

Title II-D Ed Tech Grant Summary and Reflection

Introduction and Summary of Grant Activities

In March 2004, the Oakridge School District was informed it was eligible to apply for a Title II-D Competitive Ed Tech Grant (Enhancing Education through Technology). As the Technology Coordinator for the district, the duty to write such a grant was mine. For the next month, I wrote, reviewed, and revised our grant application. In April, our district was awarded the grant worth more than \$220,000. The activities of this grant are the focus of this Masters project.

The Oakridge School District is a small, rural district that is currently running 70% free and reduced lunch. As a result, the demographics of this community are defined as high-risk. Many students do not have access to a computer in their home. With the mandates of No Child Left Behind, it is increasingly important to make sure that we as educators are training and educating our students to become productive citizens in the 21st Century workforce.

There are **three primary goals** of this grant:

1. Increase access to technology for all students by providing a wireless mobile computer lab at each school within the district.
2. Increase the effectiveness of teachers through intensive professional development opportunities.
3. Increase student achievement through technology enhanced curriculum.

All three goals are derived from the district Technology Plan and the Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP). Both documents are included as part of this project. To achieve the three goals, equipment was purchased, summer institutes were developed and implemented, and student performance was assessed to measure learning gains.

Commentary of Activities

We began the grant project by purchasing 92 wireless mobile laptops. Each of the three schools in the district received a wireless mobile lab consisting of 24 computers each. Furthermore, each of the 18 teachers involved with the grant received a laptop and LCD projector for use in their classroom. The math department at both the middle and high school also received classroom sets of graphing calculators. This purchase immediately brought our student-to-computer ratio down below 3-to-1. This is a tremendous improvement to student access to technology.

During the summer, teachers attended a five-day institute to kick off the activities of the grant. There were two distinct curricular strands: writing and mathematics. Writing teachers learned about the writing process using Inspiration to brainstorm ideas and to

organize information. Math teachers learned about how to effectively integrate graphing calculators and interactive websites into their classes. The final day of the summer institute outlined the requirements of writing an Ed Tech Unit, which is a required element of the grant. This was a great way to start the year off.

In addition to the summer institute, teachers were provided four in-service days to continue their professional development. Most recently, with our partnership with the Oregon Writers Project, a new collaborative tool was introduced at a workshop to help facilitate better student writing. This program, WriteSite!, establishes an electronic medium where students, teachers, and external content area experts can collaborate and provide feedback to student writing. It also allows for access anytime, anywhere a student has use of a computer with an Internet connection. This program has proven highly successful as students are writing to a larger audience and in turn are more motivated to perform to the best of their abilities. Used in conjunction with Inspiration, WriteSite! provides the flexible application of writing across the curriculum. To gauge the effectiveness of professional development, a pre and post survey will be given to teachers that will evaluate attitudes, motivations, and knowledge base of technology and learning. Results of the pre survey are available in this project.

By popular request, we will be providing more conventional training this spring to teachers in their quest to facilitate better writing. Conventions are one area of weakness for our students. By providing targeted professional development, it is hoped that students will become more proficient writers and bring conventions scores up on their state writing assessments.

State tests will be used to determine learning gains for both writing and mathematics. These scores will be compared to last year's scores as a basis of comparison. Furthermore, a writing preassessment was given at the beginning of the school year for students in grades 3-11. The results of this preassessment are available as part of this project. By analyzing the before and after, it is hoped that learning gains will be realized. It will also tell us where we need to focus our efforts by pointing out student deficiencies.

As stated before, each teacher was required to complete an Ed Tech unit of instruction that showcases technology enhanced learning. With the tools and strategies learned, teachers created activities that allowed for technology to increase motivation, student achievement, and give students a better understanding of the content area material. Samples of teacher Ed Tech Units are available in this project.

At the end of this school year, the Oakridge School District will hold a Technology Night that will showcase the activities of the Ed Tech grant. This event will have the added benefit of advocating the continued support of instructional technology programs within the school district. With the uncertain economic climate in this state, keeping active in promoting the need of instructional technology is becoming a high priority.

At this time, our district does not know if we will be eligible for a year two Title II-D grant. If we are, we will apply again to continue the focus of technology integration into our core content curriculum.

Summary and Reflection

This is the first opportunity I have had to implement a grant of this magnitude. I honestly did not understand what difficulties would take form as the project progressed. As I am currently in the middle of the project at this time, there are several issues that have come up that I would address in a future iteration of this project.

1. **Recruitment of teachers** – our district is very small and as such, I did not have the luxury of being overly selective to find highly motivated individuals to become part of the team. There are approximately 40 certified educators in our district and 18 were selected participate in the grant. In retrospect, I should have created a process where teachers would “prove” their commitment and not just be motivated by receiving a laptop and computer projector. This would be my highest priority if given this opportunity again. Having motivated teachers is the key component to a successful project. Perhaps that could be better accomplished through a screening process or “mini-grant” application to better determine the best candidates for this project.

2. **More effective project director** – one of the areas that I feel I am weakest is my leadership skills. I still need to develop the necessary traits to effectively motivate teachers as they learn new skills. For those who are self-motivators, I believe I am very effective in being a mentor and support system. In the future, I will work to find methods and techniques to motivate the reluctant teacher.

3. **Administrative support** – When I began writing and implementing this project, I did not include district administrators (superintendent and principals) in the process. While they were very happy for the district to receive substantial educational technology funding, they were removed from the planning process. This, in part, is due to my “do it alone” attitude. This is another area for me to work on professionally. I felt in the past that trying to organize committees to make seemingly simple decisions was overrated. However, after going through the process, I feel somewhat alone and isolated as I am the only person who is involved with the organization and planning of the project.

In summary, this project has been both rewarding and professionally challenging. I have learned a great deal about being a leader and mentor and the steps to become a better facilitator. Hindsight is 20/20 and I see clearly the issues and mistakes that should be addressed in order to make a project of this magnitude even more successful.

I am professionally grateful to the State of Oregon for the opportunity to participate in this grant. My involvement has transformed my career goals to focus squarely on instructional technology and how it can enhance the academic experience of the student.