

Interview a Professional in the Field

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### **Interview Questions**

- What is your educational background?
- How did you become the Building Level Technology Coordinator (BLTC) for South-Doyle High School?
- What is a typical day like?
- What are your main job responsibilities?
- How much latitude do you have in deciding the direction of your job?
- What challenges and/or obstacles do you feel you have to overcome in your position in order to be successful?
- What skills are the most valuable in your job? How did you develop them?
- What resources do you use to help you stay up-to-date with the changes in your field?
- What specific media and skills should one be proficient in to be a successful BLTC?
- How much interaction do you have with Knox County Schools IT department?
- Any other advice for someone who is interested in being a BLTC?

### **Narrative Summary of Interview**

I interviewed South-Doyle High School's Building Level Technology Coordinator (BLTC), Austin Rutledge, who gave me permission to use his real name. Even though Rutledge does not have an educational background in Instructional Technology, he said he is a "software guy" whose interest in educational technology has developed over the years, yet he has always had a personal interest in technology. He holds a Bachelor of Art in history and a Master of Science in education; he is four hours of a directed research project away from a master's degree in geography.

A little more than three years ago, Rutledge started his teaching career with Knox County Schools as a geography teacher at Austin-East High School. At that time, he volunteered to be a secondary technology person for the school while still teaching three out of four class blocks a day. The following school year he interviewed at South-Doyle High School, also in Knoxville, and let it be known he had an interest in technology in addition to teaching social studies and coaching football. Once again he served as a secondary BLTC. Then last school year the BLTC became a mentor teacher, so the principal needed someone to take on the BLTC role. Rutledge was given an extra planning period to perform the BLTC duties but that was still not enough time to solve everyone's technology problems. He told the principal he felt he could not be an effective teacher and an effective BLTC. Rutledge proposed doing the BLTC job fulltime and the principal agreed but had to "squeeze" a social studies position out of the master schedule to make it possible. (He still gets paid as a teacher.)

Rutledge's position does not have an official job description, so when he negotiated with the principal for the position to become fulltime he created his own "ambitious" job description. "At this point, I'm definitely not fulfilling everything that's on there," he said. Rutledge gave me a copy of his self-created job description, and it can be found at the end of this report.

A typical day for Rutledge starts with him going through emails and prioritizing requests from SchoolDude, the school district's online system used to report technology problems and issues and to request help with integrating technology into classrooms. Then he heads out to fix classroom-level problems and issues. During his lunch break, he usually watches webinars and researches how others use different technology like iPads. He spends his afternoons working on administration and "big picture" issues as well as scheduling the school's computer labs.

Rutledge said he has “a whole lot of latitude” in his job and has no set schedule, but he wants administration, faculty, and staff to know he is doing his job. SchoolDude is one way he is able to document his productivity. Any downtime he has he spends researching apps and tools helpful to teachers. He also plans professional development for teachers, which is what he really wants to spend his time doing, but technology issues take priority. If a teacher’s projector is not working, for example, then his or her lesson is impacted so that takes precedence.

Just like any other job out there, BLTCs face challenges. Rutledge said the biggest one for him is helping people understand they don’t have to be afraid of technology. “People are afraid to use things because they think they’re going to break it. Computers are really resilient, so mess around with them. Use those problem solving skills we’re trying to teach our kids,” he said. When teachers do have computer issues, he tells them, “If you think it’s something simple, try Googling it. I guarantee you someone else has had this problem and they’ve written about it online – that’s where I get most of my answers anyway.”

Rutledge said the most important skill for BLTCs is problem solving: learning how to troubleshoot things and ruling out what is not the problem to get to the source of the problem. His problem solving ability has developed with maturity, time, and persistence, he said. If he gets stumped by a problem, he sleeps on it but never gives up. He always comes back to it.

For his own professional development, he reads blogs like EdTech News Blog, watches webinars on sites like SimpleK12.com, reads email listservs, and follows people in the technology field on Twitter. Rutledge said his personal opinion is that instructional technologists should learn more about the web because “more and more things are happening in browsers, not on your hard drive.” He also said that while cloud computing seems to be on the rise, it is still

important to have networking skills and an understanding of the infrastructure of networks and how they work because that is what most organizations use.

I concluded our interview by asking him if he had any advice for someone who aspired to be a BLTC. Rutledge said people skills and being able to deal with frustrated adults who may not like your answer to their problems are extremely important skills to have because sometimes “people expect you to be a miracle worker.” He also said being able to be tactful, make others comfortable and happy are important. “I try to leave people with a smile on their face, I hope,” he said. “But it’s tough when I can’t fix it now or don’t have money.”

### **Reflection**

After conducting this interview, the instructional technology field in the K-12 setting is still where I see myself in the future. I would not mind *not* being a classroom teacher, but I do not want to get so far removed from students that I can’t have a somewhat direct impact on their lives. From what Rutledge shared, the BLTC position seems to be a great in between. The job description he created is one I would love to fill; however, it seems like his real-life day-to-day routine includes more technical and troubleshooting duties, which are not what I’d want to spend most of my time doing. I would prefer to spend my time developing professional development for school specific technology needs. I would also like to work with teachers on implementing technology into their classrooms beyond just using their SMARTboard as a projection screen.

Rutledge is a collaborator and leader in the technology field at our school and district level. He works with administration on a daily basis and even successfully lobbied our principal to make his job fulltime, which I find impressive. He interacts with district instructional technology specialists, primarily through SchoolDude and emails.

As for my own professional development plan, the interview experience has not drastically changed anything I plan to do. I am still going to complete my master's in instructional technology and take technology related courses offered by the school district. In fact, I am taking a self-paced online course for the next couple of weeks on Knox County Schools' guidelines on Internet safety, bullying, and cyberbullying. A couple of weeks after that class ends, I am registered to take similar classes about state and federal guidelines. After the winter break, I would like to volunteer to help Rutledge with our high school's technology issues or offer to collaborate on a staff and faculty professional development training. Rutledge seemed like he would be open to my assistance.

### ***Technology Integration Coordinator***

#### **Job Responsibilities:**

- ***Professional Development:***
  - Lead professional development for staff and faculty regularly
  - One on one with faculty & staff
  - Monthly workshops
  - Bring in specialists for special staff development time/workshops/etc.
  - Make how-to-guides available on school website
  - Participate in regional and national conferences
- ***Planning & Co-Teaching:***
  - Need is for integration of technology into existing curriculum, not additional curriculum
  - Regularly plan and co-teach lessons with master, mentor & career teachers
  - Informal observations with faculty so as to offer suggestions for integrating technology into existing curriculum
- ***Teaching:***
  - Teach at least one class each calendar year (technology class, etc.) to keep a good perspective on teaching real kids, not just theories on the profession...time permitting.
- ***Be a Life-Long Learner:***
  - Continue taking classes, attending workshops, conferences, meetings & skype with experts in the field
  - Become an avid reader of blogs, wikis, list serves, twitter, podcasts & professional journals
  - Stay ahead of technology trends, their connection and applications in an educational setting, and keep our school 'future-proof'
- ***Websites, Social Media & Blogs – Develop the School's 'Brand':***
  - Create and share ideas, insights & ask questions through a personal as well as a school blog
  - Keep the school website up to date and current – an advertisement for our school to develop our brand
  - Effectively leverage technology and student skills to publicize the good things happening at SDHS
  - Effectively leverage social media outlets to enhance the school's image or brand
  - Keep the school's social media policy up to date, educate faculty, staff & students about the policy and how to properly use social media
- ***Technology Team:***
  - Lead the school's technology team
  - Make decisions about hardware & software purchases as well as budget decisions
  - Develop and maintain a short-term & long term technology plan for our school
  - Work with and effectively communicate school needs to district technology team
  - Find & apply for grants to help with technology integration

