East Troy School District Students, Staff Embracing Digital Technology

As technology continues to advance and become a more important part of the lives of students outside of the classroom, it is becoming increasingly important for school districts to find ways to incorporate it inside the classroom. Within the last several years, East Troy School District has made some significant upgrades to the digital technology throughout its schools

"I think digital media has really permeated all areas of education, especially here at East Troy, which is a great thing!" said Justin Modrak, District IT Manager. "The evolution of digital media constantly allows new learning opportunities, which also means districts need to be fluid enough to evaluate and integrate new technology as it becomes available or affordable."

At the beginning of this school year, the ETSD implemented 1:1 and 2:1 devices throughout the district. The high school and middle school now have 1:1 Dell Chromebooks, which are taken home and used by students, as well as 1:1 Acer C720 Chromebooks at Prairie View Elementary. At Doubek Elementary, the district incorporated 2:1 Samsung Galaxy tablets for every classroom. This summer, the distict added 26 smartboards and interactive Smart e70 flat panels. In addition to the new devices, ETSD upgraded its wireless infrastructure to be able to handle the density of all the new technology being brought in to the schools.

Last year, the district added two Makerbot Replicator 3D printers to the High School's technical education lab. Students are now able to create and design 3D renderings and compose them to a finished physical product.

"The whole process [of 3D printing] exposes students to many different disciplines from concept to the physical finished product," said Modrak. "The remarkable aspect is that East Troy understands the importance of each student having access to this supportive equipment and is strategically planning learning environments that are not optional, but rather; a need."

Claudia Felske, the District Technology Integration Specialist and High School English teacher (who was also named 2011 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year), said the new technology has benefitted teachers just as much as the students.

"Teachers regularly remark on the class time saved every time they don't need to travel to a computer lab and wait for all the students to boot up," she said. "This impact cannot be overemphasized; even five minutes saved per class is 900 minutes, or 15 hours of student learning for that class alone."

Meanwhile, she says students benefit from having instant access to valuable online resources and learning opportunities.

"The internet has become an immediate reference that complements their learning," she said. "It's not something that's to be used occasionally when labs are available, but on demand when the learning dictates. It's increased students' abilities to collaborate on shared documents and

presentations, to connect with experts and learners outside the classroom, to receive immediate feedback on their work and to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways."

Having this sort of access for all students at school, and giving students the ability to take home their devices, also closes the "digital divide" that is often present in school districts. In some cases, not all students have the same sort of access to the internet and technology, but now all students can use technology in their learning for the same benefits.

Moving forward, ETSD hopes to continue to keep pace with technological advancements to provide students with the best possible learning opportunities.

"We need to be open to new ideas and new technologies and not stagnate," said Modrak. "Technology shouldn't limit or define our curriculum; our curriculum should define which technology will be the most effective tool for student learning and achievement."

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