

Florida teachers get smart about technology and professional development credit with EasyTech

Originally put in place to support teachers to integrate technology into their core instruction, Osceola finds EasyTech has power to help teachers learn new skills for themselves

Osceola County School District
Kissimmee, FL

39 schools
55,335 students

Hispanic
49.9 %

White
32%

African American
10.3%

Multiracial
4.9%

Asian, Pacific Islander
2.5%

When the Osceola County School District began using EasyTech in 2001, its staff was delighted to have found an engaging technology literacy curriculum to help its K-8 teachers integrate technology into their core instruction. EasyTech also helped the district demonstrate student achievement in state and national technology standards, and helped enrich learning experiences for its young learners.

What they didn't immediately realize was that the award-winning EasyTech could serve a dual purpose for the district: helping support teachers to learn and improve their own technology skills, and earn professional development credit at the same time.

EasyTech provides teachers with an easy-to-use tool to integrate technology into their math, science, language arts and social studies curricula. Its lessons are scoped and sequenced and provide students with the technology skills they need, for example, to create pie charts in spreadsheets to understand fractions of a whole, organize data in a table or graph, or outline writing assignments using visual mapping software.

What was eye-opening for the district, however, was that the EasyTech lessons provided an excellent vehicle for teachers to learn these same technology skills, especially important for many of the faculty who had never had a way to master the technology, let alone feel comfortable enough to use it in their own teaching.

Osceola's Technology Resource Specialist Judy Edge came up with the idea of using EasyTech to create a technology training program just for teachers. With more than a decade and a half of experience in education, Edge knew that EasyTech's simple-to-learn design would appeal to teachers.

Additionally, teachers often feel overwhelmed by the federal and state standards that require educators to fulfill increasing technology training requirements. Florida now requires teachers to complete an inventory that shows their technology proficiency. If they fail to meet requirements, the district is required to provide remediation.

"EasyTech will be one of the means for remediation (for those teachers who do not meet the state's technology requirements). We're happy to give them a really great option. In fact, we encourage our teachers to take the EasyTech lessons and quizzes before their test," says Edge.

Flexibility in Instruction

Edge found teachers were pleased to take EasyTech to meet their professional development requirements and to help them learn new technology skills. Because its lessons are self-paced, interactive tutorials, teachers can take the lessons whenever they have time. Because EasyTech is Web-delivered, it's available to teachers at school or at home so there are no restrictions to when they can slip in that professional development time.

"Teachers love it because they can use EasyTech at 2 o'clock in the morning on Saturday in their pajamas," says Edge.

Edge also found using EasyTech simple to manage as a professional development option, thanks to – what else? – technology. Edge used the same eight modules in EasyTech to create categories for professional development credit – Computer Basics, Word Processing, Web Browsing, Spreadsheets, Visual Mapping, Presentation Software, Databases, and HTML Basics. She posts the EasyTech modules on the district Intranet for staff members to complete at their own pace. The point value for each EasyTech professional development module is:

	Module	No. of Lessons	Point Value
1.	Computer Basics	23	7
2.	Word Processing	12	5
3.	Web Browsing	8	4
4.	Spreadsheets	16	5
5.	Visual Mapping	4	2
6.	Presentation Software	9	4
7.	HTML Basics	6	2
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE			32

Success!

In the years since Osceola implemented EasyTech as a key professional development tool, Edge sees EasyTech continuing to play an important role in professional development as a support tool for teachers who don't know how to use specific technology tools. Often, because they have been in the profession for many years, they have had not had opportunities to have exposure, for example, to basic html or spreadsheets. She is delighted to have it as a resource to support her educators to improve.

While Edge has found many younger teachers starting employment with the district are comfortable with email and word processing, not all are fully ready to integrate a broad array of technology skills into their curriculum. EasyTech supports those teachers to improve in areas they don't already know, and to easily have scoped and sequenced lessons and activities at the ready.

“Teachers have to learn and teach technology skills, then implement and extend them into actual class work. Using EasyTech to give teachers the ability to teach better and fulfill professional development requirements was the perfect solution.”

– Judy Edge
Technology Resource Specialist
Osceola County School District, Florida

Edge also finds EasyTech a valuable tool to help newly hired teachers be ready for the Florida technology skills test. For example, when the district hires new teachers, they take the skills inventory test, and Edge uses the results to point them to specific EasyTech lessons in the areas in which they need to improve.

Most important, Edge sees teachers across the district starting to understand and use technology both for their own tasks, as well as with their students.

“Now when I say ‘just send this to me in an attachment,’ they know what I’m talking about. They know how to use email. They use word processing to type out an assignment instead of handwriting it,” says Edge. “That’s a big shift from when we started with EasyTech.”

Getting that confidence by using it on their own time also results in using digital resources more often in the classroom, Edge notes. She has noticed her middle school teachers are particularly making good use of technology and EasyTech’s engaging lessons and activities in the classroom.

“EasyTech has given them confidence to use technology, and to feel comfortable using it in their classroom. They use it for their own lesson plans, and to integrate technology into what they’re doing. I see a big shift in teachers definitely being more comfortable with it, and willing to try something new.”

And, they get those professional development points, too.