

Resource Databases: Making Educators' Lives Easier

California's database of prescreened resources helps educators quickly find exactly what they're looking for.

By Rowland Baker

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Being a secondary school principal is not easy. It seems like every year, the stakes get higher and the support is less. One of my colleagues who is a principal recently told me, “You know, I really like the job. But any more, I just can’t find a way to do everything that needs to get done in 24 hours.” Out of the 153,000 principals in the United States, he’s not the only one who feels that way.

On top of all the other demands, schools are also being asked to ensure that they are preparing students for “the 21st century,” without any clear definition of what that really means. It’s no wonder educators feel buried.

I know that most schools and districts have been working on ways to slice and dice data to improve their test scores, but where can educators find out more about the 21st century skills that their students need? There is a lot of information out there on this topic. If you go to Google and type in “21st century skills,” you will get approximately two million hits. OK, who has time to go through all two million to find the two dozen that might actually be useful?

Creating a Solution

To make life easier for school leaders, the California Department of Education, in partnership with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, funded a Web portal called “TICAL” (Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership). Its purpose is to help school and district administrators lead their schools into the 21st century by providing them with tools and resources to help them be more effective in their jobs.

TICAL has a database of about 800 items that have been hand selected and vetted by practicing ad-

ministrators. A committee composed of TICAL staff members, educators, and staff members from the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) evaluated applications from across the state to choose the 20 “cadre members”—the administrators who evaluate resources for TICAL.

TICAL cadre and staff members often get leads about useful resources from their connections with the state Department of Education, the ACSA, and technology leaders throughout the state. When we get a lead, we follow up with conversations to find out more details and we check that a similar resource has not already been added. Then the resource goes to the cadre members for evaluation. If the cadre approves, it’s added to the site.

TICAL in Action

If you search for “21st century skills” on TICAL, you get 24 great resources that can really assist a principal. The resources include reports and publications, Web sites, links to organizations, and other resources. In addition to searching by keyword, users can find resources according to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS-A). The TICAL home page highlights some of the resources in the database—videos, tutorials, online professional development, Twitter feeds, top 10 resources for principals, and much more.

Want to find out how to use Google forms for teacher observations? TICAL has a template for that. Looking to update the cell phone policy in your district? TICAL provides some resources as well as sample policies to assist you in that effort.

This site is free to all educators and can be accessed anywhere you can get on the Internet. You do not need to sign up or join to be able to use the resources.

Just recently, I had a superintendent ask me what technologies might be out there that can help students for whom English is a second language. I showed him a podcast we host on TICAL about a principal and TICAL cadre member in California, Skip Johnson, who is using iPods to assist his second language students. What Johnson has put together for very little money is helping his students blow the top off their reading scores.

Got something great going on in your school? Let us know and you may be featured in an upcoming podcast.

Johnson worked with us to create a podcast to be hosted on TICAL so that others would not need to reinvent the wheel.

TICAL is also a place where principals can recommend resources. Got something great going on in your school? Have a template you developed that has really saved you time and want to share it? Let us know and you may be featured in an upcoming podcast.

So tonight, before you go home and break out the aspirin, take a few minutes and cruise through the TICAL site, www.portical.org. It may just make your day. **PL**

