

Texas District Takes a Project-based Approach to Integrating Technology into Core Instruction

Pasadena ISD pilots Inquiry, helps inform development of award-winning solution.

Theory Meets Practice

Approached to pilot Inquiry, a 21st century skills curriculum that takes a project-based approach to integrating technology into core instruction, longtime Learning.com customer Pasadena Independent School District (ISD) jumped at the opportunity.

Pasadena ISD implemented Inquiry at four campuses: three elementary schools and one middle school. Instructional Technology Specialist Emily Bourgeois led the pilot program at a district level. Technology teacher Patty Gordon and Technology Liaison Marie Alanis implemented Inquiry in their classes.

Need for a Project-Based Approach

“Project-based Learning is the best way to acquire and retain skills because it incorporates many learning styles,” says Bourgeois about the benefits of Inquiry’s project-based approach. “Students can immediately apply what they’re learning to a final product that’s meaningful and relevant to them.”

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Specifically developed for K-8 students, Inquiry includes six core curriculum projects per grade level using many tenants of the project-based learning model. Each project is based on core-area themes that continue from grade to grade, building on previously acquired subject-area knowledge and technology skills.

Students React with Enthusiasm

“My middle school students were excited to be beta testing something—anything,” jokes Gordon. “But even after that initial novelty faded, the students were engaged with the work. They especially enjoyed seeing projects through to completion and sharing the finished products.”

Alanis, who piloted Inquiry with second and fourth grade students, observed similar reactions.

“Even though students at that age are used to doing what their teachers ask, you could see the children were motivated to work on the projects,” says Alanis. “Inquiry really took off in one second grade classroom, and the teacher ended up using several of the projects.”

Even at the kindergarten level, students had a positive response to Inquiry.

“The hands-on lessons were useful and engaging for the kindergarten students,” says Bourgeois. “Even the simple activity of writing a poem helped them practice their technology skills while covering literacy curriculum.”

Teacher Resources and Lessons Enhance Instruction

When integrating a new approach, curriculum or instructional tool, educators’ success hinges upon their ability to expertly guide students through the material. Bourgeois, Gordon and Alanis all reported satisfaction with the Inquiry teacher guides and other support resources.

“It was very helpful, and the lesson plans were well written,” says Alanis. “One of my aides, who wasn’t accustomed to leading instruction, could take students through the projects. It would be especially helpful for classroom teachers who might not be as comfortable with technology.”

Gordon appreciated the vocabulary support most of all, and pointed to the included Web links as a way to save time when planning lessons.

Bridging the Gap

While Pasadena ISD primarily implemented Inquiry in Technology Applications classes, the educators agreed the curriculum “bridged the gap” between classroom instruction and technology.

“It’s a great way to get classroom teachers involved with using technology on a regular basis,” says Alanis.

“The nice thing about Inquiry is that it moves students toward higher-order thinking and away from rote instruction,” says Gordon. “It’s helpful for developing the 21st century skills, like critical thinking, that students need.”

Pilot Improvements

Based on feedback from the successful Pasadena ISD pilot, Learning.com updated and improved Inquiry ahead of full implementations during the 2014-15 school year. Enhancements include the addition of more audio support, Spanish audio support, more assistive prompts in the student interface, and adjustments to Reflection assignments to make them easier to complete.

Special thanks to:

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