Texas District Prepares K-8 Students for College and their Future Career Paths

Arlington Independent School District leverages EasyTech and Inquiry to deliver comprehensive career and higher education investigations course.

Communal Support

When students at Arlington Independent School District leave eighth grade, they not only have a grip on the 21st century skills needed for college and their careers – they have a comprehensive four-year plan in place.

"It's very powerful," says Barry Fox, director of instructional technology at Arlington ISD. "When students come back to my office and say they started thinking about this specific career path as part of the CTHEI (Career Technology and Higher Education Investigations) course."

The innovative course is made possible through the community's unwavering embrace of education technology. Arlington ISD is one of the largest and most diverse districts in the state of Texas, with 65,000 students – 68 percent of whom identify as Hispanic or African-American. The Arlington community pledged overwhelming support for the district's initiatives last year, passing a multimillion-dollar bonds package that in part covers instructional technology, as well as career and technology education.

"The package not only addresses technology mounted on the wall in the classroom, but also technology that can go home with our students," Fox says. "Technology is just a part of our lives, and that access to technology needs to be part of their learning as well."

Crafting a College and Career Path

For more than a decade, Arlington ISD has used Learning.com solutions, including EasyTech, to integrate digital literacy and 21st century skills into K-8 curricula. The district also embraces BYOD and commits resources to ensure that all students have access to devices inside and outside of the classroom.

In 2012, the district began developing the CTHEI course to exceed state requirements and prepare students for the eventual transition out of high school. The year-long, technology-embedded course gives eighth-grade students an opportunity to both develop 21st century skills and actively investigate career and college opportunities. By the time these students enter high school, each has had an opportunity to establish a four-year plan that details the requirements for different career paths and colleges of interest.

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The CTHEI course is the result of collaboration between two Arlington ISD departments, Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Instructional Technology (ITD). EasyTech and Inquiry, from Learning.com, fit seamlessly with the CTHEI curriculum, Fox says, because their lessons meet the needs of both departments.

"Since 2012, representatives from both departments have collaborated to develop a comprehensive CTHEI curriculum," says Ginger Polster, CTE coordinator at Arlington ISD. "Together, we're able to blend our content and provide exceptional resources to every student."

When the CTHEI course first launched, the district also leveraged EasyTech as a guide for teachers who had minimal experience with technology in the classroom.

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Creating a Blended Environment
Each year, a team of Arlington ISD teachers meets to update the CTHEI course's evolving curriculum. The teachers are currently developing a six-week online component. While educators will be present in the classroom during the unit, the students will complete all assignments in a learning management system. The goal is to fully expose students to online learning – and a truly blended classroom.

"I'm really proud of the support for the district's direction," Fox says. "Not many districts can say that all of their students have access to this incredible content and get to engage in the online learning component behind it. We're excited to be leading the way with this kind of initiative."

About Learning.com
Learning.com is a national leader in providing digital literacy solutions that help prepare students for online assessments, school, college and their future careers. The company offers a complete digital literacy curriculum for grades K-8 that engages students as they develop critical skills such as keyboarding, business applications, online safety, computational thinking and coding. Founded in 1999, Learning.com currently partners with one in six U.S. school districts and serves more than 4 million students each year. The company has earned more than 30 industry awards, including ISTE 2017 Best of Show, 2017 Award of Excellence from "Tech & Learning Magazine" and "The Oregonian's Top Workplace" for 2017 and 2016.