

N.J. Middle School Creates ‘Win-Win’ by Incorporating Technology into Social Studies

Students practice formal technology skills while learning about current events.

From Texting to Typing

With budget cuts reducing keyboarding and technology instruction at the elementary school level, students entering Carteret Middle School in New Jersey were more comfortable sending text messages than typing essays. Forthcoming Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests require that students have formal technology skills in order to be successful, so Carteret Middle School Principal Mary Spiga knew something had to change.

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Transforming Social Studies

Spiga teamed-up with “tech-savvy” educator John Morrison, a sixth, seventh and eighth grade teacher at Carteret Middle School, to transform middle school social studies with Learning.com. In Morrison’s class, which is a 1:1 computing environment, students do everything through Learning.com. From taking notes to submitting assignments and completing quizzes, Morrison facilitates every activity via the online platform.

Morrison’s social studies class is different than most other social studies classes in other respects, too.

“We wanted to create an elective course where students practice their formal technology skills and also learn about subject matter that’s important and relevant to them,” says Spiga.

To that end, Morrison ties instruction and lesson plans to current events. Each grade, six through eight, has a specific social studies theme and area of emphasis for technology skills. Sixth grade students learn about human rights while practicing basic technology skills such as keyboarding. The seventh grade class studies developing nations, with a focus on research skills. And eighth grade students examine crimes against humanity and genocide while developing their presentation skills.

“All you hear is the clicking of the keyboards,” says Spiga of Morrison’s classroom. “There are no discipline problems. Students use Learning.com to practice tech skills, and they’re also getting to the higher-order thinking and meaningful discussions.”

Morrison also mixes-in instructional video lessons from EasyTech two-to-three times each week to ensure students are prepared for PARCC assessments.

“I like that everything is right there on the site,” says Morrison. “My students don’t use anything besides Learning.com.”

Loved by Students and Parents

Parents and students alike love the new set-up in Morrison’s classroom. Parents are impressed by how interested their children are in current events, and students enjoy studying timely, relevant issues.

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.

“Students are so engaged in the current events that they don’t really notice they’re practicing the formal technology skills,” says Spiga. “Those skills are byproducts of the work they’re doing every day. It’s a win-win from an educational standpoint.”

Room for Growth

Carteret Middle School plans to deepen its implementation of Learning.com during the next two school years. Specifically, Spiga says the school will measure and track student pre- and post-test data reported from 21st Century Skills Assessment. That way, administrators can establish a correlation between Learning.com usage and student achievement.

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