Philadelphia Educator Reinvents Computer Lab with EasyTech

Technology specialist at Bridesburg Elementary School sparks students' enthusiasm for technology instruction, 21st century skills.

Challenge Meets Opportunity

Getting elementary school students to understand computer science and apply the principles they've learned is difficult. Building excitement for computer science class and creating engaging lessons for young learners is even more of a challenge. Few educators understand this better than Kelly Ward, technology specialist at Bridesburg Elementary School in Philadelphia. A veteran educator, Ward has been teaching elementary school students for 25 years, 10 of which have been in a computer lab setting. During the last two years, Ward set out to reinvent her lab. And she's succeeding.

The Search

While researching programs and curricula during construction of Bridesburg Elementary School, Ward encountered EasyTech from Learning.com. EasyTech is the self-paced, interactive program designed to teach students basic technology skills, online safety, keyboarding, and word processing. Ward insisted on implementing EasyTech for nearly 500 K-6 grade students. With the support of her principal, Ward successfully obtained an EasyTech license for the building.

 "I don't care to use the lab time as a study hall," says Ward, "EasyTech helps me enhance the time I spend with my students."

Filling a Need

Ward sees each student two times a week for 45-minute lab lessons. Prior to EasyTech, Bridesburg Elementary School was limited to disc-based software such as the Microsoft Office suite. Ward says the challenge she encountered was developing lessons and instruction to help students master the skills necessary to use the programs.

Students, frequently overwhelmed and confused by the programs, would ask for paper and a pen to complete assignments rather than using lab computers. Realizing there had to be a better way, Ward took to EasyTech.

The "New-School" Lab

Now in her second year of using EasyTech, Ward isn't looking back. She says this is the first time her students are truly mastering critical 21st century skills, showing interest in technology lessons and applying what they learn to other subjects.

"The students enjoy logging in and keeping track of their scores," says Ward. "The lessons are short, sweet and interactive. It makes everything I do easier and faster. This is the first time I've seen students relate the lessons to real-life software like Word and Excel."

With more structure and consistency in her instruction, Ward is able to teach a lesson and have students complete an assignment in one 45-minute session. Before EasyTech, the same lesson and activity would have taken at least twice as long to complete. The EasyTech videos help students master skills quicker, with less direct instruction from the teacher.

"The students barely need me anymore," Ward jokes. "They're more independent, so I can spend more time providing the one-on-one, individual guidance to students who need it the most."

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The Impact

A few of Ward's fourth grade students came to the lab recently and asked if they could use Excel to graph the medal count of the Winter Olympics – something they'd never done before. It's this type of engagement and enthusiasm for learning that Ward says EasyTech fosters in her lab.

"Students get it faster, and they're using these skills in ways that are meaningful and real for them," says Ward.

Bridesburg Elementary School was recently recognized as the top school in Pennsylvania for academic achievement and third best in significant point gain out of approximately 3,500 Pennsylvania schools.

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