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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Preliminary

I have chosen to examine my place of employment, Sullivan Middle School, which is part of the Sullivan School District located in Sullivan, Missouri. Sullivan is a small town of about 6,000 residents located in the eastern central area of the state. Total school district enrollment is approximately 2,200 students, with about 500 of them attending grades 6-8 at Sullivan Middle School. The school employs 41 of the district's 183 certified teachers.

Sullivan Middle School strives to use integrated technology at all levels of instruction. It also uses School Information Systems' sophisticated software suite for all student data management, financial accounting, and payroll. The software suite is commonly referred to as SIS, and it is mandatory that all teachers use this system for attendance and grade book functions.

Symptoms of a Problem

While the software publishing company offers professional training for the SIS system, only the office secretaries have participated in this training. Furthermore, the secretaries have primarily focused on learning the parts of the SIS system that deal directly with their own jobs (reports, schedules, lunch accounts, accounting, etc.). As a result, that while they have an excellent general knowledge of many of SIS's abundant features, their lack of experience with the teacher grade book functions keeps them from being able to offer the kind of training that many teachers need to use SIS effectively.

Sullivan Middle School has allotted time before and during each school year for SIS training. However, this training is not formal and usually entails a group of teachers congregating in a computer lab to help each other figure out the system. There is generally not a group leader or instructor. While this is effective for the more tech-savvy teachers, many less experienced users of technology flounder and become frustrated. Some seem to resent being forced to use a system which is complicated and not very user-friendly. Many teachers are still not using their SIS grade books properly resulting in student grades that do not accurately reflect student performance.

Preliminary Problem Statement

Sullivan Middle School mandates that all teachers use the SIS system to maintain class grade books, but does not provide the faculty with sufficient training for its effective use.

Problem Verification and Specific Needs

I have discussed this matter with several teachers, making sure that I include in my discussions both expert technology users as well as novices. As expected, the expert users experience much fewer problems than the novice users. Several of the novices didn't really know if they were using their grade books correctly or not. In these cases, I asked to observe their grade books for

evidence of incorrect usage. I discovered several instances where certain types of assignments were not being include in student grade calculation. I also found than many teachers that did not use weighting of assignments or that they were trying to calculate grades based on percentages when their grade books were set up on a point system. In these instances, all assignments were counted the same, whether it was a five question quiz or a 200 question test. Even a few of the expert users had some of these same problems. Several experts expressed a desire to set up more sophisticated grading systems, but were not sure how to proceed. The experts felt as if we needed to have more grading consistency within our building. Both the experts and the novices felt somewhat abandoned in our past SIS training.

Prioritized Needs

Of all the needs discovered, I felt as if the highest priority would have to be a basic level of formal training for the novice users. Students have a right to accurate grades and the school has a responsibility to ensure that grades reflect student performance. Of next highest priority, the teachers need to learn how to give their grades weight according to importance and level of difficulty. The lowest priority need would be to expound the more sophisticated abilities of the software for advanced users.

Revised Problem Statement

Sullivan Middle School requires that all teachers use the SIS system to maintain class grade books, but does not ensure that the system is being used correctly or provide the faculty with sufficient training for its effective use.

Instructional Goals

1. Design a formal SIS basic skills workshop to be delivered to teachers at the beginning of the school year. The workshop will demonstrate how to set up grade calculation and individual assignment weighting in SIS, copy and paste assignments between grade books, and print student progress reports.
2. Create a self-directed PowerPoint presentation to reinforce the same skills taught during the initial workshop.
3. Produce a secondary self-directed PowerPoint presentation showing advanced users how to take advantage of SIS's more sophisticated abilities.