

Less Catch-up, More Learning: EasyTech helps Boys & Girls Club students succeed with technology

Eastside Branch of the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington

Serves 1,800 youth each year

African American 50%

Multi-racial 13%

Caucasian 25%

Hispanic 6%

Asian 5%

Eva Henderson never knows who will show up in her computer lab, but whoever arrives, it's up to her to open their eyes to how technology can enrich their lives and improve their opportunities in the world.

Eva is the computer lab director for the Eastside branch of the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound, in south Tacoma, Washington. This Boys & Girls Club serves a diverse population of young people of all ages who arrive for summer and after school programs, and, based on grade level, gravitate to Eva's computer lab for lessons and free time on the computers. Equally diverse as their backgrounds are their skills in technology, from students who can whip out a presentation complete with interesting graphics to those who have yet to master their keyboarding skills.

Eva helps students progress through levels of technology skills using what she calls a "Stars" program – awarding brightly colored stars for each level of technology they master. She has a curriculum she follows to help them move through various technology skills, like computer navigation and keyboarding, and on to presentation programs like PowerPoint.

The challenge is helping students who arrive at the club with varying skill levels start with knowledge so Eva can provide instruction and engage them in activities she has planned. What works for her is EasyTech by Learning.com, a proven technology literacy curriculum for K-8

students that, because it is interactive and self-paced, is perfectly suited for after-school programs like Boys & Girls clubs.

"Unlike school, with the Boys & Girls Club we might not see the same students every day. It's a drop-in basis at our club. So because of that it's hard to teach consecutive lessons in the computer lab," says Eva.

"I appreciate that EasyTech is interactive. They see the lesson, then immediately get to apply what they just learned. And they do it inside a math lesson or a language arts lesson, so they get reinforcement of what they are learning at school."

– Eva Henderson
Computer Lab Director
Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound
Tacoma, WA

EasyTech, she says, works beautifully to help students learn the missing skills to stay with the group and take part in the lessons she teaches. Because EasyTech is divided into modules based on technology skill and by grade, students can jump right into the specific technology lesson they need, and feel successful.

The Web-delivered solution also supports students who don't have access to technology at home, she says. "Some of the kids don't have computers at home, or their computers are very slow. It's important for these students to get exposure to technology because it helps level the playing field. Learning technology skills helps with bridging that divide so everyone has the opportunity to use technology," she says. "Technology is what we're using – for work and for school."

The funding for EasyTech came from a private donor who saw the importance in providing the students at the club with the technology skills to help them be successful in school and in life.

Engaging and Relevant

Eva also is particularly pleased that EasyTech does not merely demonstrate technology skills that students just repeat, but rather takes students into real-world situations that they find relevant and engaging, and that reinforce their math, science, language arts and social studies skills. For example, they may help a character in the lesson edit a newspaper story, using their word processing skills along with language arts skills.

"They're not just sitting and listening to a tutorial on a computer," she says. "I appreciate that EasyTech is interactive. They see the lesson, then immediately get to apply what they just learned. And they do it inside a math lesson or a language arts lesson, so they get reinforcement of what they are learning at school."

Eva also finds EasyTech to be particularly well designed to be age appropriate. For example, kindergarten-aged students take short lessons, and older students get longer and more challenging lessons.

Eva regularly sees students getting excellent instruction in technology skills they will use in their class work in school.

"I was teaching second and third graders about PowerPoint recently. I used an EasyTech activity to get them to practice on their own. Then, during our open lab time I saw some of the students going right into PowerPoint and applying what they had learned in EasyTech to make really great things by themselves.

"Sometimes, in my own lessons to students, I may not hit all the points that EasyTech covers, and I will see them doing a certain skill and I ask about it. They tell me they learned it using EasyTech," she says. "It might be a small thing, like changing a background in a presentation, but I know EasyTech is working."

Making the teacher's job easier

Eva knows EasyTech makes her job easier. "Because the same kids are not here everyday, and because it's an after-school program, I am able to expose more kids to technology and still keep the flow of the lab going with EasyTech. Kids get caught up. They feel successful with EasyTech."

Eva, who first discovered EasyTech many years ago as a technology teacher in Texas, says she's "stayed excited about it over the years. It's a great way to bring technology to all students at their level, and in a fun, interactive way."

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