

New Jersey District Empowers Classroom Teachers to Teach Technology

New Brunswick integrates technology into everyday instruction with Inquiry.

The Changing Roles of Teachers

When New Brunswick School District went through a budget shortfall in 2012, they were forced to cut their technology teachers, placing the responsibility of technology instruction onto classroom teachers. As a result, technology teacher Michael Chiodo went back to his role as a 5th grade classroom teacher, but remained a technology advocate and resource and his colleagues.

Superintendent Richard Kaplan brought in Learning.com's EasyTech as a tool to help teachers, and Chiodo went to work promoting the program as a tool for his peers who didn't have the same technology background that he did.

Two years later, Chiodo was placed into the role of Coordinator of Educational Technology position for the district, where he began working with teachers to create New Brunswick-specific units of content with EasyTech lessons identified to help the less tech-savvy teachers.

Integrating Technology with Projects

Chiodo's goal was to use technology as a tool within the existing curriculum, rather than treating technology instruction as an additional task for teachers. "I want technology to be a resource within an overall content-based project," he says. "I don't want it to be labeled as a tech project."



"Technology instruction in isolation can be limiting and students can sometimes see it as busy work," says Chiodo. "When there's a project involved, you get that 'wow' factor and students are a lot more motivated."

When New Brunswick's rep heard about the core subject area projects Chiodo was creating using EasyTech lessons, she showed him a demo of Learning.com's new project-based solution, Inquiry.

"As soon as I saw Inquiry, I loved it," says Chiodo. "It took the same ideas of content-based projects but expanded what we were doing and put them all on one platform."

Saving Valued Prep Time

Chiodo's biggest resistance has come from single-subject teachers whose limited time with their students is highly valued. His goal is to convince them that Inquiry projects are "not about teaching something extra."

"I remember going through the lesson plan with one teacher and actually noticing how many paragraphs down in the plan it goes before the students even get on the computer," says Chiodo. "That's a good thing, because it emphasizes how focused Inquiry is on the core curriculum, not just technology."

Student- and Teacher-focused Options

Inquiry provided more than just a way to integrate technology into lesson plans for New Brunswick. The user interface and bilingual nature of this solution proved a perfect fit for New Brunswick. As an urban school district where approximately 85% of the students come from Spanish-speaking homes, the fact that teachers can choose Spanish for their lessons increases the program's accessibility.

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Inquiry's interface is also designed to be accessible to students, regardless of their reading levels. "When I showed my kindergarten teachers that there's a speaker button next to each text passage to read the text to them, they practically gave it a standing ovation. That right there shows it was designed for kids."

Teachers enjoy the ability to customize the content to fit their lessons, emphasizing certain tasks over others. "The fact that the teachers really can control what the students do within the project is really important," says Chiodo. "It's not a one-size-fits-all."

About Learning.com

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