Teleconference Brings 'What' and 'Why' of Networks to Northwest Schools

Schools that wire up for technology without thoughtful planning may find themselves stuck on the wrong circuit with a school network that doesn't work well for what they need. To help local schools avoid that easy-entry, tough-exit problem, the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (NETC) used a live interactive satellite teleconference to show local educators what is involved in designing a school network.

Get Wired: Designing Your School Network, held May 8, is resulting in a video and a network handbook. Sponsored by NETC in partnership with consortium members Educational Service District 101, Spokane, and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the teleconference focused on designing a school network that meets teaching, learning and administrative needs. Experienced network designers took participants through planning considerations and network design features facing educators who need to make intelligent decisions about constantly evolving technologies.

The live teleconference, with over 500 participants, included specially taped footage for a real-world look at three Northwest school districts with different network stories:

- Juneau, Alaska—a fully operating local area network in each of eight campuses and a wide area network linking the district

- Butte, Montana—a local area network in one middle school; now drafting specifications and seeking funding to network each school and the district

- Montesano, Washington—an operating local area network in the junior/senior high school and now wiring the second elementary school.

- The handbook is available without cost to schools in the NETC service region: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. (Those outside the region may purchase the guide at cost.) A video of the program is available at nominal cost. Price and ordering information is available online at http://www.netc.org/; or provide your name and address by phone (800-211-9435) or e-mail (netc@nwrel.org).

Desktop Video Conferencing Tested by Educators

There's a new meaning to the phrase from the desk of. And it's in living color.

Desktop video conferencing allows people in widely separated locations to see each other through a video system housed in a desktop computer, talk to each other, and see and edit, in real time, documents they are working on together. This new technology is already saving staff time in the region's state departments of education and the Laboratory, and is expected to save money and improve communications as well.

Since last November, NETC has been using desk top video conferencing with state education agencies in Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, and Educational Service District 101, a Star Schools site. To test this new technology as a planning and communication tool, NETC provided a desktop video system to each of its consortium partners, installed the systems, delivered training, and paid for monthly line usage and long distance service. In return, NETC partners have agreed to use the systems for their own work when feasible and provide NETC with reactions and evaluations of their experiences.

The project aims to answer a key question: How useful is it for education professionals to have readily available video communication, including document sharing, on their desktops? To answer that question, many interesting conferences with varied users have been held, including:

- State reform managers and NWREL School Improvement and Assessment and Accountability programs plan activities
- Oregon and Montana state department personnel share procedures and begin assessment of improved data collection and analysis
- State technology directors in Washington, Oregon, Montana and Wyoming and NETC staff revise state agreements and plan staff development activities
- Web page developers and grant writers provide technical assistance for state Web page development and school-consortium grant writing
- Montana and Oregon distance learning coordinators provide information to NETC for distance learning needs assessment

Using Technology in Education: Noteworthy Resources

Here are three publications that are especially noteworthy.

- **Teachers & Technology: Making the Connection**. Congress of the United States, Office of Technology Assessment. (1995.) Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

This newly released report suggests that in the process of acquiring hardware and software for students to use, teachers have been overlooked. Making the connection between teachers and technology could be one of the most important steps we can take to make the most of our continuing investments in educational technology. Available online:
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http://www.wws.princeton.edu/ota/disk1/1995/9541/9541_n.html

- **Plugging In: Choosing and Educational Technology**. Jones, B. F., Valdez, G., Nowakowski, J. & Rasmussen, C. (1995). Washington DC: Council for Educational Development and Research.

Plugging In introduces what we know about effective learning and effective technology, and puts it together in a planning framework for educators and policymakers. Technology that does not advance students' learning has little value in the classroom. The publication is based on work conducted at the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). Available online: http://www.ncrel.org/ncrel/sdrs/edtalk/toc.htm

- **Using Technology to Support Education Reform**. Means, B., Blando, J., Olson, K. & Middleton, T. (1993). Washington DC, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement, Office of Research.

Technology can be an important tool in bringing about the kind of revolutionary changes called for in new reform efforts. This report describes how technology can support both student learning and teacher efforts that support students. The final chapters review the literature on the effects of technology on student learning outcomes and implementation issues. Available online: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/studies3.html#Technology

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Teacher in Residence Brings Classroom Perspective

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's first teacher in residence, under its new five-year plan, has settled in at NETC. The residency program aims to further strengthen ties between research and practice, between researchers and teachers, in order to hasten reform with research-based applications.

Jeannie Wray is a sixth-grade teacher in the Blackfoot (Idaho) School District No. 55. An eight-year teaching veteran who spent the first five years in special education working with moderate to severe special needs children, Jeannie now teaches law-related education and visual arts courses.

She has recently become very interested in multimedia, and has been taking related graduate courses. Her two-month residency program with NETC focuses on Web site development, specifically a home page for K-12 teachers to find useful materials on technology, and the development of online teacher discussion groups.

"I'm glad to have the opportunity," Wray says, "to see technology hands on because that's the way I learn. I can go back and encourage my school and district to take on technology, to not be afraid of it. I can show them the benefit in the long run."

Wray, who is within one course of completing a master's degree in reading at Idaho State University at Pocatello, intends to pursue a doctorate in multimedia. Her busy professional and community life in Idaho with her husband and family—six children, two still at home, and seven grandchildren—doesn't leave much leisure time. And, she admits, most of that is now spent on the computer.

Deans First Forum Sets Sights on Technology

To help stimulate the integration of technology in K-12 reform through preservice teacher preparation, NETC held a Deans Forum with the deans of the colleges of education in the Northwest. Serving on the planning group were deans Dr. Bob Everheart, Portland State University; Dr. Allen Glenn, University of Washington; Dr. Dale Gentry, University of Idaho; Dr. Dan King, University of Wyoming; and Dr. Don Robson, University of Montana.

Hosted at Portland State University by Dean Everhart, the daylong Saturday session was framed by Dr. Chris Dede, professor in both the Schools of Information Technology & Engineering and Education at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. He works with the U.S. Advisory Council on the National Information Infrastructure. He recently finished a policy study on distance learning for the U.S. Department of Education, as well as a technology forecast on school-to-work transitions for the Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress.

The forum, the first regional meeting of the deans to focus on educational technology, was the initial step in convening them to help forward the integration of technology in preservice teacher education programs. Forum issues came from a previous survey of the deans. Discussion focused on instruction, management, finances and external support.

Among the next steps the deans proposed is to establish a listserv for deans of teacher education institutions and to develop future forums.

Director's Message

The mission of the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium is to provide professional development opportunities, access to technical assistance, and support for collegial interaction that allow and encourage educators throughout our region, and especially in K-12 schools, to become informed and fearless users of technology.

Welcome to our inaugural edition of *NETC Circuit*. This newsletter is just one more way the consortium reaches out to help schools and communities to improve student learning through the union of education and technology.

The Northwest Educational Technology Consortium at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is delivering a range of services to educators in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming. This region is grand and diverse, replete with peoples and places of remarkable distinction—from the rural, isolated villages in Alaska to the ranches of Wyoming and Montana and the urban centers of Seattle, Boise and Portland. And we face daunting educational challenges. The integration of education and technology is one key that can be used in many ways and in many places to unlock problems. The future is here; we must keep pace. We look forward to working with you. —Seymour Hanfling, Director