



Newsletter - February 2007

MassONE Can Help!

Now that the mercury has dropped and the winter blues are threatening to set in, here are some tips to help you get through the winter.

- On a dreary day when you need a way to spice up a lesson, consider introducing your students to the MassONE discussion forums or to a high-interest web resource from MassONE's Teaching and Learning Resources (TLR).
- Instead of braving freezing temperatures, slippery roads, and biting winds to attend a professional development workshop, think about taking (or teaching) an online course through MassONE.
- Find a warm, cozy place to do your lesson planning, with MassONE as your portable office. Use MassONE's lesson planning tool or the personal folder, and you will be able to access your work anywhere.

Spring Technology Conference

All Massachusetts educators are invited to the Department's spring technology conference on March 21. This all-day event will be co-hosted by Bridgewater State College and held on its campus. The conference will feature an opening keynote by David Rose, co-founder of CAST, and a luncheon keynote by Bob Bickerton, Senior Associate Commissioner at the Department.

Several breakout sessions will focus on online learning and MassONE. In one session, participants will have a chance to hear from three organizations that have used MassONE to teach online courses through the Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD). In another session, grant recipients will describe ways they are enhancing teaching and learning using online tools and strategies. A third session, presented by Bridgewater State College, will focus on how to select quality online professional development to meet the needs of educators. Finally, MassONE will offer a session focusing on its new tools and enhancements for 2007, including use of the Moodle course management system within MassONE.

Online Courses Available through MassONE

The Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD) is now completing its first round of online courses through MassONE. The courses will be repeated twice--in late February and in early June. There is no cost for Massachusetts educators to take the courses, and the summer courses still have space available. If you want to a course, you need to complete the online application. The online application web site also contains course descriptions and syllabi. Because applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis, it's a good idea to apply as soon as possible.

New Grant Opportunity for Online Professional Development

The Massachusetts Department of Education has just announced a new competitive grant program called the Partnership for Online Professional Development Program. This 16-month program will provide recipients with grants of up to \$50,000 to provide high-quality online course(s) using MassONE. To apply for this grant, a district must be identified as a high need school district or have established a partnership with a high-need district. Proposals are due at the Department March 23, and an informational session will be held in Malden on March 5. The online posting (http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/Grants/grants07/rfp/165_memo.html) provides complete details and contact information about this grant opportunity.

New Features in Discussion Forums

Beginning this month, there are some great new features in the discussion forums. Responding to requests from users, MassONE has implemented the following new features:

- Educators can now approve, edit, or reject each response before it is posted to the forum.
- Educators can now create online polls to survey their students or their colleagues.
- Educators can now create multiple forums and make other educators co-administrators of forums.
- All users can now select a personal avatar from a set of images. This avatar will be displayed next to the user's responses.
- Educators can now set a "watch" on a topic and receive an email every time a response is posted to that topic.

Enhanced Tool for Managing Students' Use of MassONE

Classroom teachers now have access to a simple tool enabling them to put students into a classroom workgroup. The tool allows teachers to search for the names of students in their school, select the names, and then roster them into the workgroup. Also, as

requested by many educators, the tool will also output a list of students' usernames and passwords.

Resources Focus on Diverse Learners

There are two new links in MassONE's Teaching and Learning Resources (TLR) that can help teachers differentiate instruction for their students. The first site, Center for Implementing Technology in Education (<http://www.cited.org>) offers best practices, innovative online tools, professional development, and communities of practice.

The second site focuses on how technology already in the school can enhance teachers' ability to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. Using Technology to Support Diverse Learners (<http://www.wested.org/cs/tdl/print/docs/tdl/home.htm>) offers links to a variety of teaching resources and professional development materials.

To view these and other links that you can use in your teaching, log into MassONE, and then click TLR (Teaching and Learning Resources) from the blue navigation bar on the left.

MassONE Orientation Goes Live

More than 50 educators have signed up to take the MassONE Orientation, which debuted in January. The orientation highlights ways that MassONE can enhance classroom instruction, covering topics such as creating an online classroom, working with the online calendar, setting up a discussion forum, using standards-based lessons, and constructing online assessments. The orientation, which was created by Virtual High School, is available at no cost to all MassONE users. It consists of 10 one-hour modules, which can be completed in any order, at any time. You can take all of modules or select just those that interest you.

Participants Share Their Impressions of PTPD Courses

What it's like to take an online course? Sharing their thoughts about this question are participants from the Partnership for Technology Professional Development (PTPD). These participants came from across the state, representing Brimfield Elementary School, Cambridge Public Schools, Haverhill Public Schools, Northampton Public Schools, and Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School. Each person is in the process of completing one or both of the courses taught by CAST--UDL in the General Curriculum and Teacher Tech: Digital Media in the Classroom.

A big advantage of taking any online course, participants agreed, is the flexibility it offers. They liked being able to schedule their coursework at the times and locations most convenient for them, without having to worry about fighting traffic, dealing with bad weather, or being late to class.

CAST's two courses offered a mix of presentation formats, which participants liked. In addition to the online resources and discussion, each course offered one two-hour face-to-face session and three web-based teleconferences. One participant remarked that the face-to-face session was a good way to get to know the other participants. Another person particularly enjoyed the rapid interchange of ideas and the immediate feedback that the teleconferences offered. As one participant said, "It is great to realize that we are all in the room together, virtual or not."

Participants saw a number of advantages in the online course format. For one participant, being able to work at your own pace was a benefit. Another person enjoyed being able to access information online, as opposed to listening to long lectures. One participant said you have more of a voice in an online course, pointing out that in a face-to-face course, you can speak only when given the opportunity, whereas in an online course, you can respond whenever you want.

According to one participant, the online format made it possible for the instructor to present a wealth of in-depth resources, databases, and documents. Another person agreed, saying that she found herself doing more research than she would have in a face-to-face course, since all of the resources were so easy to access. The online dropbox even allowed people to view one another's work, because everything was submitted electronically.

As one participant pointed out, CAST successfully modeled its concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), using multiple presentation methods and offering choices for course activities and assignments. As a result, the course seemed to meet needs of people with varying levels of tech expertise.

Participants had some useful advice for others who are considering taking an online course. They point out that, in order to get the full value of the course, it's important to be self-motivated and to keep up with the course schedule, being sure to set aside enough time to read all of the course information. Also, online learners need to devote time to the discussion forum on a regular basis in order to be part the course's community. Because everyone learns differently, they say, it's a good idea to think about your own learning style in order to determine if online learning is right for you. As one participant pointed out, "It has been said that you get out of education what you put into it. This is no truer than when you take a course online."

Upcoming issues of the newsletter will feature participants who took PTPD courses from Virtual High School (VHS) and MESPA.

MassONE Helps the Department Collaborate with Districts

As you may have heard, the Department of Education is developing a new data collection system, the Education Personnel Information Management System (EPIMS), which will collect individual educator data from all public school districts and charter schools. EPIMS will help the Department meet federal and state reporting requirements, perform

greatly needed analysis on our educator workforce, evaluate current educational practices and programs, and assist districts with their recruiting efforts.

For the past 12 months, the Department worked closely with a pilot group of approximately 30 districts to help identify the data elements and develop the design of the system and the online tools. In addition to monthly face-to-face meetings, the EPIMS project team used MassONE to facilitate communication among the pilot participants, and were very pleased with the results. John Shontell, the EPIMS project manager found the most useful MassONE tool to be the Virtual Hard Drive (VHD), which offered a means of disseminating and storing the project documents. Storing all of the project's documents proved especially useful when new district representatives joined the project, because they could browse through all of the files and get a sense of the project's history.

In addition to the VHD, the project also used two of MassONE's other tools: the discussion forums and the survey tool. The forums were useful for conducting conversations in between the project's monthly face-to-face meetings, and some participants even started their own discussions. At the end of the project, MassONE's survey tool was used to gather data about what worked well and what didn't. This information was then used to frame the agenda for the pilot project's final meeting and to prepare for statewide EPIMS implementation.

Back Issues of Newsletters

If you missed any previous issues of the MassONE newsletter, you can find them on the MassONE web site. To access them, click MassONE News Archives on the MassONE home page.