

Closing the Gap - Bringing West Platte Technology In Line With The Common Core: Article 3 of 8 in Series

Bo and Luke Duke were two average guys, who lived in a busy rural community in Hazzard County, Georgia. They grew up as two “good ole boys” who went about their normal lives “never meaning no harm.” Like most people, they learned a great deal through experiential and service learning activities. They went to church, helped their neighbors, valued family and friends, and for all intents and purposes, were not unlike many other country boys across the country. That was until one supremely fine piece of technologically-advanced equipment entered into their lives. It was called the General Lee and it was slicker than greased-lightning. Equipped with the latest and greatest tools on Earth, the General Lee, was like nothing around. It allowed Bo and Luke the freedom to be nearly anywhere at any time (usually faster than anyone else). It allowed them to access needed information, to meet and collaborate with friends, and to solve complex problems. It even allowed them to do the impossible...it allowed them to fly over rivers, gullies, buildings, and just about any other obstacle in between them and their task at hand! Altogether, the technology of the General Lee helped Bo and Luke become more than average: it helped them become highly-resourceful and nearly unstoppable.

Now, 30 years later, many of the same challenges exist for our youth, but their complexity has evolved. Students still need to have access to real-time information. They need to be able to collaborate with friends near and far. They need to be able to solve multifaceted problems, and they need to be able to work around all obstacles which exist on their path of problem-solving and learning. While today’s schools cannot issue a pristine 1969 Dodge Charger to each student, schools are expected, and in most cases are able, to deliver the equivalent problem solver. This opportunity comes in the form of a personal digital device which will connect each student with the information, people, resources, and solutions they need.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the West Platte Board of Education recognized the changing tides in education in regard to the Common Core Era and the increased demand for technology across the academic curriculum. To help lead the needed change, the Board initiated two significant studies. First, they organized an Elementary and Secondary Community Task Force to research and identify technology needs (among other school improvement needs). Second, the Board directed an outside educational technology firm to audit the District and advise the Board on the needed direction for technology. To no surprise, the two independent groups produced similar results and recommendations. In fact, many of the recommendations were nearly identical. Among the recommendations was to first assemble a team of technology experts who were properly trained and equipped to bring the District forward. On June 2, the District welcomed a new technology director, new technology integration specialist, new elementary computer lab instructor, and new superintendent. From that date, the pace of moving the District forward via the recommendations of the two committees has been faster than the General Lee itself!

Over the last six months, the following tasks have been initiated, substantially completed or completed: New website created; Facebook page created; comprehensive software and hardware updated; Smart Boards and document cameras installed in every classroom; eMINTS Professional Development completed by a 10 teacher leadership team; Google Aps for Education aligned; internet bandwidth upgraded to fiber (100mbps); ubiquitous wireless (wifi) network established; technology literacy standards identified; digital citizenship standards established; and more! Altogether, the completion of these tasks has established a technology infrastructure which will support the needs of West Platte teachers and students now, and in the foreseeable years to come.

Most of the work completed to date has been behind the scenes. The next step in this phasing, however, is very up-front and center stage. In January, West Platte is aligned to distribute 200 personal devices to students who are directly instructed by the eMINTS core leadership team. This will include all Junior High Students, as well as students in several elementary classrooms. These students will receive devices a semester earlier than remaining West Platte students, who will have the opportunity to “Bring Your Own Device” (BYOD) in the

Spring Semester. When students return to school in the Fall of 2013, the District is aligned to distribute devices to all secondary, and most elementary students. This phasing will allow students to develop skills, working knowledge, and levels of comfort with the devices, so they will be better prepared to “show what they know” on the Common Core tests in the Spring of 2014. Oh, by the way, those 2014 tests will NOT require a pencil, eraser, or paper, 100% of these tests is scheduled to be taken electronically on one-to-one student devices.

On June 2, 2010, the new Common Core State Standards were released with a target date for electronic testing in April of 2014. Since that time, some districts have taken the path of the shepherd, and some have taken the path of the lost sheep. As for West Platte...we are straightening the curves, flattening the hills, and we are in hot pursuit of excellence for our students!

An interactive “anchor” presentation which covers the topics addressed in this article series may be accessed on the all new West Platte website: wpsd.net. This anchor slideshow will connect you with a variety of multimedia and in-depth details on this movement. On behalf of our students and teachers, thank you for your time to investigate this initiative. I encourage you to seek out these articles and additional information over the next few months. We look forward to partnering for progress with you in the Common Core Era!

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Jerrod Wheeler, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools