Interview with **Rod Smith**

Title: Director of Technology
School District: Clayton County Public Schools
City/State: Jonesboro, GA
District's Web site: www.clayton.k12.ga.us

Description of your District's Program

The Clayton County Public School system has been a wireless environment for approximately five years, and individual schools have BYOD policies in place. When we began, mobile devices were not so readily available. District leaders were not considering outfitting schools or classrooms with these devices, nor were they considering how many students and teachers would own their own mobile device.

As we increase BYOD, which adds many devices to our environment, we require changing our infrastructure from using wireless access points to increased wireless density and capacity. With so many devices requiring access to the network, we have to create more capacity. We will use our next big budget to upgrade our wireless infrastructure to better provide 1-to-1 and BYOD initiatives.

The district has had an investment in a video conferencing solution with a plan for what the district could achieve. We are now in the process of developing a new plan to take even greater advantage of the system. We've used it for foreign language classes, distance learning, and collaboration across district leaders. Because we have this system at every school and at our central office site, we feel we can leverage this solution even more.

What instructional technology accomplishments are you most proud of?
Although I am new to my current role, I started my teaching career in this district almost 20 years ago. Coming back to the district, I am impressed with the progress they made to keep up with technology for students and teachers and to use it for instruction and to increase student achievement. Teachers are fully invested in using social media, tools like Edmodo, and others.

What has been the greatest change you've seen at your district as a result of teaching and learning with technology?
Students are more engaged and invested in their learning when they have the opportunity to use technology in their instructional tasks. I have seen dedicated teachers making the shift to put technology into the hands of students. And for me, it's not about the technology; it is about teaching and learning and how best to serve our students. We give students access to the tools and technology they need to increase standardize test graduation rates and being more prepared for college and careers.

How do you measure success?
We start with asking ourselves if the initiative is increasing student achievement. If the answer is no, then we question why are we doing it and reassess. It is more about teaching and learning than about technology, so we look for increased graduation rates, higher test scores, greater student attendance, and decreased disciplinary issues. However, we do not focus on these alone. We take other factors into consideration in order not to miss some students' achievements. For example, students who don't test well may have other strengths that they can demonstrate.

What was the biggest lesson(s) learned throughout the process?
The district's strategic plan should be the guide for implementing technology programs. We've learned that it is necessary to have a fully developed strategic plan and technology plan that are explained and discussed across the district. As planners, we must make everyone involved aware of the equipment and applications and our expectations of their uses in the classrooms. We know not to purchase technology for the sake of having technology so district leaders should communicate how technology is expected to improve teaching and learning. We need to state goals clearly so everyone knows what we expect to happen when this technology is implemented.

If you could offer advice to other districts that are getting started with technology, what would it be?
Districts should plan thoroughly and carefully and make their technology program match strategic goals. A series of steps includes:

Setting Goals	Reviewing Available Resources
Aligning to the Strategic Plan	Communicating the Plan
Identifying Stakeholders	Establishing a Timeline
Understanding the Benefits	Rolling Out the Project
Calculating Cost	Sharing Information
Realizing the Risks	Encouraging Adoption
Considering Logistics	Measuring Success
Determining Vendor Criteria	

�’ Rod's Advice: Key Factors for Success

- Vision – Define and share your vision for success.

- Foster Collaboration – Identify key stakeholders – including leaders, teachers, community members, and students – who all have a vested interest in the success of your vision. It's important that stakeholders believe that they have a voice. Then you have a greater chance of success.

- Calculated Risk Taker - One of my favorite quotes is from Albert Einstein, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Today's educational leaders have to be willing to take calculated risks. If there is a new technology or assessment application that you believe will have an impact on student achievement, don't charge in with your checkbook wide open. Get your team involved, research the technology, build a pilot program or conduct a proof of concept test with a small group first. Then take the risk, knowing that you still may not get the results you want the first time. That's why I call it a calculated risk.

- Get and Stay Connected - There is no reason for someone in a leadership role in the 21st century to go it alone. I started using social media tools like Twitter to build my Professional Learning Network. This one choice has helped me more than any course or workshop I've ever attended because I'm engaged in what my learning network is discovering and doing to make a difference as a 21st century leader.

These steps are detailed in an eBook I co-authored: From Inspiration to Implementation - A Guide to Planning Successful Tech Initiatives. http://tinyurl.com/kdbpljn

What do you hope for the future of your program?
I hope that Clayton County schools will be recognized nationally as a school district on the leading edge of using innovative technology methods. My hope is that other districts will look to us as model for developing their own technology goals.

What keeps you awake at night?
I am concerned about our district being able to keep up with the rapid changes in technology and the need for online and digital assessments. And while this keeps me awake at night, I'm still very excited about what's next. For example, I think about where are we going to be in three years with VDI and MOOC's for K12.

What are the key leadership qualities you believe are needed today?
- Communication — You have to be able to share your vision and inspire your team to give 100% effort for the organization. This is the number one quality needed to be a successful leader.
- Trust — Once you have communicated your vision, you have to trust in the people you've placed around you to carry that vision out. And as a part of that trust, assure the team that when you achieve your goals, you will celebrate together.
- Integrity — It's important that everyone on your team has trust in you and that you'll do the right thing because it's the right thing. In this role my decisions are always centered around what's best for the students and their success.

- Adaptability — Good leaders have to be able to accept change as a natural part of doing business. That is true with regards to technology in the K12 space.

How do you inspire the staff to embrace change?
The main thing I try to do is lead by example. Everyone knows that change as it relates to technology is on going. So if district administrators set an expectation for teachers to use social media for instruction, my role as a technology leader is to embrace that change and start using social media in ways that demonstrate that expectation.

Who or what inspires you?
I'm inspired primarily by the underdog. I was not a straight A student in high school or college. Anyone who starts a successful company after people said it couldn't be done inspires me. I'm inspired by people like John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco Systems, who is dyslexic (as I am) because I know what he had to go through to achieve the level of success that he has. I love a great underdog story!

Digital Learning Environments Leadership Section
www.guide2digitallearning.com

For More Information

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