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LOCAL NEWS

Nauset technology director is sought-after speaker

By Debi Boucher Stetson / dstetson@cnc.com Friday, July 11, 2003

Nauset has something other school districts want: the expertise of technology director Kathy Schrock.

Now that her position has been cut by 20 percent, she plans to spend more of her time traveling outside the district, speaking at conferences across the country to help teachers and administrators learn how to best utilize technology.

Schrock has been an invited speaker at many conferences before, but until now she had limited her speaking engagements.

"They've always asked me to speak, and I've always said no, because I already had a job," she said this week. The few engagements she did accept she did for free, with only her travel expenses being paid by the conference.

Now the picture has changed because even with the controversial 3.5 percent increase the school committee granted Nauset administrators, Schrock took a \$14,000 pay cut because of a cutback in her hours. Despite that, however, she donated her raise back to the district.

And while she has now accepted paid speaking engagements at a number of conferences, they won't make up the \$14,000 cut.

"They don't pay that well," she says with a laugh.

She just got back from the National Computing Conference in Seattle, where she spoke on information literacy - or "teaching kids the skills they need to find what they need," she explains.

Her next engagement, in about a week, will be at the International Building Learning Communities conference at Regis College in Weston. Since it happens to be in Massachusetts this year, it's one of her more local assignments; her speaking tour this year will take her to Louisiana, California, St. Louis, Iowa and Florida. That's after her August stint in Germany, consulting for U.S. Department of Defense schools there.

The cut in Schrock's hours was made over the course of the year, so rather than having to cut down to three days a week, she can take time off during the summer and cluster her hours in periods when she feels she is most needed.

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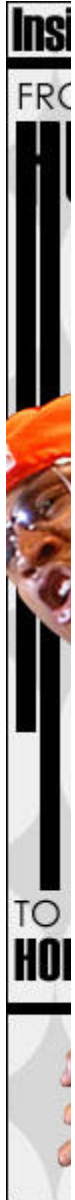
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She plans to be in the district most of the time during the busiest part of the year - September and October. "It will be a challenge," she said of her decreased hours. "People are going to have to wait longer."

Schrock, who approves all technology purchases, is responsible for implementing the district's plan to ensure all of it is compatible.

And she's the person who makes sure the "infrastructure" is in place - that everyone's e-mail works, the district's Web site is working, and that Internet screens are in place and working. She also does professional development workshops for teachers, teaching them how to use technology for curriculum development and other applications.

Schrock recently won a grant for 20 hand-held computers (also known as palm pilots), which will be distributed to classrooms from elementary school to high school, and will include training for teachers.

Schrock, who is a certified trainer in hand-held computers, has applied for another grant that would provide hand-held computers to all teachers, plus a classroom set that would be shared.

Hand-held computers, she says, are much more cost-effective than laptops, and they can be shared and personalized for each student by giving them their own cards to be inserted into the device.

The grant would also allow all Nauset Region teachers to attend the Massachusetts Technology Conference in November, where the focus will be on hand-held computers. Schrock will be there as a speaker, presenting a session called "Power in the Palm of Your Hand."

Schrock enjoys the conferences, including the travel aspect, and says her side career actually helps Nauset because she is constantly learning new things. She always attends other workshops and talks at the conferences where she speaks, which only adds to the expertise that makes her so sought after. "It helps the district, because I always come back with ideas."

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