

Nebraska state education leaders communicate and collaborate with Inspiration®

Inspiration, the powerful visual thinking software tool, supports learning in schools across the country by inspiring students to brainstorm, organize, plan and create. In Nebraska, the State Department of Education uses Inspiration Software's flagship product to help manage the complex issues involved with implementing state standards, to understand President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative, to plan education events and to guide and recap community presentations and planning sessions.

A 30-year veteran of the Nebraska Department of Education, John Clark is aware of the agency's intricate structure and the complex issues it faces. Led by the State Commissioner of Education, the department carries out state and federal statutes and the policy directions of the State Board of Education. It acts on behalf of Nebraska students in public, private and nonpublic school systems and interacts with colleges and universities.

In his role as Administrator for Communication Systems, Clark is responsible for helping staff members ensure that the department's internal and external audiences understand the issues on the agency's agenda so that they can make informed decisions on both state and local levels. In 1995, he was looking for a software tool that would help him do this when he saw Inspiration in a magazine. Clark says he quickly ordered an evaluation copy. It arrived at his office early one afternoon, and he spent the rest of the day immersed in the visual thinking software. "I kept calling people into my office and saying 'Look what I can do,'" he says. "Since then, the product has expanded and grown."

Visually illustrating standards

Like other states, Nebraska is in the process of implementing state standards. Clark found it virtually impossible to illustrate standards in a traditional way because of the dependencies and integration amongst the various audiences and curricular areas. Yet it is critical that the members of the State Board of Education have a clear picture of the state's process for adopting the standards structure. To help department staff and state board members

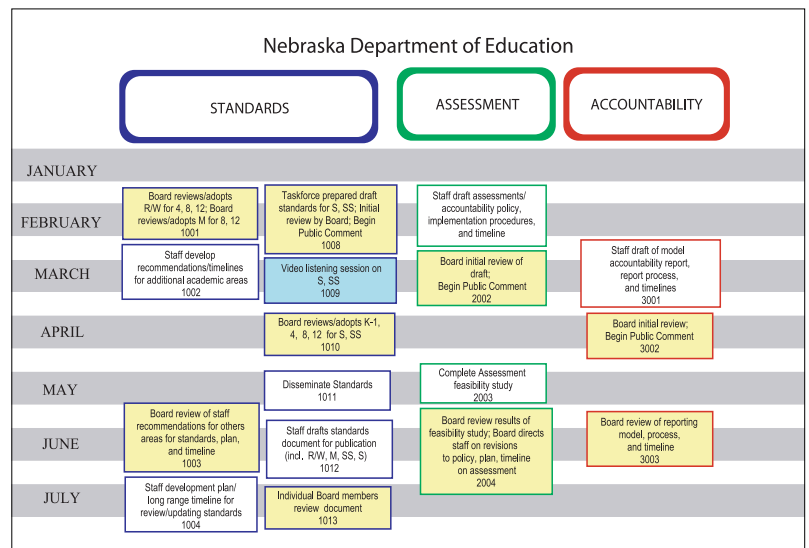
visualize their roles, Clark began to use Inspiration to develop a flow chart that illustrates the process for adopting standards.

Clark says this flow chart started as an 11 by 17 inch document and has grown to a wall-size poster that is also used for display at other events as a graphic tool for guiding the progress of the state's schools.

Clark also used Inspiration to develop a similar chart tracking the timeline for President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative, which was then presented to the board and school district audiences to demonstrate the massive nature of this education act.

Capturing community conversation

Clark says that Nebraska Commissioner of Education Doug Christensen is also a visual thinker who used to draw on flip charts with markers when making the many public



The Nebraska Department of Education uses Inspiration to visually illustrate the process for adopting standards, shown in this excerpt of the state's three-year plan.

presentations that are part of his responsibilities as the state's chief educator. Clark used Inspiration to develop a concept map from Christensen's presentations. Now each time Christensen presents, new ideas are captured in Inspiration. This is particularly useful when Christensen is

meeting with community-based groups and other constituents who are sharing their opinions on education in Nebraska. The result, says Clark, is always a living, growing document—not flipcharts that often sit on a shelf in the office rolled up with a rubber band around them.

Clark also says he and his colleagues use Inspiration to plan the numerous events that the department hosts. “The fun part of Inspiration is that you can do a proportional time scale, with appropriate distance between events. You can schedule programs, then evaluate your scheduling and make minor time tweaks and other changes,” he says. “You can do all of this live while you are in a meeting so that the plan grows as you meet and you have a product at the end. And the document is created by the planners—not by support staff following the meeting.”

The Nebraska Department of Education also uses Inspiration for what Clark calls “conversation capture” at large scale, multi-session events. For example, the department recently hosted a series of “Policy Partner Forums” at four different locations around the state. Teachers, school board members and Intermediate Unit leaders participated in this three- to four-hour discussion session on the topic of effective use of data from student assessment. Recording and compiling the discussion at these types of events used to be “excruciating,” says Clark. “You had a room full of tables, two pages of flip chart per table, and then you had to try to get a report out in a timely manner. It was awful.”

Inspiration has changed all that. At the recent meetings, as table presenters reported their discussions, they were quickly recorded using Inspiration’s RapidFire® tool. In 30 minutes flat, five to six tables had reported their discussions, and their ideas were graphically illustrated in an integrated document. After four meetings, the combined Inspiration diagram was switched to outline format and exported to Microsoft Word. The result was a six-page summary document to communicate the results of the meetings to state board members and forum participants.

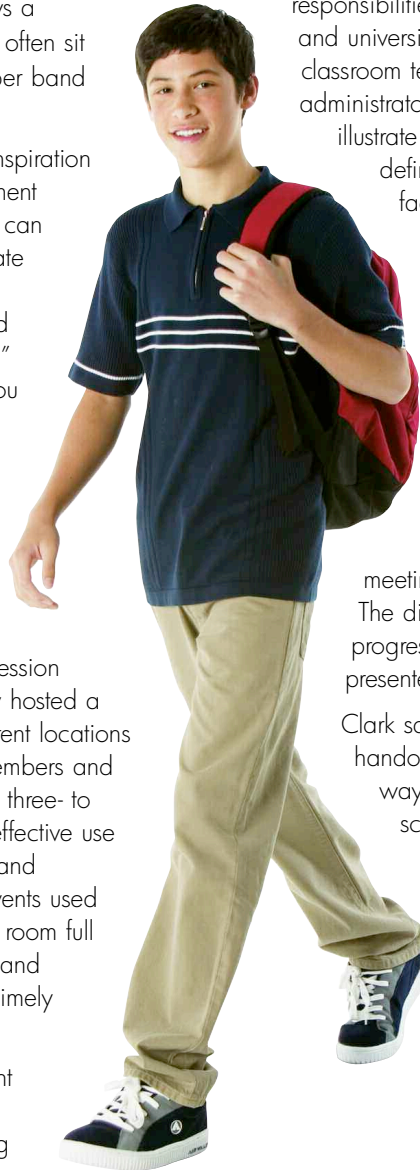
Facilitating and communicating committee work

Clark also uses Inspiration to create conceptual histories that help new members joining the department’s work groups understand program history and interrelationships. For

example, he used Inspiration with a statewide committee that was looking at language arts education responsibilities in both K-12 schools and colleges and universities. He worked with the group of classroom teachers, college professors and school administrators to capture their discussions and illustrate the responsibilities that they were defining. “When one of the university faculty members saw what I was doing with Inspiration, he immediately said ‘I’ve got to have that,’” says Clark.

Because the information that Clark was recording in Inspiration combined all meeting discussions in one diagram, committee members saw their progress and often realized that as they moved further along in their discussions, ideas or concepts from earlier meetings fit into the picture in a new way. The diagram became a flow chart and progress report that the committee ultimately presented to the board of education.

Clark says he uses Inspiration maps as his handouts when he makes presentations. That way attendees have the whole conceptual schema of the presentation in one document. “When graphical people used to try to share ideas, they had to resort to drawing diagrams on placemats and then revising them over and over,” he says. “Today, you can just use Inspiration.”



About Inspiration Software, Inc.

Inspiration Software, Inc. (www.inspiration.com) is recognized as the leader in visual thinking and learning. The company develops and publishes innovative software tools that inspire learners of all ages to brainstorm, organize, plan and create. With more than 15 million users worldwide, the company’s award-winning software is revolutionizing visual learning in education—inspiring students to develop strong thinking and organizational skills and improve their academic performance. Founded by Donald Helfgott and Mona Westhaver, the company’s mission is to support improvements in education and make a positive difference in students’ lives by providing software tools that help students learn to think.



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