

TECHNOLOGY TIPS

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Trends in WMass Education mean what for Commerce?

When you read about the school closings that are going to occur in the smaller "hill" towns of Western Massachusetts, you're going to be looking at an infusion of students into places like Northampton, Holyoke, Southwick, and ultimately Springfield. You can say you heard it here first folks. The smaller schools in these rural areas are going to get squeezed out by larger, countywide regional schools. If you read this weekend's ***Sunday Republican***, then you know what the problem is. For those of you who didn't read the article in the paper that I'm referring to, I'll give you the "Reader's Digest Condensed Version".

Many school districts here in WMass are having financial problems based on multitudes of factors including (and not limited to): the lack of fully funded federal and state mandates, mismanaged municipal finances, political pet projects, and scores of other rea-

sons. That's it in a nutshell. Because of the financial status of our communities, there are schools all over the Commonwealth that are in the process of being eliminated by district and regional merges.

You're asking yourselves, "What does this have to do with us here"? These children are going to have to be shipped somewhere folks. Maybe not to Springfield specifically, but wherever it happens, the ripple effect will bring it to us as well. Towns surrounding us will be directly affected with the influx of students as smaller schools are consolidated with larger ones in neighboring areas. These schools will then look to their neighbors regarding things like school choice and develop policies based on their ability to offer districts like Springfield and Holyoke access.

Technology fits into this picture in the form of an equalizer. Because The Springfield Public

Schools are a ways ahead of the curve with regard to distance learning, think of what might be able to occur if these towns and municipalities were to take the 40 minute plus rides each way for these rural kids and make them "teachable moments" by using technology already available and extending it to create mobile learning labs on the busses used for transportation.

This idea isn't new by any means. In the latest issue of ***eSchool News On-Line***, there was an article titled, "**Schools ride emerging trend: Bus-based connectivity**". By looking at the Republican article from Sunday and this one, it became very evident to me that this would be a perfect way for the integration of technology into our student's lives. How you wonder?

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IMPORTANT STUFF

- ◆ 7 weeks until the end of school!!!
- ◆ There's still plenty of time to get in plenty of "Teachable Moments" as it were.
- ◆ The weather's getting nicer and it's getting harder for the kids (and some of us as well) to get here both physically and mentally. Since we know this, use it to our advantage and remind the kids their grades depend on attendance because, "Showing up is the first step toward success".



Students and the New File Server!!!

Waaahooo!!! It's here!!! Finally the students will be able to save their work on a network drive here at The High School of Commerce!!!

Yes, I know you had it before, but Commerce has never had this much room (on average about 50 to 100 MB of storage space). You also never had the sorts of conveniences that are coming down the pike in terms of having things like a teachers "Assignment Folder" either.

Both of these are here right now and while the teacher's access will require a few simple steps (seeing me to sign up for it being the first), students already have access to their "H" drive file (their network drive where they

can store their work so they can get at it from any room in the building as long as; A. They're using a laptop from one of the school's laptop carts (or really any school computer as long as it's running Windows 2000, or XP), and B. they log in using the process illustrated at the right side of the article while on the school network.

Access outside 415 State Street isn't permitted right now, because the security for that type of admission isn't quite what we'd want it to be just yet. The folks over at the SPS techie haven in the PD Center are working on it though and I'm sure they'll come up with an answer before long

User
Name-
Student ID#
Password-
Birthday

Trends in WMass Education mean what for Commerce?

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THE HUB OF SPRINGFIELD'S ONLINE COMMUNITY?

Once again, the Springfield Public Schools has a history using the technologies involved with online education. We already have a cadre of folks who are very well acquainted with working on a multitude of platforms including: Manhattan, Moodle, BlackBoard, WebCT, and several others. It would seem that the expertise we have in this area would be an opportunity we could offer to other districts. Thus, instead of drawing on the funding that is so very scarce during these troubled times, we could add to our financial stability by using talents and assets we already possess.

The ways that we could benefit here at Commerce are fairly straightforward. Over the course of the last 9 months or so, many of the folks here at Commerce have become far more adept at the use of technology in the classroom. I can say this in light of looking at some of the facts involved with the use of computers and other media here at the good ol' HSofC. They are: the use of the available laptop carts is up considerably, the use of e-mail as a communication tool is surging, teacher and team/organization pages on the website are becoming more sophisticated, and the requests for a file server solution to help with the problem of saving student work.

Why would these things I've mentioned above lead anyone to believe that The High School of

Commerce could be the city's leader in the use of online learning and integrating technology in the classroom? The willingness to start from scratch with regard to technology is matched by the willingness and determination to embrace emerging technologies and methodologies for teaching and learning. The proof is in the pudding as it were.

Still doubting? Look at what Mr. Barsalou has done for the past nine years down in his computer art classroom. It's the only class of its kind in the city. Just having the class up and running with our machines (The Macs in his class are every bit as old as the ones in the rest of the building) is just this side of miraculous in my opinion. Not only that, but the techniques and lessons he's doing are many times on the college level and advanced beyond where the Arts curriculum states his students need to be. I'd say that's above and beyond wouldn't you? And this doesn't even mention the music classes and the great job they do.

Or how about the job Mrs. Boylan does in teaching her computer classes with machines that have platforms that are about 8 generations behind the times in terms of their operating systems? Saving the work that is produced in her Web Design class is, as all of us know, difficult and frustrating at best.

Of course then there's the work that individual teachers are do-

ing with planning and keeping up with what's going on at the state level. Just one example is Mr. Letourneau and his use of the MassOne platform for creating lesson plans. Moving on, despite the difficulties involved with using outdated machines and the frustration that brings, he's attempting to use the latest tools available (and doing a great job from what I can see) to teachers throughout the Commonwealth.

Of course, you'd also have to mention the folks who've come to B155 for some of the mini-workshops I've been offering since January. Mrs. Alban, Rosado, Susman, Terrinca, Harris, Crowley, and Mr. Lemanski, are just some of the folks who have stopped down for the "workshops" on Laptop use, Teacher Tools, MS Word/PowerPoint/FrontPage and other tools.

And then there are the folks who are somewhat more comfortable using technology, so I've been able to visit (and even participate, which was very cool I might add) while they do lessons with multimedia. They include: Ms Supinski, Scarfe, Sharrard, Limero, Begley-Musiak, Damon, Eynula, Mr. Perrier, Duffey, Franks, among others. With additional focused training and more of the same dedication we've already shown (in spades I would say), leading Springfield and WMass high schools wouldn't really be that much of a stretch for the folks here at Commerce.

If A is success in life, then A equals x plus y plus z. Work is x; y is play; and z is keeping your mouth shut.

Albert Einstein,

Using Technology without losing your mind...

I was talking with one of the Science teachers the other day and I commented on how the application of project based learning approaches in the area of science would not only increase student interest by making it more relevant to the students (subsequently increasing the level of understanding and subject matter retention), but it would also help show the rest of the school community some of the really fine work we do with the materials we've got on hand.

Granted, showing off isn't always the best way of proving a point, but when we have an increasingly data driven society looking for hard results they can quantify, this gives the

people what they want.

If we weren't able to get even one more thing out of budgets from here and there, we could still make a fairly impressive show on the project based learning front. We have district licenses for MS Office products (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, FrontPage, and even sometimes Publisher) some of which are the industry standard for presentation. We also have a number of other programs like Timeliner and Inspiration available in significant numbers. Additionally, we have access to things like Acrobat Professional (to create PDF files) and even a copy or two of a program called Captivate that creates Flash presentations without actually having to learn the ins and outs of Flash.

Once again, even though we have access to all these things, the point is rendered completely useless if we don't thoroughly plan well ahead of time for our units, lessons, and assessments. If we don't know where it is we want to go (and how could we not given our Instructional Guides which will be required in the fall) within the curriculum, how can we expect the students to get there? I'm not saying that there can't be any improvisation, but the overall message and purpose of using teaching and learning tools like computers and other multimedia devices is far more focused and ultimately useful if planned for in as thorough a way as possible.

Using MassOne in your classroom...

Hey! You made it this far in the newsletter! Outstanding! Since we started talking about some of the features available on MassOne in the last newsletter, let's continue where we left off. We were about to get into the areas of Surveys and Forums.

Just as with many of our former perceptions of the MassOne Platform and its predecessor VES, we must certainly begin to reevaluate our positions given the circumstances that occur at the very moment you log in.

Forums

The Forums uses a tiered structure based where the entire network is at the top, your district (in our case, Springfield), your school, then finally your individual classroom. The load time is remarkably short when compared with what it once was.

This area is exactly like many other forums of similar construction within certain academic groups (if you've ever taken an online course before, it's a lot like that), not to mention some of the media outlets such as MassLive.

Just like you would be in your

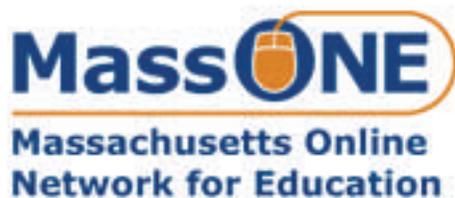
And so gentle readers...

And to think, only a few short years ago, Momma Musiak would look at her little boy (not really little by any means but I was her first-born) and say "you're going to do great things". Ah, the life of a celebrity these days. She called me 3 times the day my picture, along the side of a life size Homer Simpson, was on the front page of the newspaper.

So many people said things to me in passing that week that were so encouraging, "Hey, great article", "I saw you on the front page", "Am I the one you were talking about not being able to program my VCR"?

The woman who manages the Shell gas station around the corner from

room at school, you are the moderator of whatever discussion threads are created in your class. While they are secure from people outside the school community (ideally), these forums and discussion areas are by no means "private". They are monitored occasionally by folks like me, but even more importantly, they are monitored by folks from the DOE as well. It would be my advice to maintain a certain amount of



decorum (things don't have to always be serious, but they should always be appropriate for school) while you're working in the Forums. Of course, you knew that already, you didn't need me to be telling you that.

Surveys

This feature is a really neat addition to your online "bag of tricks" as some folks like to call it. I

where I live said, "I was doing the inventory after we got robbed and there you were". Well... saying it like that was a bit frightening, but amusing.

People I haven't seen in years called up out of the blue to say things like, "Hey, I thought you were dead", or in the case of one of the bill collectors for the oil company I use, "Good picture. Now we know who to look for if you get behind in your payments"

Oh don't get me wrong, it wasn't nearly as bad as some of the gigs I played with bands in the area over the last 30 or so years. I mean when folks come up to you at the end of the night as you're rolling up a 50 foot micro-

prefer a kinder, gentler term/phrase. "Arsenal" has a much better ring to it doesn't it? Anyway, the Surveys area of your classroom on MassOne is an awesome tool for a number of reasons.

The first of these reasons is the potential for keeping informed on the progress of students through an online course or "module". It could be seen as a testing tool, however,

I've found it to be much more valuable as an indicator of how students are reacting to the material and the depth of their understanding why they feel that way. Keeping up with this information helps me better tailor the lessons and the supplementary materials to their needs. I guess you could say that knowing this as well as test scores and the like is taking not only the academic indicators/data but the personal and less superficial information as well.

In the next issue, we'll talk about ways we can use MassOne as a supplement to regular classes

"He attacked everything in life with a mix of extraordinary genius and naive incompetence, and it was often difficult to tell which was which."

Douglas Adams

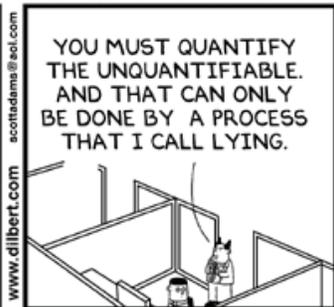
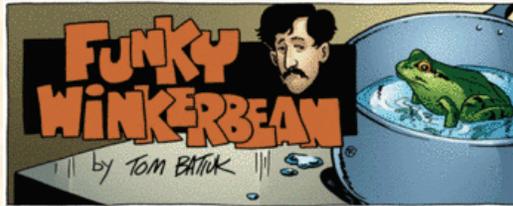
phone cable that's been through more beer than Lavern and Shirley in their opening credits at the Schotz brewery and say things like "Man you guys are great". Then they give you an impression of just how much really bad/stinky beer one individual can consume while smoking cigars and eating anchovies (mind you, this is just the ladies of the establishment in question). It's at this point where you realize "Let's keep this all in perspective".



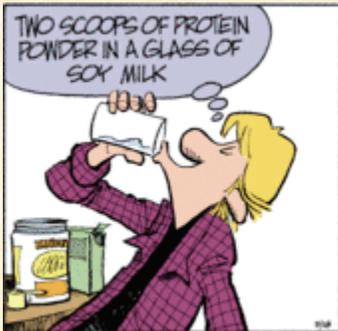
IN A SCARY PLACE!?!



Life Lessons in Comics



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