

# Enabling and Scaling School Success

## Technology in Buford City Schools: A 21st Century Learning Environment White Paper

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### Key Findings

- Professional development is one of the most important elements contributing to a successful implementation of new technology programs.

### Recommendations

Educational Technology Leaders:

- By pooling at one location the technology resources from all four of our schools, we were able to serve all of our teachers.
- At subsequent technology conferences we will limit the choices.
- Extend the length of the conference so that the sessions could be longer and they could attend more sessions.

### What You Need to Know

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To date, our single most successful and well-received professional development activity was our system-wide technology conference, which was held during the 2007-2008 school year.

The System Technology Conference was designed to support all teachers in their pursuit of high-quality education.

### White Paper

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#### Introduction

Buford City Schools is an independent school system located 40 miles from Atlanta in the northern tip of Gwinnett County. Just under 3000 students, 262 certified employees and 192 classified employees populate the four schools: Buford Elementary School (Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade), Buford Academy (2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades), Buford Middle School (6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades), and Buford High School (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades).

We believe that students benefit from their teachers' professional growth, and that in helping teachers become life-long technology learners, we can facilitate not only their instructional effectiveness, but also their impact as influential role models in the use of dynamic technologies. In an effort to increase its teachers' use of and comfort with technology and thus create a more engaging classroom environment, the district has opted to focus on professional development. To that end, we offer a wide variety of

options for professional learning. We strongly believe that all teachers need assistance in undertaking the changes that come with the use of technology and in learning how best to take advantage of these changes. Buford City Schools provides ongoing professional development to all employees during the year, offering training during planning periods, before and after school, during the summer, and on teacher work days.

## The Challenge

Our leadership team understands the importance of on-going professional development in the use of information management systems, hardware, and software. We know that if the instructional staff does not fully understand the possibilities available to them, they cannot incorporate the benefits into their classrooms.

- *Training 300 people.* The flexibility and hospitality of our school leadership teams mitigated this challenge.
- *Identifying instructors.* Finding enough experienced teachers using the tools effectively in the classroom was a challenge, but will not be a problem with our next conference, as the effective use of the tools in the classroom has increased dramatically.
- *Selecting topics.* Even with teacher input, we found very difficult the challenge of deciding what tools and programs would most benefit the teachers and students.
- *Increased interest = increased expenditures.* Leaving the conference with new ways to utilize technology to enhance the delivery of the curriculum, teachers' enthusiasm prompted a need to expand the limited number of tools available at each school. Fortunately, we did not have to pay for trainers, having used our teachers. The only cost involved was for the customized flash drive that was ordered for every participant with the BCSS logo which was paid for by donations from local businesses. Nevertheless, purchasing enough tools to keep pace with teachers' interest and enthusiasm promises to be a challenge.

## The Approach

The majority of the classes offered were designed and taught by our own experienced teachers, with the remaining classes being led by individuals from our ETC and the DOE. The sessions were customized to address the needs of the individual schools as they strive to establish themselves as professional learning communities. The instructors tailored each breakout session to teach a particular concept or skill that is aligned to standards of student performance and linked to resources in the schools. We were able to offer a selection of 20 classes, and each participant attended three classes. The conference was scheduled on a teacher workday for ½ day, with each class scheduled for one hour. Prior to the conference we sent out a survey giving all participants an opportunity to specify courses they would be interested in taking.

## The Results

- Our teachers are becoming more efficient with technology and are constantly looking to find resources, techniques, solutions, and lesson ideas that work in their classroom.
- We have found that there is more collaboration across grade levels in identifying which tools work best to reach a wide variety of learning styles, abilities, and interests.
- With the creative efforts of many individuals the System Technology Conference was an overwhelming success and our teachers will continue to grow into the future together.

## GPS and/or Keys to Quality Correlation

- *Professional Learning Standard 1:* The context of professional learning—the who, when, why and where—contributes to the development and quality of learning communities, ensuring that they are functioning, leadership is skillful and focused on continuous improvement, and resources have been allocated to support adult learning and collaboration.
  - *PL 2.5* Alignment of Professional Learning with Expected Outcomes
  - *PL 2.6* Building Capacity to Use Research Results
- *Assessment Standard 2:* A variety of effective and balanced assessment techniques is routinely and systematically implemented by all instructional personnel as part of a comprehensive school-based assessment and evaluation system.
- *Instruction 2.7* Use of Technology
- *Leadership 3.3* Use of Central Office, Regional and State Resources
- *Planning and Organization 3.1* Collaborative Planning for Fiscal Management and Resource Distribution.

## Educational Value Points

- “The student response devices are nothing less than fantastic. My students love them! The students beg for me to use them. Students tell me it is easier for them to stay focused when I use this piece of technology in conjunction with note taking. I also think they enjoy them because it allows for some competition without singling out students for wrong answers. – *Angela Edwards*
- “When I am able to use “the clickers” along with my interwrite pad it makes me twice as productive during the lesson.” – *Bryan Rogers*
- “The Interwrite Pad seems to get a lot more participation and creates a visual for group discussion and whole class sharing. This is a great device for getting students to pay attention and learn. I plan on continuing to use it in the classroom.” – *Fraser Hudgins*
- “Moodle has been a great addition to my AP Biology class. Moodle allows me to create a quiz from a test generator, upload it to the website, the kids take the quiz and when the students are finished taking the quiz it is already graded for me. I can also spend more time in class on my material and less time evaluating because the students can take the quiz at home.” – *Melissa Green*.

## Electronic References

None included.