



Newsletter - June 2007

Summer Has Arrived!

It's a great time to relax, enjoy the warm weather, and perhaps get away. Keep in mind that, whether you're in your backyard or halfway around the world, you can access MassONE if you have an Internet connection. You can use it to store files, which you can access from any location. You might want to experiment with some of MassONE's tools so that you can use them in the fall. Give it a try, and have fun!

MassONE Orientation Available

Do you need some new ideas for using technology with your students? If so, consider taking the MassONE Orientation. In this self-paced tutorial, you will learn to use MassONE to enhance classroom instruction and develop 21st century skills through online assessments, discussions and web-based instructional materials. The tutorial consists of 10 one-hour modules, which can be completed in any order, at any time. To sign up for the Orientation, go to <http://vessunapp3.doe.mass.edu/surveys/take.do?n=841424029>.

Workshops Offered Through MassCUE

Massachusetts Computer Using Educators (MassCUE), through its role in the Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD), will offer ten face-to-face workshops across the state to train teachers in the use of MassONE for communication, collaboration, productivity and instruction. The workshops will be held at various locations throughout the summer. The workshops are available at no cost, and teachers do not have to be a MassCUE member to take them.

There is one important prerequisite for taking one of these workshops. Participants must be registered for MassONE and know their username and password. For teachers who do not have a MassONE account, information about signing up is available on MassONE's home page. The web site also provides help for teachers who may have forgotten their passwords.

For more information and registration, please see the announcement on MassCUE's web site (<http://www.masscue.org/announcements/massone.htm>). The site gives the workshop titles, topics to be covered, location, date, time, registration deadline, driving directions, and more. To register, teachers need to email MassCUE, following specific instructions on the web site.

New Online Professional Development Opportunities Coming

The Partnership for Online Professional Development (POPD) officially begins this month, with partners spending the summer planning content-rich courses that will be offered through MassONE. The courses will be offered in the fall of 2007 and the summer of 2008. MassONE will use Moodle, an open source course management system, to present the courses.

Eight school districts received grants to participate in this project: Brockton, Cambridge, Easthampton, Community Day Charter, New Bedford, Northampton Smith Vocational, Springfield, and Winchendon. These districts are partnering with curriculum specialists and experts in online learning, including CAST, Community Partners Initiative, Cambridge College, the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA), Virtual High School (VHS), Education Development Center (EDC), and WGBY/PBS TeacherLine.

During the summer, the districts will work with the Department and their partners to develop online courses in the areas of mathematics, science, and English language arts. These courses will be offered to educators statewide on a space-available basis in the fall. In the spring, a team of educators from each of the eight funded districts will receive training in teaching online. The district teams will then offer courses to educators across the state in the summer of 2008.

Course descriptions and registration information will be posted on the MassONE web site in late summer. Keep an eye out for the announcement!

Department Receives Grant to Develop Online Writing Tool

The Department has been awarded a federal grant of \$400,000 (through the Steppingstones of Technology Innovation for Children with Disabilities program) for Online Writing Assistance for All, a two-year project to develop and test an online tool designed to improve middle school students' persuasive writing. The Department's partner in developing the new tool will be CAST, an organization nationally known for its work in supporting all learners according to their individual strengths and needs. Once the writing tool has been successfully tested, it will be available to all Massachusetts schools through MassONE, where it will be called the "MassONE Writer."

The MassONE Writer will include a number of supports for writing strategies. Animated characters will provide additional information and remind the student of critical features in the writing process. The MassONE Writer will also model strategies students can use

to plan, organize, write, revise, and edit their work. The MassONE Writer will also support collaborative writing by allowing groups of peers to read and comment on each other's work. The MassONE Writer will include tools allowing teachers and students to monitor their progress in writing at both the mechanics and content levels. Teachers will be able to use these tools to determine if and what interventions may be required.

Participating in the research and testing phase of this project will be middle schools in Springfield and Taunton, which received technology grants from the Department for one-to-one laptop computer programs. The testing of the product will involve a wide range of students, including students with learning disabilities in both inclusive middle school classrooms and resource rooms. Teachers and students will use the product and provide feedback during the development process so that the product can be improved.

Educators Share Their Thoughts about PTPD Courses

What it's like to take an online course? Sharing their thoughts about this topic are several participants from the Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD). These participants come from across the state, representing Amesbury, Newburyport, and the central/west area of ESIS (Educational Services in Institution Settings). Each of these people took the course "Principles of Curriculum Design," taught by the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA). Overall, these participants enjoyed the course, finding the content to be meaningful and relevant to their day-to-day work.

Unlike most of the other PTPD courses, this course consisted of several face-to-face meetings interspersed with online discussion. While the participants appreciated the flexibility and freedom that the online component offered, they also enjoyed meeting and working with educators from different parts of the state. In addition, they felt that the class meetings added to the comfort level in the online forums, because it allowed them to put a face with each name they encountered.

Like the participants in the other PTPD courses, these participants saw advantages in taking a course online. One person liked the fact that she could easily have a one-on-one discussion with the instructor if something was unclear. Someone else mentioned that it was convenient to have all of the course materials in one place. Another advantage, according to one participant, was being able to get ideas and see the work of one's colleagues across the state.

A participant who was taking an online course for the first time pointed out that, in order to take an online course, a person needs to have a certain level of technical expertise. For example, you need to know how to upload files and how to use the forum tools. It's also important, according to this first-time participant, to be able to get basic tech help from the instructor as needed. In this particular course, the technical information was covered in the initial face-to-face meeting.

Everyone agreed that online course participants need to take responsibility for their own learning, as well as for the success of the course. As one person explained, online courses

give you flexibility, but you still need to meet the needs of the group. Another participant concurred, emphasizing that it's important to adhere to the course schedule. Why? If people don't contribute to the discussion forum in a timely fashion, the quality of the interaction will suffer. Moreover, when participants take the time to write meaningful comments in the discussion forum, they can actually create a richer course experience for everyone.

Use of MassONE Is on the Rise

MassONE had more than 14,000 log-ins per week in May—an increase of 3000% since 2003. Were you one of the users who logged in? If not, think about joining your colleagues across the state in this online environment!

Back Issues of Newsletters

If you missed any previous issues of the MassONE newsletter, you can now find them on the MassONE web site. To access them, go to MassONE News Archives on the MassONE home page (<http://massone.mass.edu/>).