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Knox County Schools Streamline and Enhance Professional Development

Flexibility ... service ... and user-friendliness. For Dr. Rodney Russell, supervisor of staff development and extended learning for Knox County Schools (TN), those attributes were the deciding factors when selecting a staff development management program ... and, that's just what he found with ERO.

One of the top 80 districts in the country – boasting 4,500 teachers and 64,000 students – Knox County Schools offers an array of high quality professional development activities. For years, the school district tracked courses and participation with TeacherU, an automated staff development software created in-house. However, the district's needs had surpassed the program's capabilities, and they began a year-long process to find a suitable replacement. After comparing three top-of-the-line products – including eSchool Solutions' ERO – Knox County decided to go with the one that was configured specifically for school districts.

According to Dr. Russell, ERO enables his district to create reports and generate data specific to their needs. He noted that the program was developed by people who understand the needs of school administrators.

"With ERO we can generate data that's beneficial to the district," explained Dr. Russell. "For example, cost-tracking features help us know how much we're spending and where the money is going. Plus, we can easily see who is taking what courses. ERO helps us streamline what we're doing, creating a more efficient staff development program."

District-Specific Training Facilitates Smooth Implementation

Initially, Dr. Russell was concerned about how the transition from TeacherU to ERO would be received. eSchool Solutions was a cooperative partner – modifying the standard training to meet Knox County Schools' specific requirements. Central office and principals received the first round of training. Another session – which provided information specifically to help teachers use the system – targeted the IT group and lead mentors. These mentors served as liaisons between administrators and teachers.

"When you're going through a change like this, the key is to narrow down what you're doing. Simplifying the process will make the transition easier for the end-users," explained Dr. Russell. "Our goal was to provide the necessary training so everyone was comfortable – even people who aren't necessarily comfortable with technology."

Teachers, Administrators Agree: ERO Strengthens Professional Development

With teachers accustomed to TeacherU, Dr. Russell worried that they wouldn't be receptive to change. However, he said ERO has been very well received throughout the district because it simplifies the professional learning process. In fact, in a recent staff development survey administered by Dr. Russell, teachers felt very positively about the switch to ERO.

"There are days when we'll have five classes going on at a time. Just this summer, we're offering a hundred courses," Russell said. "With ERO, we can take a big-picture view and better mix the content offerings – enabling us to offer a stronger professional development program."

eSchool Solutions Partners with Districts to Increase Efficiency

For two decades, eSchool Solutions has been helping administrators leverage technology to improve operations. Based on this first-hand knowledge, eSchool Solutions launched ERO eight years ago to improve staff development efficiency and strategy.

"Like the administrators we work with, we believe it's not enough simply to offer a number of staff development options. For maximum effectiveness, professional learning opportunities must align with student achievement goals," explained John May, eSchool Solutions product development director. "ERO enables administrators to easily identify appropriate topics – ensuring that professional development is targeted, customized and, most importantly, effective."