

Online Professional Development Helps Norfolk Public Schools on Journey to World-Class Status

PBS TeacherLine provides convenience, graduate-level courses and ISTE NETS certification to meet district's instructional technology initiatives

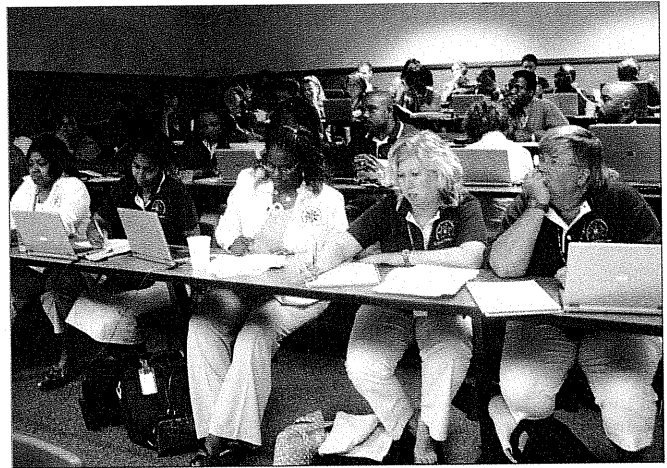
When Superintendent Dr. Stephen Jones took the helm of Norfolk Public Schools in Norfolk, Va., in summer 2005, he and his staff developed a five-year strategic plan to guide the district in its mission to provide students with a world-class education. An important aspect of the plan is a five-year technology-intensive directive to impact teaching and learning. To help teachers incorporate technology in their daily instructional practices, Norfolk Public Schools is investing in teacher professional development through PBS TeacherLine and PBS member station WHRO in Norfolk. The district is committed to technology integration to ensure students become successful graduates, and are prepared for the competitive environments of higher education and the workplace.

Over 15 percent of the district's EETT Grant is allocated for PBS TeacherLine, which provides high-quality, affordable professional development through facilitated, online courses, collaborative learning communities, and exemplary Internet-based resources. The organization offers more than 100 courses in reading/language arts, math, science, instructional strategies, and instructional technology.

Norfolk Public Schools serves approximately 35,500 PreK-12 students in 49 schools and 11 auxiliary facilities, including early childhood, hospital, alternative, and career centers. To meet the diverse needs of its large student population, the district uses the Instructional Technology Resource Teacher (ITRT) program as a scalable model to provide technology training and professional development to its staff of over 3,000 teachers.

For the past two years, the Norfolk Public Schools Department of Instructional Technology has focused on professional development for its ITRTs, who are responsible for training their peers in classroom technology integration and providing on-going support. To prepare them for their responsibilities, all ITRTs are required to take the PBS TeacherLine International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Capstone Certificate Program, a series of research-based, online courses that enable teachers to demonstrate their mastery of ISTE's National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (NETS•T).

Additionally, all ITRTs and auxiliary site staff are required to utilize PBS TeacherLine to meet the differentiated training needs of their colleagues. Since each school is different, each ITRT conducts a survey at the beginning of the year to ascertain the staff's instructional technology needs that are aligned with state standards. PBS TeacherLine courses are offered to teachers interested in learning online.



By January 2008, 81 percent of the district's ITRTs received ISTE NETS•T Certification, and approximately 500 teachers completed PBS TeacherLine courses. In addition, the district was able to use PBS TeacherLine to address a staffing issue. Three schools in the 2006-07 school year lacked an on-site instructional technology specialist, so teachers were allowed to enroll in any PBS TeacherLine course. Today, each school has an ITRT, however, teachers are still encouraged to utilize PBS TeacherLine to enhance their skill set.

"Time is of essence for any educator, and to have the ability to take a class anytime, anywhere is priceless," said Janice Richison, senior coordinator of the Department of Instructional Technology for Norfolk Public Schools, commenting on PBS TeacherLine. "The teachers enjoy having the opportunity to learn and exchange instructional strategies with their colleagues online, while also, having the ability to develop reliable research that directly relates to their content area.

"The online service is highly effective in that it allows for professional growth, and each teacher experiences a new comfort level by identifying pedagogy and lesson designs related to technology," Richison said. "In an era where technology is growing by leaps and bounds, the student's learning style is rapidly changing. PBS creates doors of opportunity for educators to enter with the technology-savvy student. Therefore, our teachers are utilizing the PBS TeacherLine services, and making a difference in the lives of all NPS key stakeholders. In 2006, we began collecting professional development data from each ITRT. To date, ITRTs have recorded well over 15,977 hours of technological professional development for our district's teachers and administrators."



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