

# IDEAS FROM TEACHERS HELP I SUPPORT LEARNING'S CURRICULA ENGAGE STUDENTS

Steve Waddell, Owner and Lead Developer of I Support Learning, Inc., details the many distinctive aspects of his forward-thinking company.

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**ESD:** You have some interesting curricula titles, like Video Game Development. How or why did you choose them?



Steve Waddell

Students are incredibly savvy these days. With the Internet and their exposure to so many things, students know where the world is heading. We take advantage of the student's interest in the future and bring that future into the classroom. We give them the taste of discovering new ideas, new solutions and new ways of approaching real-world problems. The titles are interesting because our curricula are interesting. Learning can be fun, but it has to start with engagement.

**ESD:** Could you describe the culture

surrounding your business and your overall mission?

**SW:** Our culture is as engaging as our software. We're a little quirky—we have to be. We're highly creative types, but overall we are just a warm and inviting group of people who enjoy talking and working with educators. Without question, we follow the mission: build authentic relationships with everybody we work with. It's just who we are.

In fact, we have teachers planning summer vacations just to come and hang out with us. That's pretty remarkable. We cherish that teachers want to be a part of our culture. They've bought into who we are, and they want to share time with us. Our culture is truly a basis for our continued success.

**ESD:** If I'm an educator, why should I stop by booth 1465?

**SW:** Simply this: The only people in our

booth are teachers and developers who actually use or make the curriculum. If you have four minutes to spend with one of these people, they can show you how you can radically change your classroom, bridge the gap, engage the student and make learning happen.

**ESD:** What are teachers saying about your curricula?

**SW:** It's not just what the teachers are saying about our curricula that has us excited—we've gotten the same response from administrators and students. We have teachers telling us about how revitalized they feel about their classrooms and teaching. There's no better praise than stories of students coming to school early and having to be kicked out after class!

**ESD:** Are there really no salespeople at your company? What's the advantage to that?

**SW:** It's true—the educator has a direct line

to the people who make the curricula they are using. This is incredible for both the educator and us. It means that we know educators by their first names. To the development team, educators are real people with real stories. In development meetings, we talk not only about a product, but also about what a teacher says or thinks about it.

I will be honest: A lot of our good ideas come from educators and their students. We don't know everything, but we are smart enough to listen to teachers in the trenches and to react to their insights.

**ESD:** Teachers are challenged with meeting assessment and standards. How do your curricula help them achieve their goals?

**SW:** Not only are teachers and administrators challenged—so are the students. Everybody is stressed about assessments. But if you engage a student with the standards in a way that is relevant to them, you make the connection between learning and the real world.