Iowa Students Having Fun While Learning 21st Century Skills

Tipton School District integrates technology literacy into existing curriculum using EasyTech by Learning.com

It took less than three years for Tipton School District's server-based technology program, once considered state-of-the-art, to become obsolete in 2007. At about the same time, the state legislature added a 21st century skills requirement, including technology literacy, to the Iowa Core curriculum.

And so, the search began for a new provider of technology literacy curriculum for the district. Years of investigating and piloting different solutions finally resulted in Learning.com being chosen in 2012 to update the district's technology program while satisfying the new state standards, according to Dawn Siech, director of curriculum and instruction. Tipton uses Learning.com's digital literacy solution EasyTech, which integrates 21st century skills instruction into teachers' existing curriculum.

"There are fun games and activities embedded within the learning," Siech says. "It's not just 'Here's your home row; now type the letters.' Science, math, and language arts are embedded within digital literacy lessons, so the kids are learning how to manipulate a spreadsheet or Word document, while simultaneously developing literacy or math skills."

Tipton School District, located about 45 miles from Cedar Rapids, has 946 students in grades pre-K to 12. EasyTech is used by all K-8 students, who are learning more than how to point and click.

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"21st century technology use requires more than just word processing skills; it's about finding valid and reliable resources online, understanding online etiquette, knowing copyright laws, taking technology and applying it to different situations," Siech says. "In EasyTech, students are learning to find valid and reliable sources of information on the internet. That's an important part of the program."

Because EasyTech is web-based, lessons are continuously updated to reflect current topics such as digital citizenship, financial literacy and collaboration skills. Teachers can assign all content for a grade level, or modify lesson options based on pacing, students' prior knowledge or grade-specific content. Detailed reports enable administrators to monitor student use and achievement.

The program also enables teachers to immediately assist struggling students. "We had such a lag in our technology curriculum in the past, teachers noticed students were missing keyboarding skills," Siech says. "Now, EasyTech allows teachers to assign prescriptive keyboarding exercises to the students who need them."

The district's K-8 teachers were first introduced to EasyTech during the 2012-2013 school year, and by the start of the 2013-2014 school year, all teachers had been trained and had begun using it in classrooms, learning centers, or lab settings.

The ease with which the program could be integrated into existing curricula was a key part of the successful implementation. "Teachers said things like, 'This is manageable. I can fit this into my classroom schedule,'" Siech says.

It's too early for quantitative analysis of the Learning.com program, Siech says, but anecdotally, teachers have reported that students are enthusiastic about using the program, often choosing EasyTech over other games during free computer time, and even enjoying homework, as they can easily log in from home.

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"EasyTech is self-paced, so some kids might get through lessons more quickly than others, and that's OK," Siech says. "They can move on while other students are spending more time learning skills they don't have yet."

Use of EasyTech will broaden throughout the year, Siech says. The district plans to hold sessions for teachers to revise and re-view their EasyTech lessons, differentiate lessons for students and use reports to monitor implementation and student achievement even more effectively.

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.