

THE TECH-SAVVY ADMINISTRATOR

*How do I use technology to be
a better school leader?*

Steven W.
ANDERSON

THE TECH-SAVVY ADMINISTRATOR

How do I use technology to be a better school leader?

Rationale	1
An Administrator’s Technology Toolkit	2
How This Publication Works	3
A Word of Caution.....	4
Effective Communication: Telling Your Story	6
Effective Collaborators	19
Effective Productivity	29
The Power of Virtual Professional Learning	35
Final Reflections.....	38
Encore	41
About the Author	47



Rationale

Educators are teaching and learning in a digital world. From interactive whiteboards, to iPads, to flipped classrooms, teachers are using a variety of methods to create, collaborate, and communicate with their students. Although this transition to digital spaces makes for exciting times in the classroom, it can be daunting for leaders. For example, principals need to understand the technology themselves to know if their teachers are using the technology effectively, and school and district leaders need to understand the technology being used in order to do a comprehensive technology evaluation.

There are many different levels of technology use for administrators. Some can't attach a document to an email while others are pioneers in the use of digital tools. The key is understanding how these revolutionary digital tools can make the day-to-day work of the school leader easier and how they can be used to communicate and collaborate more effectively.

The instructional technology approach in many places has been to work with the teachers because their work directly affects students. And although this is and will remain true, we have neglected the technology professional development specifically geared towards school leaders and administrators that is desperately needed.

What I want to provide is context. There are many tools, sites, apps, and resources administrators will encounter as

they walk through their building. Many of them are only appropriate for the classroom. But some have great educational value and great value for the digital administrator as well. I want to equip readers of this text with a sense of how digital tools can play an important role in not only improving the way the job of school leadership is done but also making school leadership easier and more effective.

In this ASCD Arias we will explore what a 21st century school leader looks like, what tools they are using to be more productive in their role, how administrators are using those tools effectively, and, more importantly why they should be using them. It's easy to learn how to use Google Hangouts or Dropbox. Understanding how these and other tools fit in the life of a school leader is much more important.

An Administrator's Technology Toolkit

In my work as an educator, an Instructional Technologist, a Director of Instructional Technology, and as a learner, I have been exposed to a wide variety of digital tools. Each promises to do something different and each comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. Even though I have worked in several different positions, one thing has remained true. There is a core set of tools I use that I always keep coming back to. These tools are like those in the toolbox my father-in-law has in his basement. They are well worn, well

used, well loved—and I can't imagine my life without them. I learned early on, however, that I couldn't use just this core set of tools to build my learning. New tools would emerge and tools would break or become unnecessary. My toolbox is not a static place. While I maintain this core set, I am constantly evaluating, trying, using (and sometimes breaking) new tools to see how they fit with my goals and my learning. Every day, new tools are discovered and used for a period of time and others are discarded as they don't fit a particular learning need of mine.

It is important to note that the tools presented in this book are not an exhaustive list. For the crucial administrative tasks of communication, collaboration, and productivity, I describe generally the kinds of digital tools that you can use, and then provide some information on my favorite tools. If you find that there are other tools that meet your particular needs better, I encourage you to use them. What this book should provide is insights into how technology can support and improve key administrative tasks while also giving you some specific tech tools for the job.

How This Publication Works

This publication covers crucial administrative activities that can be supported and improved through the use of technology.

Effective Communication: Communications play a critical part in the effectiveness of the school leader. In this section, we will examine the digital tools you can use to engage with your faculty and staff and, most importantly, parents and the surrounding community.

Effective Collaboration: It's tough to be a school leader on an island. There are many times that you will need to reach out and work with others, either in your building or elsewhere. There are many digital tools that make this work both easier and more effective.

Effective Productivity: Let's face it, we all could use a little break from mundane, routine tasks. There are many digital tools the school leader can use to make the evaluation process of teachers more effective and to make scheduling and project management more effective, giving you more time to focus on instruction.

Virtual Collaborative Communities: Because the role of the school leader is constantly evolving, it is important to look to the work of others for guidance and modeling. Virtual Collaborative Communities allow school leaders to connect to a global network of like-minded professionals to learn with and learn from.

A Word of Caution

We will examine many digital tools in each of these categories. It is important to stress that these are by no means

all the tools that fit into these categories, nor are the tools contained in them exclusive to that specific category. Many tools can fit into more than one category, and some can fit into all three. It will be important for you to look at the ways I've described the use of these tools by school leaders to see if they fit your needs. You also may discover, as you work through each of these administrative activities, that other means I haven't described or may have not even considered come to mind, and that is OK.

Another word of caution: The digital tools mentioned here are merely suggestions. I frequently tell teachers and school leaders that I will introduce them to a variety of tools but they have to decide which to use. After you read this publication, I recommend that you do a personal evaluation of where you are with each of the categories I've laid out. Focus for a time on building confidence and understanding in just one area before tackling another. Perhaps you already are an effective communicator, but your collaborative skills could use some work. Focus your efforts on better understanding the tools I've laid out in the section you feel most comfortable in before adding another layer to your learning.

The key is to start small. In my experience the more new tools and technologies you attempt to use at once the less likely you are to use any of them particularly well. You may even lose sight of why you chose those tools in the first place. Give yourself some time to fully understand the digital tool you want to use and how it is used. Vet it well before adding another or replacing it with another.

Good luck and have fun!