School District Best Practices

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Nguyen Bui was facing outdated projectors, expensive bulb replacements, and the need to build a stronger network infrastructure to support 1:1 student devices. His role as Executive Director of Technology Innovation and Initiatives partnered him with Akilah Willery, Executive Director of Instruction Technology Integration at Aldine Independent School District (ISD).

Aldine ISD serves over 68,000 students in more than 70 K-12 schools. After the district received a bond earmarked for the construction of new schools, renovations, and enhancements, Bui and Willery worked with an outside party to conduct a district-wide technology survey. Results from the survey made it clear that it was time to update their technology to the level of neighboring districts.

Transforming Classroom Technology and Curriculum

There was no district-wide standard at the time of the recommendation, and Aldine ISD used a mixture of projectors and TVs. "Projectors are very expensive to maintain and sometimes teachers had to turn off the lights to make it easier for students to view images," said Bui.

The district understood that they would need to conduct extensive research to ensure that this update was done correctly. "We traveled to conferences and made connections with districts across the country," said Willery. "We were also questioning whether a 1:1 environment was right for us. It was the attractive option for us in terms of how easy it would be to secure funding for the initiative, but we were still questioning if it would result in true innovation in instruction, such as personalized, student-centered lessons. We wanted to ensure that it would truly make an impact for our teachers rather than just substituting one tool for another."

For the district to move forward with a 1:1 initiative, they needed to create an environment that supported digital learning. "Devices would have been rendered useless without a rich digital foundation," said Bui. "Also, our teachers needed to be exposed to and trained on new instructional methodologies and pedagogy."

The district's technology leaders created a five-year plan that aligned with Aldine ISD's $798 million bond to renovate and enhance the district's classrooms to meet its growth needs. The five-year plan focused on five key areas:

1. Hardware and Infrastructure: Providing access to new technology and strengthen the network to support a 1:1 initiative.

2. Digital Content & Curriculum Resources: Enabling access to high-quality digital content and curriculum that are interactive, easily customizable based on student and teacher needs, and available 24/7.

3. Professional Development: Offering professional development through multiple means, such as workshops, after-school webinars, webcasts, and hosting Aldine's annual Technology and Curriculum Conference of Aldine (TCCA).

4. Curriculum and Integration (C&I) Innovation Coaches: Transforming Instructional Technology Specialists into Technology Innovation Coaches that focus on integrating curriculum into new technology.

5. Innovate Academy: Partnering with a principal and teacher from each school to help other teachers understand the benefits of digital learning and eventually adopt new classroom technology.

Evaluating Classroom Technology

As the district began assessing different types of classroom technology, Bui and Willery worked with a group of school principals, teachers, and the district's C&I Innovation Coaches to test many products and attend tradeshows to gather best practices and ideas.

Aldine traveled to TCEA Convention & Exposition, a national event that attracts thousands of educators who are interested in securing best practices to engage students, enhance curriculum, and increase teacher productivity. After attending TCEA, the district piloted a program that gave teachers access to Wi-Fi, an interactive flat panel display, and a mobile device on a trial basis to see if it changed the way they approached instruction. Teachers involved in the pilot program used interactive flat panel displays from several different companies, but in the end, Promethean® offered exactly what the district needed: an interactive flat panel display that works with new and existing technology and that can change the dynamic of instruction in the classroom.

Technology Implementation & Professional Development

After deciding to move forward with Promethean, Willery recalled, "We took bits of what we learned from other districts and created a plan to implement the new technology, strengthen the network infrastructure, and update the curriculum."

Since installing Promethean's ActivPanel™ throughout the district, Bui and Willery received a lot of positive feedback from teachers. "Hearing that students are getting out of their seats and interacting with the ActivPanel is the most exciting part of the implementation," said Willery. The students often work in small groups and interact with the ActivPanel to accomplish something that they wouldn't have been able to do in the past.

Now, the district is updating curriculum. Aldine puts a heavy emphasis on professional development. "We make sure that our teachers never have to go outside the district or outside of their campus to find the training and support that they need," said Willery. However, it was important for the district to update how professional development was implemented to avoid using old practices with new equipment.

"We worked with Promethean to restructure our professional development," recalled Willery. "Instead of hosting the same afterschool or weekend workshops, we decided to offer our trainings online through our learning management system."

In addition to online trainings, teachers have access to instructional technology specialists that are trained by Promethean's Professional Development team and are available on-site at each school to troubleshoot any problems that may arise.

Aldine ISD is halfway through their five-year plan, and they are continuing to refine their professional development plan to ensure that their teachers are not only comfortable using the Promethean ActivPanel in their classroom but are also continuing to integrate the new classroom technology into their curriculum. The district continues to partner with Promethean to ensure that by the end of their five-year plan, Aldine meets its goal of enhancing the districts classrooms to meet its growing community.

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