

# Report on Site Visit Arizona Education Professions Mesa and Peoria School Districts March 27-31, 2006

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This report covers visits to four schools who are participating in the Education Professions project within the REFLECT Initiative. Lyn Whaley (consultant for the State and a former teacher in the program) and Jan Brite (director of the program at the state Department of Education) escorted me to Dobson High School in Mesa on Monday, March 27, and to Sunrise Mountain High School in Peoria on Tuesday, March 28, 2006. The meeting scheduled for Wednesday was cancelled; we originally planned to meet with teachers from schools who had not yet started with TaskStream. Lyn Whaley took me to Cactus High School on Thursday, March 30, and to Ironwood High School on Friday, March 31, both in Peoria. All site visits took place in the morning, since that is when the classes are held in those schools.



The Education Professions program is designed to prepare students for employment or post secondary opportunities in education. The high school students enroll in two Carnegie unit courses during their junior or senior years. A significant component of the course is field experience work in local schools. There are 62 schools offering these courses located throughout Arizona. A total of 17 schools volunteered to participate in the program and sent one or two teachers to a training session held in early September in Phoenix, led by Helen Barrett and Risa Sackman. In a discussion with Lyn Whaley on March 30, we determined the following status of the 17 schools within the project.

## Observation of Technology and TaskStream Use by Students

**Dobson High School** - The students were working on lesson plans and their resume, and looking ahead to their Philosophy of Education project. I overheard a student say, “too much work” and another say, “I hate computers.” One student was looking up addresses on the Internet to include in her resume. The students were to send their documents to each other first, and wait for comments. One student asked, “How do I know other people can see it?” The teacher reminded the students to check their comments. I then observed students go to their My Programs menu to see the work sent for feedback. One student said, “Where are all these people coming from?” She was referring to the work waiting for feedback. I was curious about the kind of training these students have received in giving feedback. I also saw students using cell phones to get information for their resumes. I also observed students providing help to their peers.



One student thought she needed to attach her resume again after she changed it. I explained that once it is uploaded, it will always be there. She checked and found it was. A common misconception for students is that they are used to sending documents by e-mail. If they change the document, they must e-mail the new version again. But in TaskStream, even if they forward a section of their portfolio for feedback, they can keep working on it, and whenever the reviewer looks at the web link, they will always see the latest version. There is no need to submit the work again after each change. The key difference here is that they are forwarding a link, not the actual document. This is a conceptual barrier for some students.

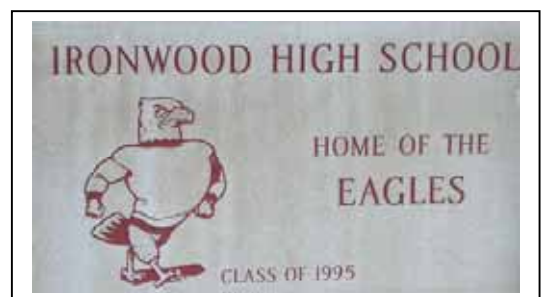
**Sunrise Mountain High School** – The teacher reserved the computer lab in the Library to hold her class for our visit. The students were entering lesson plans into the lesson plan template, a reflection of a lesson taught, and a discipline plan. The teacher mentioned that she would like a customized lesson plan. I noticed that the students did not have the formatting tools turned on, which I showed them how to do. One student proudly said, “I know how to do it [TaskStream] and I wasn’t in FTA1 last year.” I observed students using the Standards Engine to add to their lessons.



**Cactus High School** – This teacher is in her second year teaching the Ed Professions class. I observed second year students in Ed Professions II. The class met in the Media Center. In the lab, the students were to address the question, “After FTA, then what?” They were to go to the following website: <http://www.collegeboard.com> and add to their PostSecondary Plan in the TaskStream DRF. “Make this about you.” By the end of the period, print out the plan in more of a reflective journal format. The teacher used a projector and showed a slide show to introduce the lesson. During the activity, one student discovered that her major (Physical Education) is not available at ASU-West, which was surprising to her, but good for her to find out at this stage of her education.



**Ironwood High School** – This teacher is in her first year teaching in the Ed Professionals program. She mentioned that she had a digital camera to use, thanks to the FTA program. She had the students organize their folders by entry and date. Students set up web pages for journals that they kept of their field experiences and used them like the REFLECT Journal with Reflection journal prompts. The handout she provided to the students had some excellent support for journaling, with a whole page of Reflection Journal Prompts, as well as a Reflection Journal Activities Rubric.



I saw students at Ironwood using IM. I showed them all how to turn on the formatting tools, since I only saw one student had them turned on. I observed students using the Rubric Builder, Lesson Builder, and sending email from the WebFolio Builder (Step 4). The students were putting together a scrapbook for a conference in April. I noticed that some of the students had special FTA polo shirts, which they all wear in their field experiences, to identify them as FTA students, and to enforce a dress code while working in the schools.



## **Rolling it Out: Planning and Early Implementation**

**Dobson High School:** The teacher introduced TaskStream to the students about three weeks after the September training. She said that the support she received from Mentoring Services was great. She thought teachers were harder to “mentor” than the kids. They started out with the Discussion Board, not assignments.

**Sunrise Mountain High School:** The first day the teacher brought the students into the lab she was very stressed out. The first semester was pretty rough, but smoothed out in the current semester.

**Cactus High School** – The teacher introduced TaskStream to the students in the fall. She showed the students the Cybrary as a resource and “how this could be valuable for you.” They are not doing peer review. Students made a web page with three components on the web page, including career plan and rationale. They also looked at the Instructional Design Tools.

**Ironwood High School** – We did not talk about how the teacher introduced TaskStream to her students.

## **General use of/or goals for TaskStream in this implementation:**

The primary goal of this project is to support the Education Professions or Future Teachers Career and Technical Education curriculum across the state of Arizona. The vision of the program is to use TaskStream for both formative and summative assessment in the program statewide and to create a teacher education electronic portfolio continuum among high schools, community colleges and universities. Public universities in Arizona use TaskStream including

Direct Response Folios. The program has designed a DRF that matches that curriculum and that schools may choose to adopt and adapt.

The director of the program at the State Department of Education mentioned her vision: trying to get first generation college students onto campus. “We learn best what we teach.”

## **Implementation of Research Requirements:**

Most of the students are only in the project for this year. We don't know how many will be supported in the study next year. The Ed Professions Program is a two Carnegie Unit program. With block scheduling, that means one unit per semester. Many of the students are taking both of their semesters this year. The intent is to follow the seniors into the Community College next year.

## **Computer and School Environment:**

**Dobson High School** is in the Mesa School District, which is the largest school district in the state. The demographics of this school are changing, and it is in an older community. Dobson has been teaching the Ed Professions class since the beginning (for five years). The school is not on a block schedule, so the classes meet all year for a shorter time each day. The district provides unlimited server space for students, which is not removed until the students graduate. The school principal came briefly and talked with us, and complemented the teacher: “She's got all the answers!” The large, former Home economics classroom had computers around the periphery. Last summer, those computers were “gutted and refurbished” and have 512 Mb of RAM and Windows XP on all systems. The primary technology that students use outside of class is the cell phone, although school rules say they are not supposed to see them. Below is a picture of the classroom computers in a corner of the classroom.



**Sunrise Mountain High School** is in the Peoria School District. The school was built ten years ago as a Technology High School. The school has a student capacity of 1800, but currently has an enrollment of 2300. The community is upper middle class, with a lot of parent involvement. The school is on a 4 x 4 block schedule. The High School Library is also the Community Library, and the class met in the Computer Lab in the Library. I noticed that there is a charge of

15 cents per page for printing in the Library computer lab. Sunrise Mountain is a CCTI Partnership school. Below is a picture of the lab used during the site visit.



**Cactus High School** is also in the Peoria School District. The school has 1800 students in grades 9-12. The district is more middle class, has more ethnic diversity and a large Special Education population because it is a magnet school for students with multiple disabilities. Below is a picture of the lab used during the site visit.



**Ironwood High School** is also in the Peoria School District. The school is 21 years old, and has the IB program for the district. Below is a picture of the lab used during the site visit.



## **General feelings about TaskStream and eportfolios:**

**Dobson High School** – After the class was over, we were joined by the Career & Technical Education Director for Mesa School District. When asked about the successes, the teacher said, “Anytime you can incorporate technology into learning, it is a success.” She had students write an Introductory Self Essay, and send it to four students for peer review. She said that the students made better comments on TaskStream than on paper. When asked about the challenges, she said, “Having time to practice what I need to do as a teacher” and making sure everything is organized in her mind before giving it to her students. The students saw this as a different format of learning (no paper copy), which required a new mindset. They thought it was cool. Student liked sending work back for revision and not getting a bad grade.

This teacher wasn’t sure if TaskStream would be successful with sophomores. Her class is Juniors and Seniors. They have a paper notebook portfolio project, which they are still doing, since it is so embedded in the program from a couple of years ago. We talked about the use of video. The CTE director said that if the video is shot from the back of students, it would not be a problem.

There are no complaints about using TaskStream. The teacher thinks the students’ motivation is better. Students sometimes get frustrated with computers. There are a lot of things to remember with TaskStream, which can become frustrating. The hands-on component was very important. The whole element of time was a problem: “you’re supposed to teach it and not look stupid.” She found it a lot easier to learn in the peace and quiet at home.

**Sunrise Mountain High School** – The teacher mentioned that the spell check was not catching lower case “i” in student writing, as well as a problem with auto-saving student work. She finds it laborious to grade student work, having to pull each one up individually. She finds scrolling across the evaluation screen to be a problem, since she can’t see the students’ names. The biggest hardship is computer access. Some students do not have computers at home. Another awkward process was getting e-mails from the mentor teachers in the schools (who do not have TaskStream accounts) with Word documents attached, and getting those evaluations to the students in their TaskStream accounts. She found it very confusing to have three OAs (she was also in the University of Phoenix).

The biggest challenge for the teacher was time to implement the program properly. She felt that in this first semester, her success was having portfolios that the students did and a score to put into her grade book. They are still maintaining their paper portfolios. The first semester, the students didn’t like TaskStream. The second semester had a better feeling tone. They were all more comfortable in the second semester. She has to plan way ahead to get lab access, but she has a SmartBoard in her classroom.

We left the school and went to the Peoria School District Central Office, where a representative from TaskStream joined us. We met with the CTE Director. He said, “All that I hear are good things.” He would like to have the district go to electronic portfolios for all students, beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The purpose would be the collection of student’s best work. For career development,

it would include an interest inventory and efforts to prepare for the future, as well as competency lists. He would like to see end-of-program assessments, with collection, chosen samples, and rubrics to assess their competencies. I think he said that Peoria High School has been doing paper portfolios for 10 years, and worked with WestEd on the process. They met with a group of parents and the community to plan the exit evaluation portfolios for all seniors.

The discussion then led to computer lab access in the schools. “I knew that is where it was going,” he said. He suggested looking at scheduling in the schools, and adjusting the master schedule with the counselors, so that they could use existing labs. He talked about the issues of space, network drops, routers, electricity in addition to the cost of the computers. One option is wireless and laptop carts, but may not be the best solution. He suggested getting in budget requests. Teachers should already have Smart Boards.

**Cactus High School** – The teacher mentioned the following challenges: half of the FTA II students took FTA I last year and did not learn TaskStream, some took the course this year when it was introduced. The students are not very tech savvy and the learning curve was huge. To become a teacher, they always need to be learning. Another challenge was what to get ready. The successes: giving students the opportunity to experience tools they will use in future Teacher Ed programs. They will have a head start on future expectations.

The students had a mixed response to TaskStream. They would rather just write out their work by hand, or just use a word processor. Some students like to compose on the keyboard. They liked the lesson builder and Cybrary. They don’t have frequent lab access, and Julie would like more regular access to technology. She would like to be building the process over the semester, rather than a few assignments. She taught two sections of FTA I in the fall, and one section of FTA II in this spring semester.

**Ironwood High School** – The teacher mentioned some challenges: she needs more guidelines online, to give teachers ideas. The lessons in the Cybrary were not always consistent. She wondered if there was a search engine in the Standards database, since she had problems finding some standards. We talked about the background of the student data collection research questions. She complained that the students can’t read the instructions in the DRF automatically, but have to click the little triangle to be able to open them up. She thinks there should be more directions and print materials. She also thought there were too many categories in categories [in the Standards?]. When she had the student print out their assignments, the student names don’t show on the printed page.

When talking about the successes, the teacher said that they were functioning on TaskStream, using the Lesson Builder. The students are creating portfolios with the WebFolio Builder. Some students are very tech savvy, others are not as familiar, so “we’ve learned together.” They need more lab access. The school had laptops, but they are all scheduled. The CTE teachers are thinking of a CTE lab for the school, which would be very helpful.

## **Professional Development Needs:**

**Dobson High School** – The teacher wants follow-up training. In the beginning, she was anxious to get the kids going and didn't think about herself. Now she wants to develop a portfolio for herself. The Ed Professions teachers in the other schools in the Mesa district had not started. The longer they waited to get started with their students, the harder it became. "Use it or lose it!" Perhaps there should have been deadlines. She is willing to work with the four other teachers in the district, but wondered how best to provide that training: by phone and e-mail? On their own time, or at school? She thought the real challenge for those teachers was time and fear of computers. She and the CTE Director talked about a training workshop for the other teachers prior to school starting in August.

**Sunrise Mountain High School** – This teacher said, "Now that I've worked with it, I need more information about how to attach video clips and other artifacts. She also needed equipment and know how. She would like time to share with other teachers. She also needed training sessions closer to the actual implementation time. The district's CTE director suggested that summer would be good Professional Development time for hands-on work. He will pay for that time, and probably also include the cost of consultants.

**Cactus High School** – Prior to class, we met with the Web Design Teacher for the school. She is working with the Ed Professions teacher on how to teach technology, how to use her SmartBoard, and how to teach kids how to teach it in their field. She is helping them find lesson plans and educational sites as well as presentations on SmartBoards. The Ed Professions teacher stated that she is growing with the technology, including more elements in her teaching. She is using a SmartBoard in her classroom. She thinks the students are much more adept at navigating and exploring TaskStream.

**Ironwood High School** – This teacher, and the teacher from Cactus, have done a lot together to support each other. This teacher has a mentor in the CTE program, who is a Health Care teacher at Ironwood, and is in the CTE Career Ladder program, and working with the Ed Professions teacher as part of that program. Also, the Language Arts teachers in the school have helped her a lot. She also has a student TA for Technology Service Learning. She would like access to other teachers. "We're alone here." She would like more support for directions and ideas, more possibilities. This year, she has been dealing with a new Smart Board and other technology in addition to her first year teaching in the program. "Making all these transitions in one year."

## **Comments on the Progress of the Project Implementation:**

In this project, the teachers are isolated. There is no school community to build on. We need to break down barriers, so that they can see what the other schools are doing. There should be a plan developed for ongoing Professional Development, so that we can build a learning community among the teachers. Lyn Whaley and I talked about some potential ways to support the teachers to collaborate, without having to physically travel, through audio conferencing either by phone or computer using Skype. I suggested adding incentives for Professional Development, including Clock Hours or Staff Development Hours/Credit. A summer workshop was discussed.

I hope that they will open up the workshop to all of the REFLECT teachers in the state, including those at Cactus Shadows and Buena High Schools.

Teachers from more than 15 schools were trained in early September; there are only six who are currently using TaskStream. For some of those schools, the impediment to implementation is insufficient access to technology. It would be an interesting sub-study to interview those non-participating teachers to find out if there are other reasons for not using TaskStream.

I admire the lessons that I saw in both Cactus High School and Ironwood, where the teachers are working together. I was very impressed with the work that these two teachers have been doing together. I am also very impressed with the handout provided to the Ironwood students on Reflective Journaling... very sophisticated for high school students. I would like to get her permission to share this handout as a resource to other schools in REFLECT.

## **Review of Project Goals from the original Proposal**

From their Study Description (1):

*The primary focus of this portfolio study is to capture components of secondary education instruction and measure for impact and consistency. We would also like to determine the best method to utilize electronic portfolios for enhancing the process of learning.*

*This grant program would assist us as we strive to create a teacher education electronic portfolio continuum among our high schools, community colleges and universities. Public universities in Arizona (Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University) are utilizing many components of TaskStream including Direct Response Folios. Private colleges (University of Phoenix) have been using portfolios for a few years. Many of the Maricopa Community Colleges have utilized various components of TaskStream for the past two years (Rio Salado, GateWay, Estrella Mountain, South Mountain, Phoenix, Chandler-Gilbert, Scottsdale & Mesa).*

*This grant program would not only provide valuable research and data in regards to high school student use of electronic portfolios, but would go far in strengthening the teacher education electronic portfolio continuum in Arizona.*

Key Goals for the study (2):

*Our objectives are as follows:*

- *Identify if the utilization of electronic portfolios has an impact on student learning.*
- *Determine if students find value in using electronic portfolios*
- *Determine if teachers find value in using electronic portfolios in their classrooms.*
- *Determine if the utilization of electronic portfolios enhances the career path of future teachers.*
- *Are high school students who utilize electronic portfolios better prepared for higher education?*

Students targeted for the study group (3)

*The students from the Career and Technical Education Division's Education Professions program targeted as our study group. The Arizona Department of Education, Career and Technical Education Division oversees and manages the Education Professions Program. The Education Professions program is designed to prepare students for employment or post secondary opportunities in the education field. The program provides instruction in education career choices, education structure and systems, theory, pedagogy, developmental stages, learning styles and methodology. The program also provides interactive experiences with students at different age levels, in a variety of content areas in educational environments.*

*Education Professions is designed to articulate with the Introduction to Education courses at the community college and para-professional preparation programs. In addition to technical skills, students completing this program will*

*develop advanced critical thinking skills, enhanced academic skills, develop civic responsibility, understand education as a consumer, develop employability and leadership skills. The program utilizes a delivery system made up of four integral parts: formal/technical instruction, experiential/service learning, supervised work-based learning and the student organization, Future Educators of America (FEA). Dual/concurrent enrollment options with community colleges are available to students*

*There are 62 schools and 948 students in this program. The schools are located throughout Arizona. If this proposal is approved, schools would be recruited to participate. Many have already expressed interest in using TaskStream.*

#### **Main purpose for the implementing portfolios with secondary students (5)**

*[x ] Learning or process (formative assessment)*

*[x ] Assessment (summative assessment)*

*[x] Showcase (employment, college applications, etc.)*

#### **Incentives for teachers (8)**

- Release time for professional development would be allowed for teachers to attend trainings*
- State and Federal money are available for equipment, but this depends on local scheduling and priorities.*

#### **Sustainability: (11)**

*Education Professions is committed to having students convert from paper to electronic portfolios. If this project is successful electronic portfolios will be Institutionalized the DRF within the Education Professions Programs and expand efforts to other schools. The portfolio will become one of the elements of the program and a portion of the required end of program assessment. It is also anticipated that the portfolio will be come one of the required elements for schools seeking dual enrollment credit with community colleges*