It’s a common occurrence: Instructional and technology teams meet, but everyone leaves frustrated because they don’t speak the same language.

The IT and instructional teams at the Cabot Public School District in Arkansas have found a way to bridge that communication gap, based partly on an informal friendship started years ago on a children’s soccer field.

As their kids played together, Kendal Wells, Cabot’s director of technology, and B.J. Brooks, Cabot’s director of instructional technology, sat together on the sidelines and talked tech.

“I was a teacher at that time,” says Brooks, “and Kendal’s been our tech director as far back as I can remember. He would complain about teachers, this, that and the other. And I would say, ‘Well, that’s because of x, y, z.’ So, we opened up a dialogue back then.”

That informal dialogue continued after Brooks moved from teacher to director of instructional technology. Brooks and Wells meet each Friday night to chat by a campfire. “We talk at work,” says Brooks, “but on Friday nights, we do brainstorming. We ask, ‘What can we do to push this district from good to great? What can we do to push those teachers?’ We just throw out all kinds of wild, crazy ideas, and sometimes they’ll become real.”

Providing Professional Development

Cabot Public School District deployed Chromebooks on a fast track, beginning the rollout in 2013. Both Brooks and Wells point to the teacher training they’ve provided as a key element of their success. Brooks started providing informal technology training classes when she was a teacher. When she moved into
As more people become involved in the planning of technology and other educational initiatives, it’s critical to ensure that everyone is working toward the common goal of improving education. Here are some tips to help keep the focus where it needs to be.

**Keep teams on track**

- **Go big.** Joe Kuzo, director of technology at the Quakertown Community School District in Pennsylvania, says the planning teams in his district involve not just technology, instructional and business department heads, but also multiple stakeholders within the instructional group, including affected curriculum areas and special education teachers. This avoids “doing something with blinders on and no idea of an impact on another department.”

- **Break down barriers.** It’s critical that departments work together, says Kuzo, and leaders are critical to ensuring that no one is working in a silo.

- **Empower teacher-leaders.** In the research projects she directs for the Consortium for School Networking, Ann Ware, educational leader at the Ware Group, sees the most successful districts using teacher-leaders to guide technological change among the instructional staff. These teachers should be easygoing and respected by their peers, she says, and they should not be in a supervisory role or seen as being on the bleeding edge of technology.

- **Include a student voice.** After all, students are the audience being served by these innovations, and the districts Ware has worked with are involving them more in the planning process. “When young people speak,” she says, “it’s very meaningful to the stakeholders.”

**Streamlining the rollout**

Joe Kuzo, director of technology at the Quakertown Community School District in Pennsylvania, is working with his instructional and technology teams to extend the district’s one-to-one program from the high school to the middle school. This expansion had been in the works, but Common Core requirements have pushed it to the forefront. “Without some sort of one-to-one program, I don’t see how schools will conduct online assessments,” he says.

To avoid glitches and ensure that the technology is serving curriculum needs, Kuzo involves all the curriculum groups when planning a new rollout, including special education. They do most of their planning by email, he says, because it is faster and more efficient.

**Consortium for technology planning and implementation teams growing in diversity, beyond just instructors and IT staff. As district leaders look for “a financial model to re-allocate resources,” it makes sense to include CFOs and principals, says Ware. Planning teams can also benefit from someone with Title I responsibilities, since Title I funds can be used for professional development related to technology deployments or to backfill other areas after re-allocating funds.

While the teams expand, however, Ware says the focus behind technology planning and deployment is staying true: “We see curriculum being more of a guiding force,” she says.

For Wells, that is how it should be. Cabot’s district motto is “It’s about the kids,” and when the curriculum guides technological change, that’s where the focus remains.

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