

# The Evolution of Technology in Schools

## Q&A with Michael Jaber, coordinator of instructional technology, Sheboygan Area School District

### **Q:** What do you think is the job of a school district technology coordinator?

I think every district is different in how they approach the responsibilities of the technology coordinator. There are districts where the technology coordinator wears the informational, as well as the instructional hat. I am fortunate in Sheboygan to have an amazing IT team to work with and bring the instructional perspective to how technology fits into teaching and learning. So, with that said, we have two technology teams in Sheboygan — informational and instructional. I can't

speak for every tech coordinator because their situations may be different, but my duties include:

- Organizing/providing professional development opportunities and supports to staff across the district;
- Writing, revising and guiding the technology plan for the district;
- Overseeing the technology learning and innovation coaches as well as library media specialists;
- Working with our curriculum team to ensure that we are implementing new and existing technology standards;
- Working with our academic and career planning coordinator on future offerings for our students that align with technology pathways;
- Visiting classrooms and showing students and teachers emerging technologies and how they could use it in their classrooms;
- Working with our special ed department to help support students and teachers with technology;
- Reporting to the board pertaining to all things technology; and



- Representing the Sheboygan Area School District at conferences as a presenter/keynote speaker.

**Q: How are the “model users” of technology among schools and/or districts using technology?**

Our “model users” have learned that technology is not the be all, end all for a teacher. They view technology as a tool to help support/guide/enhance their instruction.

We have teachers using the student devices to streamline processes for students. This may include creating a digital workflow between teachers and students or leveraging the power of our learning management system to disseminate content or flip their class. It can also include utilizing virtual reality/augmented reality/mixed reality in the classroom to enhance the learning experience for students, utilizing robots and coding apps to accompany lessons, creating multimedia projects that include the use of a green screen, and that’s just to name a few.

**Q: Is technology use among schools changing? Where are the “model users” going with technology?**

It’s no secret that technology use is rising in our schools today. As I stated in a keynote address that I gave to attendees of the Southern Oregon University Ed Tech Summit, “The Tech Train is Leaving the Station ... Are you Onboard?”

My point is that technology is not just another initiative that is here, and gone. Technology is not going away and we need to embrace its value, instead of being a laggard, hoping and wishing it goes away soon.



We are doing a disservice to our students if we continue to turn a blind eye when it comes to the utilization of technology in instruction. The students of today need to be given the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning and be engaged while learning. If teachers teach the way they always have, they are missing out

on so many learning opportunities that technology can provide them with. We must remember that technology is still just a tool for learning and that the real key to a student’s success is the teacher in the room. Giving poor teachers access to technology in their classroom doesn’t make them better teachers.

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**Q: What do you think are some of the “lessons learned” about technology use in schools?**

After having gone through several major technology initiatives and device deployments I can break the lessons learned down into three pillars.

**1. Infrastructure** — Before a district even considers something like a 1:1 initiative, they need to make sure that the infrastructure throughout their district (bandwidth,

wireless application protocol, filtering, configuration, etc.) are in place before they hand out even one device. If you want to see your 1:1 initiative fail, give students devices that don’t work with your existing ecosystem. Make sure you have a robust network and enough bandwidth to support all of the devices in the building/district. If you want to really irritate a teacher, give their students some technology that they can’t count on working consistently.

If the technology is not “invisible” from a troubleshooting standpoint for a teacher, they will not use it!

**2. Professional Development** —

This is the second pillar that you need to make sure is in place in order for your 1:1 initiative to be successful. Make sure that the proper professional development is set-up in order for your staff members to be successful. Teachers need to learn how they can change their pedagogy because they are walking into a room where every student has access to technology that should be utilized. By providing a variety of trainings and coaching opportunities, the teachers will become more receptive to trying new things instructionally, as well as honing their skill set with resources they may not be familiar with. These training/learning opportunities need to be offered throughout the year, but individual appointments with teachers usually become more popular than the large group training sessions because they can be more personalized to meet the needs of that staff member.

**3. Continued Support** — The last pillar is pretty simple — provide continued support! Even though you have all your devices allocated and your district is in full swing with your 1:1 initiative, you cannot forget to

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support your staff. This pillar is crucial and is a place where your initiative could fail if teachers don't feel they can reach out for help if needed. Technology coaches should become a part of each building's culture. They shouldn't be treated as a separate entity nor should technology be treated as a separate piece for that matter. When teachers no longer feel supported, their technology integration will decline. Please make sure you that you seriously consider budgeting for technology coaches in your district because the support of your staff is a main indicator of whether or not your technology initiative will succeed or fail.

**Q: You will be joining us at the State Education Convention this month in Milwaukee. What will you be doing at the convention?**

I am so excited to have been invited back to this year's State Education Convention after making my first appearance there last year. I was able

### Catch Michael Jaber at Convention

**Michael Jaber**, coordinator of instructional technology, Sheboygan Area School District, will have an interactive technology display in the exhibit hall at the State Education Convention. The display will feature a "Mash Machine" and many other new, exciting technologies used in schools. Mr. Jaber will also be giving a presentation on virtual reality field trips, "Trekking with Google Expeditions: It's 'Virtually' Amazing." This presentation will be repeated Wednesday, Jan. 17 from 9:15-9:45 am and 2:45-3:15 pm, and Thursday, Jan. 18 from 10-10:30 am in the Internet Café.



to interact with so many district leaders and board members and talk to them about some of the technologies that the Sheboygan Area School District was using in classrooms across the district.

I brought along suitcases full of the latest technology gadgets and I even featured a music-making piece of technology, called the Mash Machine, of which there are only four of these units currently in the

U.S. Needless to say everyone who stopped by had a blast creating their own beats, as well as looking at some other amazing technologies that was on display.

This year I will be bringing more "gadget goodness" and I will also be offering some interactive sessions that will feature Google Expeditions, a virtual reality experience. Please stop by and introduce yourself for a chance to win some great giveaways. ■

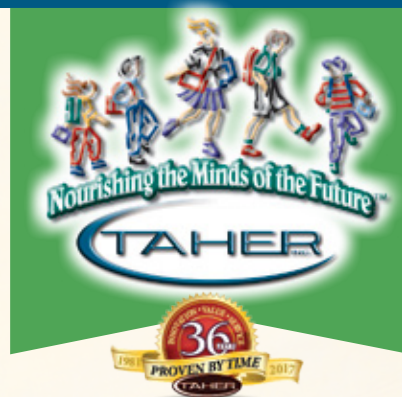
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