

THE TECH-SAVVY ADMINISTRATOR

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

Steven W.
ANDERSON

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Website: www.ascd.org
E-mail: books@ascd.org



www.ascdarias.org

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PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-4166-2004-4 ASCD product #SF115015
Also available as an e-book (see Books in Print for the ISBNs).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Anderson, Steven W., 1980-

The tech-savvy administrator : how do I use technology to be a better school leader? / Steven W. Anderson.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4166-2004-4 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Educational technology--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. School administrators--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Educational leadership--Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title.

LB1028.3 .A51555

371.33--dc23

2014036718

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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!



Effective Communication: Telling Your Story

At the heart of effective communication is an effective digital strategy. Let's face it. Your school's first impression on your community in this day and age is through its digital presence, be it a school website or social media page. When I was choosing a school to send my kindergartener to, the first thing we did as a family was start our search by looking at school websites. The community can learn a lot from your digital footprint.

Using the digital tools you will learn about in this section will help you move beyond first impressions to tell your own story and the stories of your students. As we well know, sometimes the negative stories get more press than the positive ones. Having many places online to tell what you, your students, and your faculty are doing is important to telling your story. The idea of branding is at the heart of this plan. Just like our favorite companies work to tell their stories, schools and school leaders should do the same. You become a walking PR machine capable of letting your community know all the greatness that is within your walls.

In addition to external communication, technology can facilitate and improve internal school communication as well. Many of us are digitally connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you look out into a faculty meeting you will

see phones, tablets, and laptops out and heads down. Using the digital tools on the pages that follow can help you more effectively reach your faculty and deliver timely information, freeing you up to spend time on more meaningful tasks like professional development and building school culture.

Before we get started, remember to always check with your district policies on using these communication tools. Talk to your school attorney and check any existing rules that may be in place that you'll need to be aware of when it comes to communicating this way.

The School Website

In my role as a District Instructional Technologist, I was tasked with overseeing the website for a district of 81 schools, 4,000 teachers, and 54,000 students. Part of my role was to work with the 81 school-based webmasters to help them improve their schools' web presence. As I mentioned earlier, in the 21st century the school website is generally the first impression schools make. So it was important that our websites convey the message that we are a welcoming place where there are many great stories to tell.

There are several key takeaways that are important to remember as you think about establishing your website or improving the one you have.

- **Make the Essentials Easy to Find.** One of the first things you'll want to ensure is that your site has basic information in places that make it logical and easy to find. Things like contact information, building hours, schedules, and events should be easy to find and well

labeled. A good rule of thumb for navigation is that users should never have to click more than three times to get to the information they need.

- **Guidelines Are Important.** As much as teachers (and some administrators) may resist, having a standard font, font size, image use, and color standards are very important for the professional look of each site. Having a standard layout is also important. Many parents have more than one student and often they are in different schools. With a standard layout used across the district, parents and the community can find the information they are looking for quickly, because the experience is the same across all sites.
- **Keep a Regular Schedule.** You've probably seen or visited a website in the middle of the school year that still had a "Welcome Back" banner on it. It is important for you as an administrator to establish a schedule for your site to be updated. Posting events, happenings, and stories to keep the site up-to-date will help parents and the community feel connected and informed. Some information, such as events on your calendar, will change regularly. Other items, such as your mission and vision, might never change. Look at your site quarterly and make improvements. Can you post pictures of your students from a recent field trip? How about a sample video from the recent debates students had in English class? Keeping content fresh can be as simple as that.

The bottom line with school websites is they can be difficult to establish but can serve as an important mechanism to build relationships with your students, parents, and community.

Blogs

In recent years, blogging has become more and more mainstream. Educators write blogs for a variety of reasons, including sharing what they are learning with others and openly reflecting on their thoughts and ideas on teaching and learning. Administrators are using blogs as platforms for sharing what is happening in their buildings, for reflecting on their thoughts around current issues in education, or for just sharing tips, tricks, and resources. Blogs come in all shapes and sizes and there are no hard and fast rules for setting up a blog, how long the posts should be, or how often to post. Blogs are personal in the sense that you decide the purpose, the look and feel, and the meaning of your own blog.

If you want to jump into the world of administrator blogging, you first will need to settle on a platform. There are many options and features available.

Your school or district may provide a location or platform for you to blog. Check with your technology department to determine if one is provided or if you can choose your own. If one isn't provided there are two main options:

Blogger (<http://blogger.com>). Owned by Google, this platform has been around for a very long time. Free to set up, it's literally a three-step process:

- Sign-in with your Google account
- Choose a blog name

- Choose a look and feel

After that, you are sitting at the place to make your first post. In about five minutes you can become a blogger with, well, Blogger! Blogger is my platform of choice just because I've been using it for a very long time and it works very well. As you begin to feel comfortable there are various customizations you can make like adding in widgets and plugins but if you never even go down that road, you can feel confident that you have a great blogging platform.

WordPress (<http://wordpress.com>). This is another popular platform in the edublogosphere. It is also free and very easy to set up. Many edubloggers comment they like the flexibility WordPress provides because there is a very large user community that creates templates, plugins, and widgets to further customize the look and feel of the blog. Some of these enhanced features require you to host your own WordPress site (and there are lots and lots of directions for doing that on their site. I've included some links in the Encore section) but for just starting out, the free version and all that it has to offer is plenty to get you going.

Once you choose your platform there are three things to remember and consider:

- Choose your blog name and URL carefully. Some of these services will allow you to change but some lock you in. Choose something that relates to your purpose. Are you going to be posting about school events and happenings? Then maybe the name of your school

belongs in the URL and title. Perhaps it will be a more personal reflection of your learning. Then you will want to choose a title that reflects that.

- Post on your own schedule. There are some in the social media marketing world that will attempt to tell you there is a magic schedule for posting so the most people see what you have to say. The reality is, when it comes to blogging, you post when you feel you have something to say or share. There is no set schedule. You will want to be regular enough so that those that are reading your content can expect it, but you decide what that schedule is. I used to post three to four times a week. Then I had two daughters and now I am down to a post a week. I sometimes only post every two to three weeks, depending on my schedule and the projects I am working on. Social media tools like Twitter and Facebook have made it much easier to share this content, so having a rigorous schedule isn't as necessary as it might have been.
- Comment on your comments. I end each of my posts with an invite for anyone reading to share and respond in the comments. I want to hear what each of my readers has to say about particular topics, tools, or ideas. The comments section of the blog is where that happens. If someone takes the time to read your post and to write a comment you should respond, even if it is a thank you or another thought or idea. This process is important and helps build community around your blog.

A Note about Widgets and Plugins: Widgets and Plugins are add-ons to your blog (or site) that give it a more personalized feel. Some are simple, like a widget that shows how many hits your blog gets and where in the world they come from. Others are complex that allow for a highly customizable experience. Widgets and Plugins are a completely optional part of any blog and not necessary for many users.

Social Media

In my experience, the fastest-growing tools administrators are relying upon to tell their story and keep engaged in their communities are social media tools. Their quick posts, ease of use, and mobility allow school leaders to share their experiences in 140 characters, pictures, and videos that can be seen and shared by anyone. These posts can happen anywhere, any time and can have a great impact on your story and how your parents and community engage with you as well.

You may be thinking to yourself that social media is just a place where celebrities share their latest happenings or where foodies post pictures of their latest eats. While certainly social media is used for that purpose, don't let that discourage you from using it. There is a very large educational user base.

There are many services to consider for posting information in real-time to your students, staff, faculty, and community.

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>). Twitter is easily the most popular social media tool. Many administrators are

discovering the power that Twitter can have to connect them to their school and their community. Free and easy to use, Twitter allows you 140 characters to post thoughts, happenings, updates, and more.

But where do you start? What are some things to consider? There are a few questions you will want to ask and answer before you jump in:

- **What do you want to do with this account?** What do you hope to accomplish? What do you want to communicate? The possibilities here are endless. But think beyond the basic stuff like picture day and what's for lunch. Consider taking pictures of kids doing collaborative projects or highlighting staff of the month. It can really go beyond all the regular communication and show the community what your school (or district) is all about.
- **Will you follow anyone?** Again, this is situation-dependent. You may want to follow other schools and the teachers in your school but will you follow parents? Students? Community members? If you are just going to be broadcasting, following becomes less of an issue. If you want to facilitate interaction, then following is important and you will need to decide on some guidelines on who to follow. You'll want to see if your school or district has a policy against following current students through social media accounts. Many schools and districts stick to following just news outlets and other schools. Remember, you can still

interact with other Twitter users, even if you don't follow them.

- **Will you respond?** If someone sends you an @ message (an @ message is a message sent directly and publicly to a specific Twitter user), will you respond? Often times your account will get mentioned or someone will send you a question. You will need to decide how to handle these questions. The interaction can help you generate more interest and better engagement in your community.
- **Getting started.** Now you are ready to set up your account. You will need an e-mail address that is not already associated with a Twitter account. If you can have a generic e-mail set up by the district that is the best way to handle that. Otherwise you will have to find an e-mail address to use. The e-mail address is used to confirm the account and send notices of private direct messages (DMs) and new followers along with other happenings on Twitter.
- **What's in a name?** You will want to pick a name that is easy to remember. This will become part of your brand. This is the point where you will define who you will be on Twitter. Remember though, users only have 140 characters to tweet with and if your user name is @StevenWilliamAnderson, that doesn't leave a lot for others to tweet with. So maybe you go with @swa or @web20classroom. (My Twitter name also relates to the title of my blog.) It is popular for Twitter users to use their first and last name in their handle. And

remember, there are several hundred million Twitter users so don't be disappointed if your first choice for a username is taken. Get creative and find something that can become your brand.

- **Who are you?** A profile will go a long way in letting people know who you are. This is the place you can put in your name, location, description, and link to your school website or your blog. You will also want to put in a picture. That helps other users identify, quickly, who you are. And you can do as much or as little of this as you feel comfortable.
- **Promote.** The account does no good if no one knows about it. Let everyone know. Put a widget on your website so every time folks visit they see your updates. Tell parents about it in mailings home. A simple "Follow Us On Twitter" and a link will go a long way into getting folks to see what you are saying.
- **But I don't want to be on Twitter.** You may find resistance to the idea of an administrator Twitter account because parents and community members don't want one of their own. That's fine. They don't have to have one. The easiest way to follow updates is to have their own account but they can also simply visit your Twitter page on the web. Another popular way is to install the Facebook widget to their Facebook page to see the updates every time they visit. And remember, you should have the widget on your school webpage so there are many ways to see the updates without requiring your community to use the service themselves.

Post Ideas:

Quickly share changes to sports events or afterschool activities.

Post your blog posts you and your staff are writing.

Congratulate students on accomplishments and share them with followers.

Facebook. Like Twitter, Facebook can be a means of effective engagement with your community. However, with Facebook you aren't limited to a number of characters, so your options for what you want to post becomes greater. In addition to text posts, you can post video and images as well.

I was doing a social media workshop for a large district in the Midwest. They were skeptical as to the number of actual Facebook users in their community. When I showed them the statistics, they were shocked. Facebook has 1.2 billion active users a day and many of those are in the United States. And it's not just teenagers. The second largest group and fastest growing group of users is those over the age of 40. Many members of our communities use Facebook to keep in touch with loved ones, keep track of their favorite shows or products—why shouldn't they also be able to stay in touch with their local school?

Many of the same considerations we had for Twitter apply to Facebook as well. You will want to think about what you will post, create an appropriate profile, and promote your page as well. Some additional considerations are:

- **How many people will have access to posts?** If you decide to set up a Facebook page for your school you will want to set up a fan page (a link to instructions is in the Encore section). Fan pages allow you to assign various page administrators who can post content to that page. Will you be the sole administrator or will you invite other members of your leadership team to post as well?
- **To comment or not to comment.** Fan pages allow various levels of posting by people who follow the page. You can set your page up so that it is view-only and is simply a one-way means of communication. You can allow commenting on posts or you can open it wide up and allow anyone who follows the page to create their own posts. You will need to decide which option is right for you and your situation. Many schools and districts allow followers to just comment on posts and not create original content. And remember, you can delete anything, at any time.

Post Ideas:

Share sports schedules, changes, game highlights, pictures, and celebrations.

Create galleries to share projects such as art, music, or other courses.

Share links to local news stories about your school or district.

Post general information about weather announcements or schedule changes.

Instagram. Instagram is an overlooked social media tool in schools. It can be a simple way to share pictures and short videos of the great things your students are doing. Because you are a mobile school leader and constantly out and about in your building or district, you can load Instagram for free to your phone and share those images and short videos in an instant.

Using Instagram is simple. Once the app is downloaded to your mobile device you create your account and begin snapping photos. Instagram prides itself on what you can do after you take the picture: apply different filters. You can get creative in capturing those moments but most times you will capture an image or use the record feature to capture a 15-second video and instantly post it to your feed for the community to follow. Connect your Twitter or Facebook account to Instagram and the images and video you share can have an extended reach.

Post Ideas:

Pictures from the classrooms that capture what it means to be a student in your school.

Short videos of drama or chorus events.

Highlights from sports events or afterschool activities.



Effective Collaborators

As school leaders, we become masters in paperwork. I will never forget the look of my principal's desk every time I visited her office when I was a teacher. Stacks upon stacks of teacher evaluation reports, notes from meetings, and articles to be read and shared. Her computer was about the same, with every file crowding the desktop competing for space. How she ever found anything was beyond me!

In addition, as soon as she was away from her office and from the school, she couldn't access any of her files. Short of filling a flash drive everyday with important documents or projects she was working on, she didn't have an efficient way to access that data from anywhere.

Another shortfall came when she had to share files with other members of the leadership team. E-mail was one method. But think about it. If you send an e-mail with an attachment to five staff members, that means you've created five copies of the same document. Then what if each person has an edit to make? That means five files have to be merged into one. And forget about it if the files are sent back and forth, over and over. Confusion will ensue.

For a digital leader, effective collaboration is about two things: effectively storing your documents and files so you can get to them later (from anywhere), and using tools that

help you effectively collaborate on those documents so you can work smarter, not harder.

In the pages that follow, we will explore several tools that can help you accomplish both these tasks (sometimes in the same tool) and give you some ideas for how you can incorporate these tools into your workflow.

Effective Document and File Storage

When I was teaching I was paranoid of losing my lesson plans, resource files, or really, losing anything digital at all. I couldn't save anything to the computer in the classroom because that could get erased at any time. I had a little network storage but I couldn't get to the files once I left for the day. So I carried two flash drives and an external hard drive that all had virtually the same files on them. It was tiring trying to keep up with all that.

Then someone introduced me to the Cloud.

What is the Cloud? In its simplest form, the Cloud is virtual storage. Instead of saving a document to your computer or a file to your flash drive that you carry with you, those files get saved to a computer somewhere else that you can access when connected to the Internet. No more flash drives, no more having multiple versions of files on all your different computers. You have one file that lives in one place that you can get to from anywhere.

Using cloud-based storage changed how I work. I have one place I save all my files and I can get to them from any Internet-connected device. This flexibility has been helpful to me in any number of situations and circumstances.

There are many options available for cloud storage, all of them similar but unique in their own way. They each have three main features:

- You can store many different types of files there. When you install any of these services to your computer or mobile device, they act like another folder for storage. Anything you can put into a folder, you can put into your cloud-storage folder. This makes it easy to drag and drop or move the files you need to get them uploaded to the Cloud.
- You can share. All of these services allow you to share individual files or entire folders with someone else. Think about a large project like a school handbook. You might have several different people working on different parts. Instead of hundreds of e-mails going back and forth with all the files, they can be shared all at one time. And, given the correct permissions, anyone with access to that folder can save there as well, removing the need for e-mail.
- You get a lot of space. Many of these services give you more space than you will ever need, for free. If you find you are running out they often have lots more space for a small monthly charge.

A quick search for “cloud storage” will result in many sites, apps, and services. However, there are a few that rise to the top. I’ve listed here a few of the most popular with educators. You will find a few key pieces of information:

- Name of the service.
- The URL.
- How much storage you get (and how much you get if you pay to upgrade).
- Are computer and mobile apps available?
- Something special about the service.

Dropbox

<http://dropbox.com>

2 GB Free (100GB for \$9.99 per month)

Desktop and Mobile Apps Available.

Many other applications allow you to connect to your Dropbox account to access files you've saved or to more easily save files you've created.

Google Drive

<http://drive.google.com>

15 GB Free (100GB for \$4.99 per month)

Desktop and Mobile Apps Available.

Google Drive has Google Docs built in. Google Docs is a cloud-based, Microsoft Office-like set of programs, allowing you to not only store files but edit them as well.

Microsoft OneDrive

<https://onedrive.live.com>

7 GB Free (100GB for \$50 per year)

Desktop and Mobile Apps Available.

Microsoft OneDrive, like Google Drive, has cloud-based versions of Microsoft Office apps like Word and Excel built in that allow you to edit files without having those products installed on your device.

The one you choose is up to you. Visit each site and look at their other features and see which appeals to your needs.

Ideas for Using Cloud Storage

There are many ways you can use cloud storage to be a more effective collaborator:

- Because sharing documents is so easy, create a folder for your leadership team that has files all of you need to access, such as teacher evaluation notes, parent communications, master schedules, and other important school files. All of you will have access to the information you need, anywhere you are.
- Create a schoolwide file repository. Are there forms or files every teacher needs access to? You can put them all in one folder and share them with all staff.
- Cut down on the amount of paper you send home. Put all the flyers, announcements, and other communications into a folder that you share with your parents and community. They can access the folder from anywhere and they can download anything that's been uploaded there easily.
- Of all the tools I use on a daily basis, cloud-based storage is the one I rely upon the most. I can get to my files

no matter what device I am using and I never have to worry about losing a file.

Effective Document Collaboration

As we've seen, using cloud-based storage can provide many benefits to administrators attempting to simplify the process of organizing and sharing documents across the organization. But there are even better ways to reduce even the number of files in your cloud storage account and allow others to collaborate on documents and files, in real time.

I first discovered the ability to collaborate on documents in real time when I was a classroom teacher. At the time I was a member of our School Improvement Team and we were tasked with working on a 100-page document that laid out our goals for the coming year and how we as a school intended to get there. During one meeting we were editing a large section while trying to watch the editing on a screen at the other end of the media center. We had to take turns editing, saving, sending, opening, and editing again and it took much too much time. I had heard about a program called Google Docs where we could load our document and edit it all together, at the same time.

Things changed for the better after that.

Now we had one version of the document that updated as we went, and because it lived in the Cloud any of the team members could edit that document, at the same time, from school or home or the local coffee shop.

Collaborative documents, like cloud-based storage, all have individual advantages but many of their features are similar, no matter which you use.

- **Familiarity.** No matter which service you choose, it will feel familiar to other word processing or spreadsheet software you've used in the past. And that is done on purpose so you can easily transition and learn how to use it.
- **Basic Features.** All of these services feel powerful without feeling overwhelming. You won't find full versions of Microsoft Word or Excel, but you will find the features you use the most, like creating tables or inserting images, allowing you to make the most of your collaborative document experience.
- **Create New Documents or Use Existing Ones.** While you can create brand new documents that you may never download and use in another program, in all these services you can import documents from your computer that you created in that other program and convert it so you can edit in your browser.
- **Different Levels of Sharing.** Sometimes when you are working on a document you just want your staff to review or provide comments. Each of these services provides different levels of access to the document, from just being able to view, to just being able to leave comments, to full access to edit. You can learn more in the Encore Section.

- **Revision History.** When you have multiple people working collaboratively on documents, it's easy for one person to make a mistake. Each of these services allow you to see what revisions were made and when they were made. You can even revert back to a previous version to restore what was lost.
- **Export.** When the time came, our School Improvement Team had to send our document to Central Office as a specific type of format. There will come a time when you need to export your collaborative document out of the Cloud to e-mail or for another purpose. All these services have you covered, allowing you to export your document to popular file formats including .docx, and .pdf.

There are several options for document collaboration. However there are two services that are the most popular with educators, Google Docs and Microsoft OneDrive. Let's break down the features of each (see chart on the next page).

Using collaborative documents for school improvement plans is just one way. Here are a few more suggestions:

- **Paperless Meeting Agendas.** Instead of printing agendas for your faculty/staff meetings, send a link to a shared document with the agenda and all the notes and sites listed. That way focus can be on the meeting and not on ensuring everyone has all it written down. And if you give your staff the ability to add comments it becomes a very dynamic document.

	Google Docs	Microsoft OneDrive
URL	http://drive.google.com	http://onedrive.live.com
Applications Available	Word Processor Spreadsheet Presentation Forms Drawings	Word Excel PowerPoint OneNote Notebook Excel Survey Plain Text Document
Built In Storage?	Yes (15 GB)	Yes (7 GB)
Offline Editing Available?	Yes	Yes
Open In Other Programs	Yes	Yes
Ability To Share Documents	Yes	Yes
Collaborate In Real-Time	Yes	Yes
Mobile App Editing	Yes (Free)	Yes (Subscription Required)

- **Forms.** Think of all the forms and information you need to collect at the beginning of the year. With very little effort you can convert those to an online form and reduce the amount of paper you use significantly. For teachers, capturing parent e-mails and phone numbers can be done through a simple form and the results shared with all teachers, easily and simply. Set up a few laptops connected to the Internet and you can accomplish a lot!
- **Teacher Observation Notes.** As you are meeting with teachers or conducting walk-throughs or observations, you can collect those notes and share them with the individual teacher or staff member easily making the evaluation process much more transparent.

No matter which you choose, when you discover the power that collaborative documents, when used in conjunction with cloud-based storage, have, the way you do business in your building with your staff will change. You can drastically reduce the amount of paper you use, allow for easier collaboration on documents and projects with staff members, and not be tied to your school network because you can access your information from anywhere.



Effective Productivity

Becoming a master of your communications and collaborations is just part of the puzzle. As an administrator you are busy, there is no doubt. You are constantly on the go, taking meetings, making notes, and scheduling the next thing you have to do. For the unprepared it can easily get out of hand, making the job of the administrator overwhelming.

But it does not have to be that way.

There are a few, simple tools you can integrate into your workflow to make your job and life easier to manage. From organizing all those files, to easy scheduling, to helping you remember what you need to do, these are the tools you will want to seriously consider adding to your tech toolkit.

Evernote

Organization isn't really in my vocabulary. Well, let me say, it wasn't in my vocabulary.

But it is now, thanks to Evernote. To boil it all down, think of Evernote as a giant filing cabinet. In it you put all the different notes, clips, photos, scans, and just about anything. You can organize these notes into notebooks. Really what you use it for is up to you.

These notebooks can hold pretty much anything. You can make notes directly into them, add pictures, or attach documents and include links to items on the Internet. In one

of my notebooks are notes for three presentations I did at a recent district technology conference. I plan out my slide deck, resources, and videos. Everything can go right in the note for that particular session and I have it no matter where I am. I can scan in items, add Word docs, images, and more to a notebook or note. Did I practice a part of my presentation that I wanted to save the audio for? No problem! I can even include audio as part of my notes. (That works even better on a smartphone.)

Evernote is 100 percent free. You can download it as many times as you want. There are versions for both Mac and PC and it works on your smartphone too. There are, however, monthly upload limits for things like images and PDFs. You can pay for Evernote Premium (and I do), which gives you lots more space, the ability to search your PDFs, the sharing option, and more. For \$45 a year, it is well worth it.

Ideas for Using Evernote. You might already be thinking of uses for Evernote (and there will be several in the Encore section) but here are just a few:

- **Teacher Evaluation Portfolios.** I mentioned before how you could use something like Google Docs for observations. Evernote allows you to take those observations to the next level. Because you can include other documents, images, and audio and you have powerful mobile apps at your disposal, you can create evaluation portfolios that capture, throughout the year, how teachers are growing and progressing. And because

you can share those notebooks privately with teachers, it becomes more collaborative than just a document. Teachers can add in evidences as they go, truly creating a broad body of work that demonstrates their abilities, challenges, and growth.

- **Virtual Filing Cabinet.** Using the scanning feature of Evernote, either through a flatbed scanner or through the app (which is easier if you ask me), you can digitize all that information into notebooks. The best part? It all becomes searchable so you don't even have to remember the name of the document. Evernote will search the text within PDFs and pictures so you can always find what you need.
- **Clipping and Sharing Articles for Reading.** Using the Web Clipper, you can save those articles and blog posts you find to a notebook and share them with your staff.
- **Professional Development Notebooks.** As a leader, you participate in many opportunities for professional learning. Keeping all the meeting notes and conference resources organized gets much easier when you use Evernote. When I attend a conference or a PD session, I create a new notebook. Then all the notes, handouts (because I can scan them in with my phone or iPad, remember), or audio recordings can go right in there. And because the search function is so powerful, I can go back and find what I need in an instant.

Online Calendars

As leaders, we have busy schedules. Faculty meetings, time with parents, afterschool activities—keeping all that information straight can be a challenge. If you are like me, you use an e-mail program that has a calendar feature built in. And that can be great. Being able to access it on your phone or via your computer makes it very handy and it will usually stay consistent across devices. But what if you want others to make entries onto your calendar for you? Or you want to have a calendar that you can share publicly via a link or embedded to your school website? In that case you have to turn to an online calendar.

Google Calendar (<http://calendar.google.com>) is my calendar of choice. As we've previously seen, Google has many products you either are using or will use, so using the Calendar feature there makes sense; one less login to remember. But it's much more than that. There are many features of Google Calendar that makes it stand out above all the others.

- **Quick Add.** With this feature, you can type events in plain English and Google Calendar will create an event out of them. No more going to the date, and clicking through multiple steps to create an event. You can simply type, "Meeting with Ms. Jones next Tuesday at 3pm" and the calendar will automatically create your event for you.
- **Multiple Calendars in One.** In many desktop and e-mail calendar programs you can't have more than one calendar. You can create events with different colors but it is still all one calendar. Google Calendar

allows you to create multiple calendars that you can add different events to independently. School master schedules, sports schedules, band schedules, etc., can all have their own calendar.

- **Share Your Calendar.** Google Calendar makes it so easy to allow others to see your calendar. With the click of a button you get a link that makes your calendar view-only, or you can allow others to edit events for you. And you can have multiple types of views on the same calendar. Sharing calendars is great for those other calendars you create too. In addition to sharing your calendar you can get a bit of code to embed that calendar directly to your school website. So as you make changes, the calendar there updates automatically. And all the Google Calendars that are shared with you show up on your one calendar and you can turn their view off and on so you get a clear picture of everything happening.

There are other features too, like being able to set meeting invitations, starting virtual meetings right from the calendar, and subscribing to public calendars like holidays and sports schedules too. It is a full-featured, very powerful calendar program for the busy leader. And it's free!

To-Do Lists

For me, it never fails. I scratch out a to-do list on a piece of paper or in a notebook and then either lose it or forget about it. Or even worse, I have three or four lists going at

any one time with lots of overlap. Many times I have lots of projects going on and need to assign others tasks to help keep us moving, but keeping all that straight can get messy.

I moved to online task lists a while back and haven't looked back. Not only do I always have my to-do list with me (because it is on my phone, on my tablet, and on the web) but I can share that list with anyone and keep track of it all simply.

Just like lots of the other tools we are learning about, there are many, many options available. Here are a few favorites of mine and other educators:

- Wunderlist (<http://wunderlist.com>). With access via the web and mobile apps, Wunderlist is a no-frills, very powerful to-do program. Create multiple to-do lists all from within the program, invite others to collaborate on those lists, and manage projects by creating tasks and sub-tasks to fully keep track of everything.
- Any.do (<http://any.do>). On the surface Any.do is very similar to Wunderlist with many of the same features (multiple lists, sharing lists, sub-tasks) but there is one feature that helps it stand out. If you use Any.do on a mobile device, you can set up location-based tasks. Let's say you need to remember to drop off those important papers at Central Office. You can set a reminder that will automatically notify you when you get close to the office. Any.do knows where you are because of your phone's location and can automatically remind you of those important tasks.

- Evernote. Yes, Evernote can be your to-do list in addition to all the other things we mentioned it could do. If you are looking for just a basic to-do list to check off items as you do them, then Evernote is your tool. Just like a pencil and paper list, you add in items and then either use the check box or strikethrough features to note that they are done. If you are looking for the features the other tools have, you won't find them here, but Evernote is perfect for you if you just want to better organize your to-do lists.



The Power of Virtual Professional Learning

In today's digital age, as we've seen, collaborating across the divide has become so much easier than in the past. There are many sites, services, and apps that help us connect, learn, and grow. But what if we want to take that one step further and use video and audio to connect? How can these virtual collaborative communities help us be more effective leaders by sharing what we've learned?

Sharing our learning experience is one way we can use video and audio conferences to learn. However, there are many other ways we can use these services as well:

- **Virtual Professional Development.** If your school or district is like most, funds for professional development opportunities are on the decline. And it can be a challenge to bring together educators from across a large area to a central location to learn face to face. Using online video and audio conferencing, you can deliver and take part in PD anytime, anywhere. Participants can learn from their environment without having to travel, saving time while allowing more time for learning.
- **Virtual Learning Communities.** Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can play a big role in school improvement. Teachers and school leaders sharing best practices, struggles with teaching and learning, or ideas for improvement can have an impact across our schools. For leaders it can be a challenge to meet with leaders from other buildings or other districts on a regular basis. Video and audio conferencing allow us to do those meetings from anywhere, to help school leaders grow in their professional practice. One of my favorites is the Leadership 3.0 Community on Edweb.net. (<http://www.edweb.net/leadership>) This community has thousands of school leaders posting questions, resources, and ideas all around school leadership. They also conduct webinars on a regular basis on topics like formative assessment, school branding, and building school culture. It's a great place to connect with other school leaders who aren't in your area.

- **Virtual Meetings.** Sometimes getting away from our building is just not possible. Using audio and video conferences we can still meet without having to travel. These can be great too for meetings with parents or other community members that can't make it to the physical building. They can still participate without having to be there.

When it comes to audio and video conferencing services there are many available, some that will cost you big bucks. But there two free services that really stand out.

Skype (<http://skype.com>)

You might already be familiar with Skype because it has been around for a number of years. And over the course of those years Skype has continued to get better and better. With text-based instant messaging, audio, and video calling all built in for free, Skype is a powerful tool you may already have installed on your computer. I've used Skype for a number of years and keep it open often to send messages or do quick video calls with colleagues.

When I was a school-based instructional technologist I was part of a Skype group that had members from all over the state in similar roles. We could quickly ask questions, send files, or bounce ideas off each other. If I was busy I just closed the window and when I had time I could revisit the conversation and catch up. Using the video feature (which allows up to five people at a time) we could "see" each other, share our desktops, and have small group meetings where we could troubleshoot, learn, or catch up.

Google Hangouts (<https://www.google.com/+/learnmore/hangouts/>)

Similar to Skype, Google Hangouts allows you to do either text-based chatting or use the video feature. Google Hangouts goes a little further than Skype in that you can have 10 simultaneous videos. And because it's Google, you can bring in something like a Google Doc and (while you have multiple videos going) edit your document in real-time. You can also pull in a YouTube video and watch it all together, which is great for virtual professional learning communities or professional development.

Google Hangouts also has the added feature of Hangouts On Air which allows you to broadcast your video and record it to YouTube. You are limited to just two video streams when doing a Hangout On Air but those watching have access to the text chat. If you are exploring virtual professional development, Hangouts on Air can be a great tool. Not only is it free, it's automatically recorded and you can post it to YouTube for others to watch later.



Final Reflections

Technology is powerful. In our day-to-day lives, we are in constant contact with it and some would say we wouldn't be able to function without technology (whether we are pumping gas, getting money from an ATM, or making a

cup of coffee). As we've seen, for school leaders, it is no longer a question of "should I be using technology?" It's "what technologies can I use effectively?" But for school leaders merely using technology isn't enough. There needs to be an understanding of the role technology plays in learning.

As you reflect on your reading and how you will use technology in your role as a school leader, keep these things in mind:

Goals. As an educator it's important to reflect on the previous years, the high points and the low points. Use those reflections to build goals for your learning. Whatever your goals, make them actionable and reachable. And these questions are the most important: How will you be better than you have been? How can you improve as a professional? Set aside time for yourself to reflect on what you want to accomplish and how you will get there.

Get Connected. One of the most important ways an educator can grow and learn is to get connected. Joining Twitter, reading blogs, and contributing to an online community are all ways that you can hear about the good things that are happening in other classrooms and schools and learn from others. These places can also serve as virtual sounding boards when you run into a problem or need a solution. Many more school leaders are embracing social media, so there are many more opportunities to connect with others.

Reflect Often. Think of your learning as a journey and not a destination. Reflection should be an important part of your learning. Think back to your goals. Are you on the

right track? Do you need to change directions? What can you take time to celebrate? Use reflection as an opportunity to examine where you've been and where you are going.

Always remember to have fun with your learning, especially with technology. Take time to explore, play, and leave yourself room to fail and make mistakes. But learn from those failure, and become the School Leader your students, teachers, and community need!

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ENCORE

In this section you will find many links and resources to get you started. Some are links to show you how a particular technology works while others will show you ideas for use. Remember, the Internet is dynamic. Some links, over time, may go dead, change addresses, or just disappear. I've done my best to include lots of the best stuff so you will always have somewhere to look for help or ideas.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Websites: Sample Guidelines

- Webpages should be used for business only. Please do not include personal information.
- Use only professional fonts and font sizes.
- If you must use animated gifs, there should be no more than one per page.
- Background colors should be used minimally and should match the color scheme of the school colors.
- Always use spell check.
- Avoid the use of bookmarks (anchors) and scrollable webpages. Create multiple pages that link instead.

Blogs

Platforms:

- Blogger: <http://blogger.com>
- WordPress: <http://wordpress.com>

Resources:

- Self Hosting vs. Hosted WordPress Blog: <http://premium.wpmudev.org/blog/wordpress-org-vs-wordpress-com-a-definitive-guide-for-2014/>
- Creating an Effective Blog: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit1>
- Why School Administrators Should Blog: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit2>
- 7 Reasons Educators Should Blog: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit3>
- Using Blogs As Part Of Your Professional Learning Network: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit4>

Twitter

- Getting Started With Twitter: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit5>
- Twitter Basics and Terminology: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit6>
- Educators Guide To Twitter: <http://bit.ly/twitterguideforedu>
- The Power Of Twitter: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit7>

Facebook

- Creating A Facebook Page For Schools: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit8>
- Facebook in Education: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit9>
- Your School Needs A Facebook Page: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit10>

Instagram

- Instagram For Beginners: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit11>
- 10 Ideas For Instagram In The Classroom: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit12>
- The Administrator PR Machine: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit13>



EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Cloud-Based Storage

- What Is The Cloud: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit14>
- Dropbox, A Superb Classroom Tool: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit15>
- Dropbox For School Administrators: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit16>

Collaborative Documents

- Getting Started With Google Docs: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit17>
- All About Google Forms: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit18>
- Google Docs For Administrators: 5 Ideas To Get Started: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit19>



EFFECTIVE PRODUCTIVITY

Evernote

- Evernote 101: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit20>
- Evernote For Educators: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit21>
- 14 Ways Evernote Can Help Principals Manage Schools: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit22>

Online Calendars

- Getting Started With Google Calendar: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit23>
- Google Calendar: Why Every School Should Use It: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit24>

To-Do Lists

- Getting Started With Wunderlist: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit25>
- Getting Started With Any.do: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit26>
- Using Evernote As A To-Do List: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit27>



VIRTUAL COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

Skype

- Getting Started With Skype: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit28>
- Administrative Ideas For Using Skype: <http://bit.ly/admintoolkit29>

Google Hangouts

- Getting Started With Google Hangouts: <http://bit.ly/1rh94xE>
- Google Hangouts On Air: <http://bit.ly/1uZXPLG>
- How Educators And Schools Make The Most Of Google Hangouts: <http://bit.ly/1sV1oz>

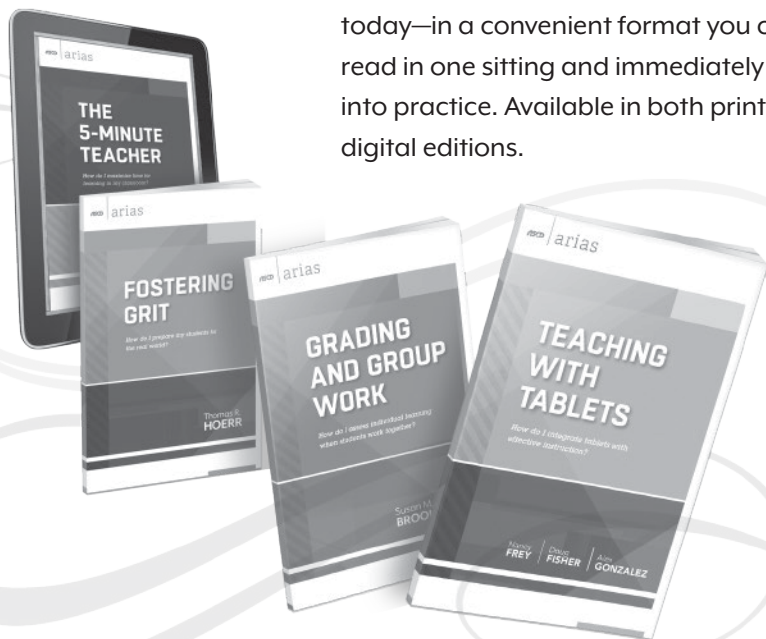


About the Author

Steven W. Anderson is a learner, blogger, speaker, educational evangelist, author and dad. As a former teacher and Director of Instructional Technology (and best known as @web20classroom) he is highly sought after for his expertise in educational technology integration and using social media for learning. Steven presents at education conferences worldwide and is also responsible in helping create #edchat, the most popular educational hashtag on Twitter. Steven has been recognized with the 2009 and 2011 Edublogs Twitterer of The Year Award, a Microsoft Heros of Education award, and a 2013 Bammy Award, recognized worldwide as the Educational Emmy.

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THE TECH-SAVVY ADMINISTRATOR

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

How can school leaders use technology to be more effective? In this book, award-winning blogger and educational technology expert Steven W. Anderson explains how and why leaders should use technology and outlines what should be in every leader's digital toolkit. This resource will help leaders

- maximize social media to stay connected with teachers, students, and the community
- use online collaborative tools to manage documents and increase collaboration
- identify online tools to stay organized
- develop online professional learning networks.

Digital tools can play an important role not only in streamlining how school leaders do their jobs, but also in helping them get better results--no matter what the initiative.



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