

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: MAKING CONNECTIONS

Partnership with Kentucky Department of Education helps technology thrive in the classroom. As a young cadet at West Point in the 1980s, David Couch learned a lesson about education.

He was studying engineering, and despite reams of written material at his disposal, he found himself struggling to grasp the ideas behind aerodynamics.

So his instructor took a different approach by showing him a visual simulation, one that illustrated the forces of lift and drag. Suddenly, the principles began to make sense. "I got it by visually seeing it," Couch said. "That's what a good teacher does, recognizing the different learning styles of the student."

It's a lesson that's served Couch well over the past 20 years in his work at the Kentucky Department of Education, where he serves as chief information officer and associate commissioner. And it's one he likes to point to when he talks about the collaborative partnership between the KDE and KET, and their pioneering efforts to bring technology to the classroom.



David Couch

"KET was the very first to offer educational television to all the schools across the state," Couch said. "And KDE was the very first to provide high-speed internet to every school across the state. And what's been fun is to watch us both maximize those technologies."

Schools increasingly rely on that connectivity to complement students' classroom computers — or, as Couch calls them, "content-delivery devices" — cultivating an environment of "anytime, anywhere, always-on learning." Teachers can tailor their lesson plans to meet students' individual learning styles, thanks to online resources such as PBS LearningMedia, a free repository of educational videos and materials that KET provides throughout Kentucky. KET is also among the leading national contributors to PBS LearningMedia, creating more than 3,000 digital resources, which were streamed more than two million times in 2017 alone.

"KET has always been outstanding in providing great audio and video content that encourages teachers and students to not shy away from certain subjects because it's on the screen in a format they can understand very quickly," said Couch.

Education runs deep in Couch's family. His mom was a beloved teacher in Johnson County, and two of his children are teachers as well. Couch and KDE earned nationwide plaudits thanks to a series of education technology milestones: the first state to connect school districts with high-speed internet, the first to switch to cloud-based computing, and the first to implement a state-wide school information system.

Those milestones helped pave the way for another statewide initiative: the Student Technology Leadership Program, known as STLP, through which Kentucky students tackle a variety of technology and engineering projects—everything from robotics to Minecraft.

The program culminates each year in a state championship that is live-streamed by KET and watched by thousands of students and educators. KET also helps advise school districts in their preparation for STLP championship, teaching them about video production in KET's Media Lab and connecting them with relevant PBS LearningMedia materials to get them up and running on their projects.

"KET has a cadre of staff and consultants who go out and work with teachers, making them aware of the electronic content that's out there and teaching them how to maximize that content in their instruction," Couch said. "That saves us money because we don't have to hire those folks at KDE because KET is already doing it and doing it well."

That collaboration, Couch said, is an example of the state's efforts to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars, using its resources efficiently and equitably serving every district in the state.

"We always try to look at the things that can be done statewide and the things we can do together as organizations," Couch said. "KET fits in with that because its focus is on the right thing—providing a good experience for students and teachers. And when you have that as your focus, you're going to maximize your resources."

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600 Cooper Drive, Lexington, KY 40502

859.258.7000 • 800.432.0951



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