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Is your one-to-one program destined to fail?

Posted By *Stephen Noonoo* On August 10, 2015 @ 6:00 am In Featured on eSchool News, Mobile and Handheld Technologies, One-to-one computing, Top News | [No Comments](#)

If you don't know where you're going, you'll never know when you've arrived



[1]It's been a busy summer leading workshops at many schools and districts with one-to-one iPad, Chromebook, and laptop programs. Many of these schools are years into a one-to-one program, and my conversations with school administrators often focus on the success of their program.

In several of these conversations, school administrators have categorized their one-to-one program as "stagnating" and that they face continued resistance from a significant number of teachers. Yet, at first glance, the administrators have provided everything the faculty needs for success.

For one, every student and teacher has a device (and in some cases multiple ones). These schools have a stable wi-fi network, so accessing websites and online programs in the classroom is not a problem. Network filtering is restrained so that teachers can bring social media websites into the classroom. Administrators have also hired instructional technology specialists to assist the teachers. Finally, teachers are afforded much latitude in tech implementation. At these schools there is no explicit requirement for teachers to use the devices and no one is tracking the hours of classroom time dedicated to technology integration.

So, these administrators naturally wonder why their technology integration program is not entirely successful.

Next page: How to think *beyond* the device

At the outset, I typically ask a series of questions: "Why did you decide to go one-to-one?" "How does technology integration align with the school's vision of meaningful and purposeful learning?" "How is learning supposed to be different as a result of a one-to-one program?"

When I ask these questions, it's not uncommon for there to be silence for a few moments. The administrators often glance at each other and hesitate before responding. What might emerge is a vague statement on improving student proficiency in the four Cs — creativity, collaboration, critical

thinking, and communication. Sometimes administrators divulge that they do not have a vision of how learning should be different as a result of the technology. Many point out that the teachers have everything they need and have given teachers freedom to develop implementation strategies.

From the outside, it often seems crazy that schools make major technology purchases with no clear plans for how learning should change. We've found, however, that there are so many details in technology planning—acquisition, security, sustainability, teacher training, parent education, and so on—that many schools lose track of the most important issues. To paraphrase educator/speaker Dan Meyer: "If iPads/Chromebooks/laptops are the answer, what was the question?"

A defining trait of effective leadership in successful school technology programs is a well-defined vision of technology-aided teaching and learning that is shared with various constituents: administration, faculty, staff, parents, and students. A well-defined vision communicated effectively and consistently provides a common mission for the entire school and a rallying point for change.

Yet when I speak to teachers, they often question the purpose of the one-to-one program. "Why are we doing it?" With no clear motivating educational vision, some faculty ascribe less-than-altruistic reasons for the program (such as the desire to "keep-up-with-the-Joneses" district that has gone one-to-one). One interesting paradox is that faculty at one-to-one schools often praise administrators for the autonomy teachers enjoy in designing and implementing tech-infused lessons, yet at the same time criticize administrators for a lack of direction and leadership.

From our vantage point, school leaders need to do three things to make the most of the investment in technology :

They need to work with their communities to articulate a clear vision for how new technology will improve instruction.

They need to help educators imagine how new technologies can support those visions.

They need to support teachers and students on a developmental journey that will take them from using technology for simply organizational and administrative tasks to using them as objects to spur thinking.

Many one-to-one programs focus on learning the device itself and not enough on thinking *beyond the device*. The best technology integration (one-to-one or otherwise) tends to take place in schools created around a focused pedagogical vision, such as project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and digital citizenship. Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia and High Tech High in San Diego feature project-based learning. The Silicon Schools Fund in the San Francisco Bay Area supports schools concentrating on blended learning and differentiated instruction. Providence Day in Charlotte, N.C., has a One to World initiative that seeks to connect students to the global community, and empower them to become active participants.

It's hard to move a faculty along if teachers are left to their own devices (pardon the pun) and there is no broad consensus on the purpose and implementation of a program. A "let's try this" or "it's all up to the teachers" environment is not a recipe for success. As one teacher recently opined: "Let's try this' is not leadership."

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