

Preparing Students for Next Generation Assessments with the Right Technology Solution

Students at Placentia-Yorba Linda USD develop 21st century skills with Learning.com's EasyTech.

In Placentia-Yorba Linda USD in Orange County, California, there is a great amount of socioeconomic diversity among the district's 26,000 students.

Preparing for New Standards

"We have elementary schools where every student has his or her own iPad, and some where students do not have access to any technology at home," says Joey Davis, director of assessment and accountability.

With California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards, it became apparent that all students needed better keyboarding, higher order thinking and information fluency skills in order to perform well on the Smarter Balanced assessment.

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"The technology curriculum we were using was eight years old," says Davis. "We are a Google district, and it was written before Google Apps existed."

Because the curriculum was locally written, the people who initially implemented it had a lot of buy-in. However, Davis points out the curriculum was inconsistently implemented across the district.

"We knew we had the option to rewrite our own curriculum, but we realized we would have to do that every three years," he says. "The rate of technology change means we cannot wait more than five years before rewriting. By implementing curriculum from an outside company, that burden would be lifted off of us."

Choosing a Forward-thinking Curriculum

A technology selection committee of 15 teachers was formed in spring 2014 to identify criteria for the new curriculum, such as building students' creativity and critical thinking abilities. "We focused on what skills we wanted students to gain," says Davis.

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EasyTech from Learning.com was the committee's choice. EasyTech is a platform-agnostic program that teaches students the 21st century skills needed for next-generation assessments, college and beyond. The self-paced lessons and games are accompanied by activities to reinforce key concepts.

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An account manager and a territory manager for Learning.com led two half-day training sessions in August 2014 with two teachers from each elementary school. In September, EasyTech was required for all students in grades 1 through 5, and optional for kindergartners and sixth-graders.

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.

Setting Implementation Goals

"The assistant superintendent had all of our principals set goals for how many lessons their students would complete in a year," says Davis.

Davis' curriculum design team built 36 common sense progression lessons using Learning.com's custom sequencing tool. This provided the students with more lessons than they would be able to complete in a year, so administrators will have a better idea of how many lessons to include, and how to properly sequence them, for the 2015-16 school year.

To aid in professional development, a few teachers built a Google site that addresses frequently asked questions about the program. Davis and another educator also created five screencasts demonstrating how teachers can do specific things in EasyTech.

Building the School-home Connection

It is easy for parents to see what kind of work their children are doing in EasyTech because there is an option to create generic logins. "We distributed a log-in so parents can see five different examples of lessons students are doing in EasyTech," says Davis.

EasyTech's clear reports showed that the students at Placentia-Yorba Linda completed 16 lessons from September 2014 to January 2015, which is on track with expectations, Davis says. "After we complete our first year, we are looking forward to setting realistic but challenging goals to make sure our students are moving in the right direction."