

## **K-12 Educators Speak Out**

### Moderator

Eliot Levinson, BLE Group

### Presenters

Sharnell Jackson, Chief E-Learning Officer, Chicago Public Schools

Bijaya Devkota, Chief Information Officer, Charles County Public Schools

Kate Kemker, Chief Information Officer, Florida Department of Education

Ken Eastwood, Superintendent, Middletown New York

One of the major themes of the panel discussion was current innovation and the importance of training and competency, user developed materials, accountability, and infrastructure. The panel named digital content as a tipping point for evolving innovation.

Bijaya Devkota provided information regarding Charles County. The fast-growing district, located south of Washington, D.C., will have to build one school per year for next 17 years to accommodate its 27000 students and 3300 teachers and administrators. Devkota stressed the importance of providing personalized, universal access to all kids and figuring out how to do so.

Such a venture poses some challenges and raises questions—how can other schools provide similar learning experiences? Devkota talked about utilizing IP communications for data, voice and video and the importance of one-to-one accessibility. Schools must create a standard to digitize course content and provide assessment at various points in time (as a way to map to state standards).

Ken Eastwood then spoke about Middletown City Schools in New York. The district is responsible for 7,000 students (70% of which benefit from free and reduced meal plans, 23% of which qualify as English Language Learners) and 600 teachers. In this district, many student parents work schedules that don't allow for much school involvement and many rely heavily on the schools to take care of their kids.

Eastwood came to Middletown after his predecessor was sent to jail. Upon arrival, he realized that there was no scope and sequence for the district. Non-existent online resources, poorly-coordinated teachers, corrupt student data and poor assessment tools all plagued what Eastwood initially believed would be a stable educational environment. Furthermore, attendance and drop-out rates were respectively some of the lowest and highest in the state. No technology had been adequately introduced into the system. The buildings were not wired and many teachers were not well-acquainted with the limited technology possessed by the school.

Since 2007, Middletown has instituted an \$8 million infrastructure program at no cost to taxpayers; the schools are now wired and heavily invested in technology. Technology teacher coaches, online resources, standards based on scope and sequence and security equipment were all integrated into the school system.

The background on Chicago public schools, which accommodates 409,000 students, 40,000 employees with a \$4.5 billion budget, was provided by Sharnell Jackson. Jackson enumerated the challenges presently facing the system:

- Lack of reliable assessment
- Changing priorities
- Teacher-directed student learning
- Lack of communication and collaboration

- Multiple sources of data and info (142 School Information Systems)
- No digital content repository
- Student assessment data is used to evaluate teachers (issues with unions)
- Insufficient resources for teachers

Implementation and product management, Jackson said, are important. She then gave an overview of the current measures and technologies in place:

- Gigabit to desktops in all high schools
- Implementation of many software tools and SIS
- Collaborative efforts among administrators and external resources (i.e. the Principal's Technology Leadership Institute, Tabula Digita, Intel Tech literacy activities etc)
- Standardized digital media content (which increased students' literacy scores by 15% overall for 2006-2007)
- Teacher quality and instructional effectiveness improving

Jackson said that online student testing remains the system's ultimate goal.

Kate Kemper then spoke about the school systems in Florida. The state boasts 67 districts and 2.6 million students (7 large districts with 1.3 million students, 22 medium districts with 1 million and 38 smaller districts with 250000). She talked about a disparity across states and limited funding for tech and resources; Kemper stated that all students must have access (and the budget crisis portends that local funds will be larger than state funds). She remarked on the challenge that accompanies the implementation of EETT funding.

Florida has taken many steps to improve student and teacher technological literacy rates—performance-based tools, teacher training, state control of digital content and user-created content. The state has spent a lot of time developing media assets for teachers; this summer the state will instruct teachers as to how to create tags in their learning objects to post on a platform—they will create an object and tag it before master trainers offer feedback and send it to the state. Kemper supported disruptive innovation and providing guidance for teachers by collaborating with higher education institutions/businesses.

## Tipping Points to Innovate Education

### Digital Content

- Challenges – Digital rights management, intellectual property, broadband access, affordability, emerging technologies
- Drivers – online assessment, digital content, social networking

### Low Cost Devices

- Benefits - Wireless, affordable, multiple functionality
- Drivers – affordability, new and supportive business models (purchase new, updated applications not devices)
- Challenges – funding reoccurring maintenance, security

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environment

- Definition –medium for supporting multiple modes of learning ecosystem
- Drivers – decreased funding, NCLB reauthorization, increasing demands
- Challenges – organizational silos, strategy/management, broadband access

## Q&A

How did you work with superintendents to get such strong support for initiatives?  
The panel stated that prioritization was necessary.

Do you believe that innovation in homework help is within your purview or is it more curriculum-focused?

Kemper and Jackson each advocated the construction of at-home access for teachers and students, and both were looking to strength the connection between school and home environments. Devkota and Eastwood agreed that seamless instruction would require this kind of universal access.