Keeping Up With the Fourth Graders

It’s almost a cliché in elementary schools: when a computer glitch befuddles the adults, someone jokes that it’s time to call in a fourth grader. There are plenty of other vivid reminders that our young people are growing up immersed in technology. Whether it’s hardware, software, cell phones, or iPods, technology fluency is what often separates the generation that’s in school from the generation that’s supposed to be doing the educating.

It’s important for principals to realize that technology is a powerful instructional and management tool, and to take the lead in emphasizing this belief to teachers, parents, and the wider community. While it would certainly be easy to feel overwhelmed by technology, this is not an area where educators can settle for simply upgrading basic knowledge. Mastering e-mail is just a beginning. No one can imagine a successful business that isn’t constantly slicing and dicing all kinds of data to glean information about the organization’s strengths and weaknesses, and to help guide strategic planning. Schools can’t afford to be left behind.

While technology promises to make many facets of our work easier to understand and analyze, getting up to speed and staying there represents a steep and formidable learning curve. In our guide, Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do, one of the six standards states that effective principals use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and apply instructional improvement. Technology gives us a major tool to accomplish this.

Upgrading Management Practice

At East Silver Spring Elementary School in Maryland, an openness to technology led the principal to pilot a district initiative in which teachers and administrators use hand-held personal digital assistant (PDA) devices to load classroom performance data into the school’s computers, providing new ways of analyzing student performance and school progress. Other schools use PDAs to record and analyze observations during classroom walkthroughs, producing real-time data.

While computers in most schools are seen as high-profile classroom learning tools, more recent applications for school management continue to grow and impress. Access to the Internet alone offers principals valuable resources to improve practice. For example, the online National Educator Training and Leadership Center (www.netlc.org) puts an array of education issues in perspective and connects topics to the larger idea of thinking about how systems operate.

NAESP was a partner in creating the IBM Reinventing Education Change Toolkit (www.reinventingeducation.org). This site offers educators a new way to think about how to effect change—and how to bring others along—using practical strategies drawn from change-management expertise. The site also ties together leadership and change management.

Beyond the Internet, a new generation of management software can help with budgeting, staffing, data analysis, and professional development.

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Opening Avenues to New Learning

We’ve learned in the years since we started wiring more outlets for computer labs and installing fiber optics or wireless modems that the key to harnessing technology is not acquiring equipment but developing the skills and knowledge to use it effectively. It echoes the way in which education standards have spurred teaching and learning reform. When you ask your fourth graders, “While technology promises to make many facets of our work easier to understand and analyze, getting up to speed and staying there represents a steep and formidable learning curve.”

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Fun

ZROCK does what the human body wants to do: it moves. Modest in scale with an appropriately restrained range of motion, it’s the furniture equivalent of an encouraging smile. Place it in libraries, break rooms, reading nooks, or alongside the teacher’s desk. Also appropriate for special education environments where therapeutic motion is required.

Fit

Students come in all sizes and so does ZUMA®. The ZUMA bucket is proportionally compensated to provide the right degree of flex and support in 13”, 15” and 18” models. All three sizes have leg braces and, like the rest of the ZUMA line, meet ANSI/BIFMA standards for strength and durability.

Uplifting

Seat height adjustability is the single most important element of proper ergonomics. Our full line of adjustable ZUMA® chairs provides appropriate support for students of every age whether they’re keyboarding, doing lab work, or scanning titles in the media center. Available with or without casters in the full ZUMA palette of 22 colors, these chairs can be bright and agile or subdued and still.

Sustainable

Reprising the flagship separates of original ZUMA® in sustainable materials, the beauty of our new ZUMAfrd™ chairs and desks is enhanced by up to 70% recycled content and a multi-generational service life. This is sculpture for the classroom, an elegant metamorphosis, a change for the better.

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