Long Island Students Develop Crucial 21st Century Skills

New York district uses EasyTech to supplement curriculum and prepare students for the PARCC assessment.

Whether using the internet safely or preparing for a nationwide assessment that will be completed on a computer, students at a Long Island, N.Y., district are conquering the digital world.

The district's 5,800 students in grades K-8 are using EasyTech, a web-delivered curriculum from Learning.com that allows teachers to seamlessly integrate digital literacy skills into math, science, language arts and social studies instruction.

"This program is motivating. It's addressing Common Core standards in an organized fashion," says Jolynn Sapia, director of technology, business and libraries for the Half Hollow Hills School District in Suffolk County, N.Y. "Students can rewind the short instructional videos if they don't understand something, and a teacher can easily add more content to a particular topic. Material is presented in a variety of formats, which is helpful to students with different learning styles."

Half Hollow Hills students use EasyTech, which features interactive lessons and activities to reinforce digital literacy skills that will be especially important for students taking PARCC assessments, scheduled to begin in 2014-15. Students will need to be able to use technology to apply and demonstrate their knowledge of traditional curriculum.

"The question might be to demonstrate knowledge of a fraction, such as one-fourth," Sapia explains. "The student might know what one-fourth is, but if they don't know how to drag the mouse to show one-fourth or shade one-fourth, they're not going to get credit for it."

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While Learning.com modules include other skills, such as graphing or charting, that will be employed during PARCC assessments, they also address core curriculum standards. All lessons are organized by grade and topic, allowing teachers to customize exercises for their students, who can move at their own pace.

"We like the flexibility of the program," Sapia says; "for example, if you are proficient in keyboarding, you can move on to another topic."

The district began using Learning.com products more than five years ago, when the emphasis became focused on 21st century skills and the internet safety requirements established by New York State.

Today, all of the district's K-8 students use Learning.com modules that reinforce word processing, keyboarding and spreadsheet skills, while integrating these skills into curriculum areas such as reading comprehension, math and writing to prepare them for the online PARCC assessments.

The Learning.com platform allows teachers to create, store and share curriculum among their peers, even those in other buildings. Sapia visited each of the district's elementary schools this past year to show teachers how to enhance their own curriculum while preparing students for PARCC.

"Once they understood why (computer skills mastery) was so important, teachers signed up for 15-hour professional development programs this summer or fall," Sapia says. "We love Learning.com because it's a one-stop shop. The lessons are organized yet flexible. This is not 'in addition to' but rather 'integrated into' existing curriculum."

For example, a teacher could introduce students to graphing on paper, then have them work on digital problems through EasyTech, whose modules are aligned to ISTE NETS-S and supports Common Core standards.

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To determine a student's digital skills and identify areas that need more emphasis, the district uses Learning.com's 21st Century Skills Assessments in grades 5 and 8.

"It's allowing us to measure the effectiveness of the program for the students," Sapia says. "As teachers use the program more often, we'll be able to see how students who've used the program have progressed."

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.