Shiawassee Regional Education Service District (SRESD)

District enhances professional development for teachers and administrators while reducing costs using Adobe® Connect™ software

A new way to train

These days, many school districts are struggling to provide professional development for teachers while dealing with budgetary restrictions and cuts. Depleted funds for travel or paying substitute teachers have made it difficult for districts to enable full-time teachers to participate in training during school hours.

The time and expense of in-person professional development can be cost-prohibitive for many teachers and districts, but keeping teachers trained is more important than ever. With technologies like video, multimedia, and the Internet proving useful in making learning more engaging and relevant to students, K-12 schools in the Shiawassee Regional Education Service District (SRESD) in Michigan are applying those same technologies to make training more available to and engaging for teachers. The district is using the hosted version of Adobe Connect software to save money while providing convenient, high-quality professional development for teachers.

"With Adobe Connect, we can bring teachers together from across the state and provide them with high-quality, virtual professional development sessions that are just as effective as in-person sessions," says Carolyn McCarthy, educational technology coordinator for SRESD and an Adobe Education Leader. "It's a convenient way for educators to access valuable training content and for schools to defray the costs of professional development."

Alleviating time and budget constraints

In 2007, McCarthy and the 55 other educational technology coordinators at Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) in Michigan started seeing disturbing trends regarding teacher training. They found attendance at professional development offerings delivered in-person at several regional educational media centers had declined steeply each year. Travel to and from meetings and training sessions was particularly inconvenient for users in more remote parts of the state—such as the Upper Peninsula, located approximately eight hours north of the state capital.

By adopting Adobe Connect, McCarthy and her state-wide colleagues can circumvent logistical and financial concerns about in-person meetings or training. Educators across the state are provided with a rich, intuitive virtual learning environment featuring live chat, polling, integrated audio and video, screen-sharing, and other interactive elements.

Since Adobe Connect is built on the Adobe Flash® Platform, users need only the free Adobe Flash Player to access the rich, interactive sessions. The solution also does not require software downloads, which is a key prerequisite in an educational environment where users are often prohibited from downloading and installing software on their computers.

The Adobe solution provides administrators and teachers statewide with the flexibility to be in more than one place at a time. For example, when McCarthy or her colleagues are at a regional center conducting a training, they can use Adobe Connect during down times or breaks to attend other scheduled meetings remotely.

"Given how scarce money is for districts to pay substitute teachers, it wasn’t shocking to see that some districts were not allowing teachers to leave classrooms at all during the school year—especially the most distant districts," says McCarthy. "Adobe Connect has helped us bridge the gap and enable educators from all over the state to participate without spending money on gas and lodging or missing valuable in-class time."
McCarthy estimates that for just four of her colleagues, districts can save as much as 335 miles and $170 per person by conducting meetings virtually rather than on-site. The savings are welcomed relief for districts’ limited budgets, and support environmental sustainability initiatives aimed at reducing schools’ carbon footprints.

Greater convenience, greater utility
With Adobe Connect, McCarthy and her counterparts have a variety of eLearning and web conferencing options available. Virtual professional development sessions—part of the 21 Things curriculum (http://21things4teachers.net)—are posted on the service district websites or on the Blackboard or Moodle learning management systems. Teachers can sign up and attend virtual sessions that cover a variety of technology topics and have the opportunity to earn graduate and state credits.

Meanwhile, administrators statewide leverage the solution for web conferencing, enabling them and others to hold cost-effective, productive meetings while significantly reducing travel costs. For instance, users from various parts of the state—frequently up to 30 participants at a time—are able to attend regional conferences remotely from any location. The meetings last all day and include a prescribed agenda and break times for optimal efficiency.

“With Adobe Connect, the savings in gas, lodging, and time are significant, especially if you consider both meetings and professional development sessions,” says McCarthy. “There is also a major convenience factor because everyone is short on time. Adobe Connect helps us use our time more efficiently and be more productive. We can often complete a meeting or training session in the same amount of time it would take for some people to drive and attend in person.”

Users state-wide are taking advantage of the advanced features Adobe Connect offers. As meetings and training sessions become more frequent, McCarthy and others have begun implementing the solution’s recording capabilities for future playback and potentially closed-captioning for hearing impaired audience members. The note pad feature enables users to contribute their items to the master agenda and reveal them to the group at the appropriate time, which helps facilitate smoother, more organized and efficient meetings.

Widespread praise and adoption
Since adopting Adobe Connect, use of the solution has grown to include 27 regional education media centers (REMC) across the state. For districts in every corner of the state—REMC 2 in Traverse City, REMC 12 in Kalamazoo, REMC 16 in Ann Arbor, and all points in between—the solution has become an integral part of daily educational operations. Users have overwhelmingly embraced Adobe Connect. In response to a survey McCarthy created to gauge user satisfaction, comments broadly praised the intuitiveness and time-saving characteristics of the solution.
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Carolyn McCarthy
Educational technology coordinator, SRES

Melissa White, supervisor of media and technology at Ingham Intermediate School District near Lansing, offered a response that sums up the overriding theme of survey respondents’ opinions: “I could not live without it! I use it daily in my work. I have saved so much time and money by not traveling to meetings this year. It makes it so easy to troubleshoot problems now with teachers and technical staff.”

For McCarthy, Adobe Connect has become a staple of her teaching and she sees what she is doing now as just the beginning. She envisions a day when teachers and administrators will use Adobe Connect in the classroom as a pivotal tool in making learning more relevant and engaging for students across the country.

“Districts across the state, and in several other states, have taken note of the cost savings and efficiency we gained with Adobe Connect and have approached us about consulting on their professional development programs,” says McCarthy. "Adobe Connect provides a powerful way to reach out and engage kids, teachers, and administrators, and provide them with an exciting learning environment. We’re really just beginning to tap its potential.”

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www.adobe.com/products/connect
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