

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL TO CONNECT TO THE WORLD



Visionary administrator: Paul Caputo, supervisor of curriculum, technology and federal programs

North Schuylkill School District, PA (www.northschuylkill.net)

Number of schools: 2

Students: 2,100

Teachers/staff: 150

Community: rural area, serving several small towns

Ethnicity: 98% white, not Hispanic

Free and reduced lunch: 33%

Preparing students for 21st century jobs means “providing them with the communication skills they’ll need to be successful and math and reading skills to compete globally.”

A rural school district located in northeast PA, North Schuylkill School District educates about 2,100 students. For Paul Caputo, supervisor of curriculum, technology and federal programs, technology provides a unique opportunity to expand the horizons of North Schuylkill students. The district created his position to foster technology integration within the K-12 curriculum. His primary concern is making sure that students have the same opportunities as their peers in larger, more affluent districts.

“Technology levels the playing field,” he said. “Whether they enter the workforce or go into higher education, they need 21st century skills. They need the latest technology: whiteboards, laptops, mobile devices...”

In 2007-2008, the district launched a major technology initiative. Through discussions with principals and teachers, Caputo determined that network and computer reliability had become major obstacles to technology integration. The school board approved a major network upgrade, two highly qualified IT staff positions, and a transition to low-maintenance thin clients with hosted software for online class information and remote access. The district achieved 99.9% uptime in the first year of deployment, and experienced significant increase in parent involvement with an online gradebook. “We went from low attendance on parent nights to 250-300 parents logging in each night to find out about their child’s progress,” said Caputo.

Caputo believes strongly in allowing teachers opportunity for learning and innovation. If teachers want to try it, Caputo and his staff help them: “We want to bring about a shift in pedagogy by encouraging our teachers to become facilitators of learning. This shift will ultimately lead to the further development of each student’s critical thinking and analysis skills.” In 2007, North Schuylkill received a “*Classrooms for the Future*” grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide professional development for 33 teachers on teaching in the 21st century and Authentic Teaching. Other workshops focus on web 2.0 skills: using wikis, digital media, video and iPods in the classroom.

To Caputo, preparing students for 21st century jobs means “providing them with the communication skills they’ll need to be successful and math and reading skills to compete globally. We need to make sure that our curriculum is rich enough and diverse enough to attend to different learning styles. Programs such as art and technical education must be as strong and vibrant as our core courses.”

Caputo holds the fundamental belief that “technology is important and students learn differently.” As a visionary administrator, his role is to encourage students and staff not to be afraid to make mistakes. Teachers are also encouraged to empower students and allow them to become partners in the use of classroom technology. He said: “While teachers are the content experts, they can learn from students new ways to use these tools.”