



Mecklenburg County Public Schools News Release

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Mecklenburg County Schools Receives SVRTC Technology Leadership Award

The Mecklenburg County School Division was presented the Division Leadership Award from the Southside Virginia Regional Technology Consortium. The award was presented at the 3rd Annual Awards Banquet on March 20, 2009 at Longwood University.

Ernie Conner, Director of Technology and Career Education, Natalie Coronas, Coordinator of Career and Technical Education, Chad Wollenberg, Manager of Technical Services, Remona Tomko and Stephanie Carter, Technology Resource Teachers, Mona Rainey, Principal of Bluestone Middle School, Mark Eckler, CTE Teacher at Bluestone Middle School, and Bernard Robinson, Technical Support Specialist represented Mecklenburg County Schools at the banquet.

A committee selected Mecklenburg County Schools for this award based on their accomplishments over the last two years. Mecklenburg County Schools has worked very hard to integrate technology into its instructional and administrative programs. The division continues its commitment to provide effective Internet Safety programs. They updated the comprehensive Internet Safety curriculum guide that was developed in 2007-2008, added resources to their Internet Safety website, setup displays at local fairs, provided professional development for teachers, assisted 26 teachers in becoming certified in the I-Safe Internet Safety program and conducted student assembly programs at each elementary school. In addition to these initiatives, many other training opportunities and resources were provided. A Technology Resource Teacher Connection website was updated weekly with resources, lesson plans, instructional manuals, and newsletters. A teacher was selected each month, recognized as the "Top Techie" Teacher and highlighted on their website. Division, department, and school websites were updated. Using Moodle, the division provided additional technology resources and curriculum. Teachers utilized this online course delivery system to earn re-certification points and learn to integrate technology into their instructional programs.

MCPS implemented additional technology initiatives in 2008-2009. They determined that they could save a considerable amount of money by replacing its email server, spam filter, electronic calendar, and Microsoft Office suite with Google Applications for Education. In addition to the cost savings, Google Applications provided the division with an online document storage solution and a great collaboration tool for staff and students. They contacted Google and were able to obtain the education edition at no cost. They worked with Google to setup the account and migrate the users and previous emails over to the new system.

They installed Open Office 3.0 on all computers as a tool to help with the transition from Microsoft Office XP. This open source software was selected because it looked similar to Office XP, did not involve licensing fees, and could be provided to the teachers and students for school and home use at no charge. TRT's provided workshops and online training that highlighted the features of Google Applications and Open Office. Online training courses were developed to compliment the trainer sessions.

Chad Wollenberg and Ernie Conner submitted and received a Productivity Investment Fund Grant from Governor Kaine's office to document the implementation process of this initiative. The division used these funds to hire a Google Applications Specialist to provide training and resources to the school division and make it available to other schools in the state. Others can use this data to determine the feasibility of implementing this initiative into their operation

Sheila Beck, Google Applications Specialist was hired in October 2008. She setup displays at local events, fairs, etc. to inform the community about the Google project. The Virginia Open Classroom website was developed. It provided a “one stop” location for information and documentation on our project.

Sheila worked with staff and students to implement projects using Google. An application was implemented with the school nurses to track student information and visits. A collaboration project was done with a class at Park View High. The students completed a project with a school in Oregon on business ethics and the costs of living differences in their localities. Class projects are currently underway that include the development of a Personal Finance curriculum that uses Google Applications exclusively and a work order system used by student computer technician interns to track their individual assignments.

MCPS worked with the Center for Rural Education and Economic Development to use Google Applications to organize and manage portions of the Great Southern Virginia Teacher Recruitment Fair. MCPS used Google Sites to advertise the fair and provide a registration tool for the event.

MCPS made presentations at conferences on this and other free and open source resources to demonstrate to others how this project was implemented. The presentations were video taped and placed online.

Other school divisions visited us to take a closer look at our use of these resources and how they were implemented. Google contacted our school division and interviewed us on our progress and asked us for ideas on how they could improve their program to meet our needs.

Mecklenburg County Schools continues to implement new technology into the division. Many free and open source resources are being tested for implementation in the future.