

# Teachers Support Each Other to Integrate Technology

*Florida’s Polk County Sees Technology Becoming Embedded in Curriculum as Teachers Increasingly Use EasyTech*

**DISTRICT PROFILE:**  
93,000 students  
149 schools

White  
55%

African American  
23%

Hispanic  
20%

When Polk County created a cadre of teachers who were willing to coach and support fellow teachers in ways to integrate technology into their curriculum, it started with just 12 individuals. That was in 2003. Now, that number has grown to more than 200 trained teachers.

Those teachers, along with district leaders, recognize how important it is to support students to gain critical technology skills, and to also support teachers to master those same technology skills.

The tool Polk County used to spearhead this effort is Learning.com’s EasyTech, a proven, Web-delivered technology literacy curriculum that supports teachers to easily and effectively integrate technology into their math, science, language arts and reading curricula.

“We feel we are at a tipping point where technology is not looked at as a separate entity in the curriculum,” says Dawn Mulder, one of the district’s Technology Specialist Trainers. “Technology is becoming embedded in every content area. It’s exciting, and our students benefit from this change.”

Polk County, the eighth largest district in Florida, uses EasyTech in 17 elementary schools, 10 middle schools and four private schools that are under the Polk County umbrella of schools. It chose to implement EasyTech in 2003 because the district wanted to provide its teachers with a way to effectively teach technology skills and to make technology integral in their teaching, allowing them to apply those skills within core curriculum.

“EasyTech goes beyond teaching skills. It also applies those skills to actual projects,” says Virginia

Richard, also a Technology Specialist Trainer with the district, and the lead on implementing EasyTech in 2003. She appreciates that EasyTech’s interactive Web-delivered lessons build foundational technology skills, and give students opportunities to apply that technology to what they are learning in core subject areas. EasyTech also models for teachers how to effectively integrate technology into their lessons.

It is also important to Polk that EasyTech is aligned with ISTE-NETS, and to state and national standards for both technology and core subject areas so it does not create additional work for educators striving to integrate technology into their instructional day.

## Effective Technology Integration

Mulder is impressed with the number of teachers anticipating and planning how to incorporate technology into their curriculum. She says teachers are planning what technology tools they will use in a unit, taking the lessons themselves to get the skill, then have students learn or practice that technology skill with EasyTech when in the computer labs. Then when the students are back in the classroom, they are ready to go on activities that include technology, and both the teacher and the student can feel confident.

“No one can afford to teach the technology skills in isolation. There isn’t time,” says Mulder. Just as important, she says, “The value is in applying the technology skill within the content areas through projects. We want our students to be regularly engaged in activities that would have been impossible to achieve without technology.”

For example, at Crystal Lake Middle School, Mark Schuh wanted the students to design their own solar system based on the principles they had studied together. Students first took EasyTech's lessons that provide instruction in graphics and presentation software within engaging lessons that allow them to solve fun and challenging real-world problems while practicing the technology skills they are learning. Then Schuh brought them back together to talk about what they learned, modeled for them how to create a solar system using the graphics and presentation technology, showed them examples of past student work, and let them loose to make their own new worlds.

"They learned a new tool to complete the project in a way they had not done before. The technology tool had purpose. Students were not all sitting at a computer and completing a lesson; they were applying their new knowledge within the lesson, making a connection to their learning, and creating a product," says Mulder.

When Boone Middle School teacher Scott Reynolds presents his unit on weather studies, students first use EasyTech to learn or refresh their spreadsheet software skills. More than merely a tutorial on spreadsheet skills, EasyTech provides valuable lessons and activities his students find relevant and support his core subject instruction. When students have honed their spreadsheet skills and grasp how to apply those skills in EasyTech's activities, they then collect weather data and put that data into spreadsheets.

"I really like EasyTech and I feel it is a wonderful tool," says Reynolds, whose school is 81% free-and-reduced lunch, and has a high population of ELL students. He is especially pleased that all his students, regardless of access to technology at home, have the ability to learn critical technology skills at school, giving them the same skills as students who do have computers at home.

### Supporting Professional Development

EasyTech also gives the district an effective tool to support those teachers who need to learn or brush up on their technology skills.

"Teachers are able to go into EasyTech, complete the technology lessons themselves to get the knowledge, and feel confident about including that technology in their curriculum planning," says Mulder.

Polk also uses EasyTech's lessons to support teachers as a remediation tool. Teachers who are not able to pass the state's technology standards requirements can go to the corresponding lessons in EasyTech to gain those skills, then go back to retake the state's Inventory of Teacher Technology Skills (ITTS).

### Looking to the Future

Polk County is now implementing EasyTech in all its middle schools specifically to prepare students for the 2008 No Child Left Behind Act's requirement for technology proficiency in eighth grade. The district also will continue its model technology teacher and technology coaching programs.

"As those teachers have seen the benefits, and how EasyTech fits into their curriculum, they continue to request it each year," Mulder says. "That demonstrates its success in helping us meet our students' and our teachers' needs."

### Working Safely on the Web

Dawn Mulder appreciates that EasyTech provides teachers with ways to guide students through how to appropriately and safely use technology, particularly Web-based information.

"Students' access to technology increases every day. We need to teach them how to navigate through all that information," Mulder says. While they may embrace the new tools, "they don't come equipped with the understanding of how to work ethically or to interact online. Educators need to model that, discuss it, and provide opportunities for students to manage information and effectively communicate online within the school setting." EasyTech provides the structure and content to help launch these kinds of conversations, she adds.

In one elementary school in which a student e-mail program was implemented, the school's fourth and fifth grade students went through EasyTech's lessons on e-mail to prepare them to use it for classroom-based projects. "They understood the components of e-mail and could use it more effectively," Mulder says.