

Developing an Online Collaborative Platform to Support Professional Development in Rural Schools

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Abstract

In order to increase the availability and decrease to cost of providing professional development opportunities to a large and rural geographic area, the East Texas STEM center is currently developing a model for providing high quality online professional development programs. Development is currently underway to establish a consortium of educational partners to collaboratively author online seminars, workshop series, and other resources from which individual participating institutions can create a customized professional development program. This research/technical showcase will focus on the development and dissemination of the online professional development model currently being piloted in east Texas.

Overview

The East Texas STEM Center (ETXSC) at the University of Texas at Tyler in collaboration with Miami University, Northern Michigan University and the University of Northern Iowa are working with rural school districts to develop the capacity and infrastructure to develop online professional development modules to better support teachers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Access to high-quality professional development is often an issue in rural school districts. Many rural districts neither have the expertise or the resources to provide continuous PD to its faculty, staff, and administration. Bringing professional development programs to rural areas often requires travel and other expenses for the professional development provider, the participants, or both. More recently, web-based professional development has become an option. However, this has primarily consisted of teachers taking college courses online or short term workshops. Although this has provided more access, it has not solved the issue of expense or the provided a local school district the ability to design and implementing its own professional development for small numbers of teachers.

The ETXSC has convened a consortium of higher education institutions and rural school districts to address this issue. The institutions are engaged in using an existing Course Management System and opening it up for rural districts to collaboratively develop a series of online professional development seminars. Once developed the seminars would remain on the system and open to any institution in the consortium. The intended result is that a library of online professional development seminars and programs will be developed and available to all teachers in any participating district. From this repository, participating educational institutions will be able to develop customized workshop and seminar series to meet their specific professional development needs.

This research/technical showcase will focus on the development and dissemination of the online professional development model currently being piloted in east Texas. The showcase will highlight specific aspects of the development and dissemination process, including:

- Current model for collaborative development of online modules
- Delivery and dissemination process to provide access to centralized or localized installation of professional development courseware
- Summary evaluation of pilot projects planned for summer, 2008
- Current and projected project impact