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12922

# Eyes Closed Tight

## Why does the digital revolution stop at the schoolhouse door?

A decade ago, education leaders raced to get computers into schools. Macs squared off with PCs. Cisco faced off against Novell. The Internet came to life. Why is it, then, that educators who wouldn't dream of buying their airline tickets or banking anyplace but online have not been able to transform education with technology? What happened?

One problem is that schools don't look to other schools to find solutions to common problems. This phenomenon is pervasive. If schools don't consider outside models for ideas to modernize with technology, they can't move forward. It's not just a matter of money, either. Turn loose a tenth grade class on the Web to investigate what works in education and technology and answers will emerge overnight. Maybe educators should take a hint from their students, who are inquisitive and not afraid to take risks.

There's also the issue of internal communication. Typically the technology and instructional departments do not sit down at the same table and ask, how can we work together to improve school performance with technology or help students learn? And too often, administrators don't encourage either group to explore innovative solutions.

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The first step is openness and awareness. Every state has its success stories, examples of how technology transformed education. In California, for instance, the state department of education held a High School Summit in 2004 that explored best technology practices and raising

expectations for students. The atmosphere at the summit was electric, as you might expect when 3,700 educators see what their peers are doing for the first time.

The next step is to be bold. Let students research how technology could assist them and their teachers. Put them to work looking for homework and test prep solutions, for example, and have them report their findings to the school board. In the words of the education blogger Ms. Frizzle, let's learn how to take chances from our students.

There are several practical ways school boards can attack this problem.

If a school's IT department isn't working alongside those who develop curriculum, maybe it's time to establish a position that serves as a bridge between the two. The person in this role (called an "assistant superintendent" or "principal" for performance and accountability) works to ensure the development of joint strategies for higher student performance and better-trained teachers.

Another possibility is to create a new school designation. In the vein of magnet and High Tech High Schools, why not create Schools for the Information Age, modern institutions dedicated to learning as much about themselves, and what's possible with emerging technologies, as they are to delivering curriculum?

Finally, school boards might consider taking a page from the business world. Unlike most school districts, corporations embrace business plans with return on investment components, reinvention exercises, and other tools that demand clearly defined actions and measurable results, as opposed to dust-collecting strategic plans. In adopting these practices, districts will grasp a new and powerful understanding of what works and what doesn't. They will also make what they are learning visible to others. &

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