

Opportunity Through Technology

Education technology specialist **Kevin Honeycutt** says wise use of technology can benefit students and districts

Kevin Honeycutt, a nationally renowned school technology expert, serves on the Inman School Board in Kansas. Inman, Honeycutt said, is a small town in the middle of Kansas in danger of dying out. The interstate no longer goes through the town, and, as Honeycutt says, the school district needs to give people a reason to stop in Inman or to get parents to consider sending their children to its schools.

“What do we do?” Honeycutt asks. “We’ve got to live out loud. We need to brag a little.”

In a special Pre-Convention Workshop, Honeycutt told school leaders how his district has been working hard to use technology in innovative ways to make their district one of the best small districts in the state.

As far as bragging, Honeycutt said one idea the district had was to ask parents to talk about one thing they liked about the district. Parents were asked this during parent teacher conferences and teachers recorded the responses on their iPads. Every parent that answered the question was entered to win a gift card for a local restaurant and the responses were made into a video to promote the district.

Technology can also bring benefits to the classroom. Honeycutt talked about the amazing amount of free online opportunities that can be used to expand classroom activities and get students excited about learning. Among other online resources, Honeycutt talked about shapeways.com – an online marketplace that provides on-demand 3D printing. To use the

website, students upload a 3D design file and then set up their store. Family members can purchase their student’s work. Honeycutt said this gets students excited about creating and developing 3D designs, and along the way, students learn engineering and design skills.

Another amazing resource is on-demand printing. Honeycutt told the story of a troubled student who was always writing poetry. One afternoon, Honeycutt helped the student use Lulu.com to upload her poetry, format it, and create a store where she could sell her book. Honeycutt went home that night, ordered the book online and presented it to the student a couple days later.

“She opened that book like it was the most precious thing in the world,” Honeycutt said.

He said she also noticed all of the spelling mistakes she had made. Suddenly, Honeycutt said, she cared about spelling. Lulu.com and other websites like it can be useful for schools in a number of other ways. Honeycutt said his district no longer pays an outside company thousands of dollars to produce their year-books. The school now does it itself and actually makes a little money in the process.

As far as technology hardware, Honeycutt encourages schools to use technology such as tablet computers, but warns “don’t get stuff just to get stuff.”

Instead, Honeycutt says districts need to make sure teachers are trained and know how to use tablets first.



Additionally, he says he likes the “use/lease” model where students have to show their teachers something productive they’ve done with their tablet computer or else it might get taken away for a period of time.

Additionally, Honeycutt emphasizes teachers and school leaders to use the technology such as tablet computers but also any websites such as YouTube or Lulu.com before using it in the school setting. This helps to not only make sure the technology is something that would be useful for the school, but also shows students that you are modeling good use of the technology.

Right now, Honeycutt says, he sees too many students using technology without any supervision.

“Kids are on digital recess and no one is watching,” Honeycutt said. “I want kids to slow down and think.”

Honeycutt said part of technology integration should emphasize how a Facebook comment or Tweet is out there forever. Additionally, Honeycutt said when a class covers current events, it should include discussions on the influence of social media to show students the power (good or bad) of social media.

“The stakes are higher and the whole thing is faster,” Honeycutt said.

For a list of educational, online and free resources visit kevinhoneycutt.org. ■