

FACILITATOR'S OBSERVATIONS ON KEY THEMES FROM THE PISD TECHNOLOGY PLAN FOCUS GROUPS—NOVEMBER 13-15, 2002

STRENGTHS TO BUILD UPON OVER THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS

Focus Groups identified the following positive impacts of PISD's very impressive technology infrastructure built over the past five years:

1. Technology applications are allowing teachers, students and parents to overcome historic time and place barriers.
2. Technology has opened access via the Internet to the world of knowledge by students and teachers.
3. Technology has created much greater immediacy and ease of access to information.
4. Technology has greatly facilitated teachers' "multi-tasking," allowing them to tailor instruction to a variety of learning needs—from remediation to acceleration.
5. Technology has greatly expanded the instructional system's communications capability---teacher-to-student; teacher-to-parent; teacher-to-teacher; student-to-student.
6. Technology has significantly expanded the capability of both teachers and students to be more creative in their presentations, using multi-media tools.
7. Available software has provided powerful tools to supplement other materials, especially in reading and mathematics.

The above strengths put PISD in a uniquely strong position to further strengthen effective technology utilization to improve learning over the next 3-5 years.

AREAS THAT CAN BE STRENGTHENED OVER THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS

Focus groups identified the following priority areas that need to be strengthened over the next five years.

Make Certain Applications More "User-Friendly"

1. Some applications need to be more efficient and "user-friendly" (Ed-Soft was cited often. In its early "roll out" it seems to be taking a great deal of teacher time for data entry.)
2. The "log in-log out" process is seen as being cumbersome. Many participants recommended two different log-ins for teachers.
3. A number of participants suggested that the software acquisition process needs to be a) more clear and b) more timely in reaching approvals. They also suggested that more work needs to be done to provide more timely maintenance and repair of hardware.

4. The system for parents accessing teachers by phone during the school day needs more work.
5. Closer proximity of printers was suggested by many of the groups. Currently much teacher and student time is lost in retrieving documents printed at a location other than the classroom.

Expand Access

1. Participants suggested that the BESS system filters out too much information. They suggested that teachers need different level of access than students.
2. Closed captioning on video and video streaming was mentioned frequently as a needed enhancement for improved access by hearing-impaired students.
3. Participants recommended continued expansion of available tools such as more mobile wireless labs; more instructional software; more video streaming; more projectors; more laptops for teachers and students; more digital cameras and digital video editing capability; more on-line (Web-based) curriculum resources; more resources available to teachers of “elective” (non-core) subjects.

Customize and Expand Training and Technical Assistance

1. Participants called for a “customized” approach to training in using technology. They suggested that there currently is a wide range of knowledge and skill—thus the need for customization of training. Achieving an appropriate balance of on-line training with more on-site training was seen as a significant challenge over the next 3-5 years.
2. The greatest single need the groups identified was to strengthen everyone’s awareness of the full array of impressive technology resources available to enhance instruction.
3. An ongoing program of sharing “technology tips” generated by central office, C.T.A.’s and classroom teachers was strongly suggested as a way to further “scale up” good practice in using technology. Facilitating more networking of teachers across schools was seen as an important part of this suggestion.
4. Participants suggested the help desks provide more advice on effective uses of software)
5. The issue of finding adequate time for continued professional development was a very strong theme as participants discussed their desire to improve their uses of technology in the classroom.

Improve Technical Quality of the Technology Tools

1. While the current video streaming capability was universally applauded, they suggested the need for improving the quality of the resolution.
2. They also suggested improvement in the quality of sound outputs-both computers and video.
3. There was a strong desire for more color printers.

Clarify Curriculum Expectations for Learning About Technology As a Societal Tool

1. Several groups suggested a clear curriculum “scope and sequence” for learning about technology as a societal tool. Included would be learning about both technical and social/ethical issues.
2. Participants strongly suggested that learning keyboarding should be introduced much earlier age.

Doing the Impossible: Dreaming About Potential New Applications

The final discussion item in the focus group process was an “imagineering” activity in which the teachers suggested areas where they currently face barriers in improving learning. They were asked to imagine new uses of technology to overcome these barriers. A couple of major themes emerged from their reports:

1. Greater use of technology to truly personalize learning for all students
2. Greater use of technology for ensuring access and security (e.g. thumbprint identification, bar coding, etc.)
3. Increasing the speed and ease of access to information

The detailed written reports from the groups contain a large number of specific items suggested from this imagineering process.