the work he'd started.

## The Simplicity of Software as a Service (SaaS)

"The system worked…but slowly," says Gerlach. "When our four lab aides couldn't handle a request, users would email one of the District's three technicians. It was a step up, but we still couldn't track things electronically and reporting was weak, if not nonexistent."

*"SchoolDude has brought better accountability and enhanced professionalism to our IT department. Today, we're able to provide faster resolution times, save on paperwork, and provide valuable reports to administrators and the school board."*

— *Don Gerlach, Director of Technology/CIO Susquehanna Valley Central SD*

What's more, most of Susquehanna Valley's teachers were on Macintoshes (approximately 500 machines), while the 200 computers used by administrators were PCs. Regardless of operating system, the hardware had to be tracked and monitored for inventory and software licensing purposes. The mix just added an additional layer of complexity to the already over-taxed, homegrown system.

To better manage the District's computer inventory and eliminate the day-to-day headaches of tracking issues, Gerlach turned to technology from SchoolDude.com, the leading provider of online operations management solutions designed exclusively for schools. To bring Susquehanna Valley's process into the 21st century, Gerlach implemented SchoolDude's ITDirect, a powerful, online help desk management tool and ITAMDirect, an online technology asset management tool. Both solutions are delivered as a service (SaaS), over the Web, so there was no software to install or new servers for the already over-burdened IT team to manage.

## IT in Mind

"When we looked at SchoolDude, we liked that their solution was educationally based, with IT in mind," says Gerlach. "Since they provide Web-based applications, we didn't have to invest in any hardware. Plus, it is very easy for both end-users (teachers) and support staff to use."

Upon implementing ITDirect and ITAMDirect, Gerlach saw immediate improvement. Right away, says Gerlach, the department saw an uptick in response times to user requests. According to Frank Regulski, Susquehanna Valley's network specialist, users appreciated the automatic email verification that the system generated when an incident ticket was submitted. "They took solace in knowing that someone was addressing their issue in a timely manner," he says.

Regulski continues, "The system provides requesters with important details about the issue, such as who is working on it and when it will be done. Users are informed by email, right then and there, that the work is completed and everything is operating properly. That's definitely a benefit."

Gerlach adds, "As an administrator, I can log on to the system anytime and look at each team member's workflow and generate reports that quantify the level of customer service that we are providing, which keeps us accountable. In a recent administrative cabinet meeting, for example, I was able to report that we handled 200 technical issues and averaged 10 support calls per day."

## A Real Asset

Providing support to users is only half the battle for Gerlach's IT department, which is also charged with managing and tracking the Districts' 700 computers and associated software and peripherals. To complicate matters, only a portion of its hardware was direct purchase. Other machines were acquired through the regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which provides hardware and services that otherwise would be uneconomical, inefficient, or unavailable to rural districts. Like a lot of districts, Susquehanna Valley had been managing its IT assets with Excel spreadsheets and other database programs.

Don Gerlach, Director of Technology/CIO; and Frank Regulski, Network Specialist, from Susquehanna Valley Central School District

Gerlach also faced the daunting task of tracking inventory used for instruction, versus that used for administrative purposes. His job was further complicated by the proliferation of devices with dual personal and professional uses. "With iPods, digital cameras, another small devices, we needed a tool to help us get a handle on all aspects of our inventory," he says. "So, we selected SchoolDude's ITAMDirect."

ITAMDirect streamlines all aspects of IT asset administration, from monitoring and reporting, to planning and life cycle costing. "ITAMDirect was built with education in mind," says Gerlach. "It is easy to use and it directly integrates with SchoolDude's ITDirect, which is a huge benefit."

## In the Hot Seat

Gerlach relies on ITAMDirect to increase software licensing compliance, as dictated by statewide regulations. Like many states, New York school districts are subject to statewide control and audits. "One of the hot areas they look at is IT," says Gerlach. "Believe me, everyone that sits in my chair sweats it, because they're going to come in, pull an asset number, and ask, 'Where is this device?'"

As fate would have it, Gerlach was audited during the implementation of ITAMDirect. "Thank God we had this system in place," he says. "When questions came up, we were able to generate reports very quickly. When the auditors looked at ITAMDirect's reporting capability, they were impressed by our ability to monitor, in real time, what we had. For example, I showed the report stating that we had 600 licenses for Microsoft Office. Then the auditors gave me a hardware number for an asset they questioned. We looked in the database, found the asset number, and it was the Music Department chairperson's laptop. It was very nice to have that tracking capability. It made it easy to demonstrate that we were being compliant."

## Preventing Waste, Nefarious Use

Regulski adds, "ITAMDirect allows us to set alarms to notify us if a machine hasn't been audited within a specific time frame of our choosing. It can also tell us how often a software program is being used, as well as many other data points that help improve the utilization of programs so we can use our IT budget wisely. There's also an illegal download monitor, so, if someone installs a computer game or tries to do any kind of hacking, we'll be notified."

## Saving Money While Increasing Professionalism

As Susquehanna Valley grows, Gerlach knows that SchoolDude will be able to grow with them. "So far, we've only tapped a fraction of the capabilities in these tools," he says. Even so, Gerlach is pleased to report that ITDirect and ITAMDirect have already saved his department time and money by providing a solution that has zero hardware costs and no servers to manage. Additionally, Gerlach concludes, SchoolDude has provided his department a new level of accountability and increased professionalism: "If someone were to ask me, 'How many work requests did you resolve two years ago?' I'd have no clue. Now, with SchoolDude's ITDirect, I can tell them within three minutes how many work requests we've handled today, yesterday, last week, and last month. For instance, I can report that in the past three months, we've solved more than 400 issues. SchoolDude has brought better accountability and enhanced professionalism to our IT department. Today, we're able to provide faster resolution times, save on paperwork, and provide valuable reports to administrators and the school board."