

North Penn Had the Technology Equipment - So What Next?

EasyTech provides teachers with the means to integrate technology into their teaching, and TechLiteracy Assessment gave them the data to understand how well their students were doing

North Penn School District
Lansdale, PA
17 schools
13,000 students

White
73%

African American
7%

Hispanic
3%

Asian Pacific Islander
17%

North Penn School District had the classic challenges: an influx of wonderful technology tools, a district-wide commitment to help its students get the technology skills they need, but no cohesive plan for how to integrate those new technology tools into the instructional day.

The suburban school district, located just 30 miles north outside Philadelphia, received a significant upgrade four years ago in the amount and quality of technology equipment it had, including upgraded technology labs and some laptop carts with wireless connectivity for buildings. The result was a lot of great equipment.

“Four years ago, North Penn rolled out a large amount of computers. We had the equipment, and we asked ourselves now how do we best enhance student computer literacy skills? We needed to find something that would lead the students to learn with technology,” says Stormy Vogel, North Penn School District learning coordinator.

EasyTech is the solution

Enter EasyTech, the technology literacy curriculum by Learning.com that not only provides instruction in critical technology skills but also provides that technology instruction within the context of core curriculum lessons and activities. The district is now in its fourth year of using EasyTech throughout the district – and every child, grades one through six, receives at least 30 minutes each week in EasyTech’s interactive, self-paced lessons.

To help teachers incorporate technology into what they were doing, the district started with EasySets, the built-in tool within EasyTech that lets teachers, with the click of a mouse, assign a full year’s worth of curriculum to ensure students cover all the critical skills they need for their grade level.

“Teachers valued the EasySets because they knew they weren’t repeating what other grades were covering, and it made it simple for them to get started,” Vogel says.

The district also named a teacher in each building as that school’s EasyTech mentor; some teachers volunteered and some were appointed. All were responsible for supporting teachers with EasyTech curriculum and technology-related questions, providing in-service for their staff, and offering technology integration tips via email.

“For teachers, it’s extremely helpful to have someone right in your building when you have a question,” she says.

What the data told North Penn

After three years of using EasyTech, the district believed that students were progressing in their technology skills, but had no real data to prove it. They then turned to Learning.com’s TechLiteracy Assessment, a criterion-referenced assessment that measures and reports students’ technology skills and knowledge.

“We really didn’t know if EasyTech was working” Vogel says. After one season of testing, the district has validated that the program was making a measurable difference in students’ technology skills.

“We administered the assessment in spring 2007 to every sixth-grade student. Eighty-eight percent of the district’s sixth-grade students met proficiency, according to the NETS standards, and every elementary school scored 236 or above.” To meet proficiency, schools had to attain a score of 220. Scores ranged from 236 – 260.

Best of all, the district learned from the TechLiteracy Assessment data those students who were not reaching proficiency in technology, and could report that to the principals, who could then support teachers and students with intervention or more focused instruction.

Teachers also saw the assessment as a motivator “because they could now see that their students were by and large proficient – that what they were doing was working, so they are appreciating EasyTech and using technology in their instruction more,” Vogel says.

Interestingly, teachers generally thought students would do well in their presentation skills, but the TechLiteracy Assessment revealed that was the weakest area for students overall in the district, and while still proficient in that category, students were performing the least well there, and had room for improvement.

“It helped our teachers see that, while students knew the basics to put together a presentation, they didn’t know everything about PowerPoint, or how best to create an effective presentation,” Vogel says.

Business teachers were finding students already knew basic technology skills ...”so we now have more time for deeper-level business instruction.”

*- Stormy Vogel,
North Penn School District Learning Coordinator*

Vogel also sees the data as a way to inform instruction and develop course design.

“Our seventh grade business teachers were telling us that students were coming to them already knowing much of what they were going to cover,” Vogel says. “Because of EasyTech and our emphasis on regular technology time for every student, students were exposed to word processing and presentation skills earlier than seventh grade. The business teachers found they don’t have to spend as much time in these areas as they used to, so they now have more time for deeper-level business instruction.”

“Next we sat down to do a curriculum review and from that review, the teachers expect to increase the rigor of what they are teaching.”

Vogel is pleased to have an effective way for teachers to use the technology the district is so fortunate to have, and is even more delighted that the data show students are gaining the skills they need to be successful in critical technology skills they will need their whole lives.

“EasyTech makes it possible for every student to receive technology literacy skills, and many teachers are reinforcing those skills in the classroom. Technology is not going to go away. It’s part of their lives, and it’s so beneficial to get this training at school at an early age,” Vogel says.