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Program Assessment
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Focus area: Use of digital tools embedded in instruction

BACKGROUND:

According to the Standards for School Library Media Programs in Maryland and local curriculum objectives, media specialists play a critical role in helping teachers effectively embed technology into instruction. They also support students in efficiently and effectively using different technologies to learn, create, collaborate, organize, research, etc. Next year, our school will be facing exciting challenges as we move to a wireless environment. To support students and staff in making the most of this opportunity, we decided to measure the digital tools teachers currently use and how often. The digital tools included on the survey are based on the Web 2.0 programs our county's technology services department has been highlighting and providing training for the past several years. I also solicited feedback about the best ways to share digital tool resources and what concerns they may have about technology use in our wireless environment. After speaking with both the principal and media specialist, we agreed that surveying the staff at a faculty meeting with a paper copy would generate the most responses instead of sending out a digital survey (which seems a little ironic).

At Monday's faculty meeting, 63 surveys were passed out to teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, special education assistants and other staff members. I briefly explained the survey's purpose. Staff were encouraged to return the survey to me at the end of the meeting. In May or June, I plan to survey students using a Google form with similar questions to measure how often they use meaningful digital tools as a part of instruction or learning.

SUMMARY

As of Monday afternoon, staff returned 37 surveys. I anticipate additional surveys will be returned to my mailbox throughout the week. Based on the collected surveys, the following observations were made.

Nearly 50 percent (18 people) said they embed instruction on a regular basis in their instruction, while 15 people said they sometimes do (figure 1). Interestingly, four people said they rarely embed instruction, and all four of the respondents indicated they taught math. In consulting with the media specialist and based on my own prior experience as a literacy specialist, math content area teachers remain a challenging population when trying to integrate research, reading and use of popular Web 2.0 collaborative and multimedia tools.

Figure 1: Frequency of Technology Use Embedded Within Instruction
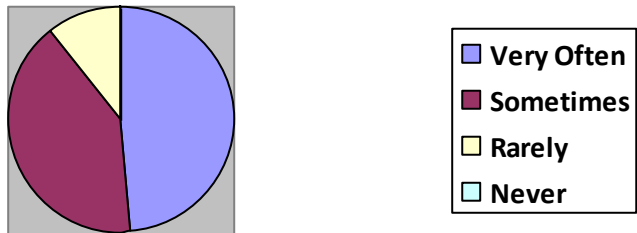
Most staff members never used or knew of the 27 different web 2.0 programs being promoted by the county technology resources technicians. Of the tools most likely used by staff, Google, Quizlet, and Remind 101 were the most popular. I would like to ask several follow-up questions regarding this information, including why these tool receive the most use and what specific Google tools staff use. I was surprised that more staff were not using Edmodo and Discovery Education or other curriculum-based tools. These have been heavily promoted in the county, but perhaps teachers do not see their value? I would like to discuss this further with the county's technology resources experts to identify reasons why staff may not be aware of or rarely use the different Web 2.0 programs.

Out of the respondents, nearly 30 staff members were somewhat or very interested in learning more about different types of digital tools (figure 2). All were evenly ranked in interest, except of the curriculum-based tools, which generated the most interest. There were two respondents who were not interested in any of the tools. One was a science teacher getting ready to retire and the other was a math teacher.

Figure 2: Rating of Interest in Learning about Different Types of Digital Tools
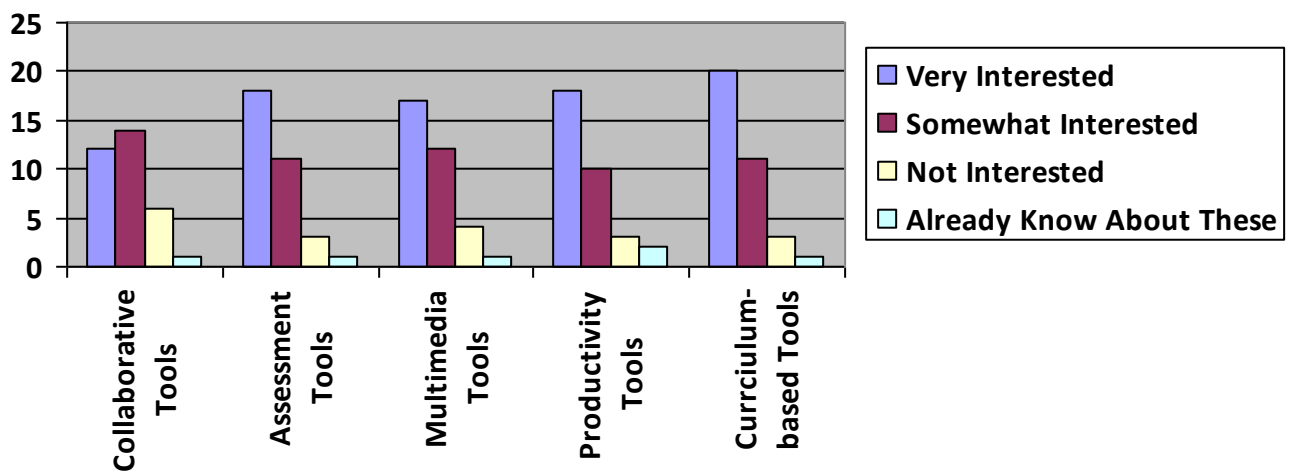
The staff provided several suggestions to best ways to share information. Most of the comments stressed the need for differentiation by interest, ability and curriculum/department. One respondent stated that information should be shared by hosting "specific sessions by subject area with a trainer who has resources that can be readily used." Others recommended tapping into collaborative digital tools such as setting up a technology blog, using email or Google tools to share ideas and information. There were several comments that I need to keep in mind because I know I am guilty of this: trying to cover too many topics or too many ideas in one session. One person remarked, "Too many choices is too overwhelming." By targeting a few specific tools for teachers to practice each year may be more manageable. Finally, the importance of follow-up sessions was noted. Some wanted more than just a one-shot inservice, but instead opportunities to build and follow-up on the same programs/skills throughout the year.

When asked about the barriers preventing teachers from successfully embedding technology into instruction, the most common complaints were:

❖ Time for planning, learning, practice, implementation, etc.

- ❖ Lack of reliable hardware
- ❖ Accessibility to computers/digital devices
- ❖ Inability to trouble-shoot when technology doesn't work

These answers were similar when asked what teachers needed to make the most of our wireless environment next year. A few respondents commented on the importance of preparing our students, setting appropriate wireless expectations and understanding that not everyone has digital devices with advanced capabilities. Several commented that supplying tablets to staff would make it easier to use more technology in the wireless environment. Currently, we have no digital tablets.

<u>GOALS</u>

(Each year, teachers must select a professional develop focus area, which is then developed, implemented and monitored by administration and the teacher. When reviewing these results with administration, I may suggest that they encourage staff to select an area related to embedding one or more digital tools into instruction.)

I. The library media specialist, with help from staff experts and the county technology resource trainers, will provide sustained, departmentalized professional development opportunities for staff. Staff will become familiar with and embed at least two to three tools from the possible categories:

    A. Curriculum-based digital tools
    B. Assessment digital tools

II. By coaching and co-teaching, the library media specialist will assist in lesson development for interested departments. These lessons will embed instructional technology by employing essential curriculum-based tools. Staff and students will become proficient in using one type of curriculum-based digital tool designed to reinforce and extend learning. By co-teaching and coaching, the media specialist also will serve as a trouble-shooter in the classroom, reducing the problems caused when the technology doesn't work.