

Outsourced Educational Technology Management

Discover how top school districts are advancing 21st century learning.



With Questeq, advancements in a district's use of technology to boost personalized student achievement and growth are possible regardless of the district's transformation starting point.



Curriculum Leads North Hill's Digital Transformation

Challenge

In the North Hills School District (NHSD), where 96% of students go on to attend college, the challenge is to steadily advance student achievement with district-built "bookless" digital curricula, while keeping a future eye toward a full 1-to-1 personalized learning environment implementation.

Action

The district had previously launched a successful online academy, and in the years since had steadily added to a core online and blended digital curricula. To advance its "bookless" vision going forward, NHSD needed to move simultaneously on multiple fronts. Integral to it all, NHSD's curriculum team prioritized and continued building new digital curricula. At the same time senior administration formalized a digital professional development program for district educators. And, a newly outsourced IT team built the procedures, staff, infrastructure and focus on customer service to enable the ever-progressing technology transformation.

Results

NHSD's online academy now has its own successful enrollment, and has "flat-lined" exits from the district by students opting for area cyber schools. Students can receive a NHSD diploma from the online academy. "Bookless" digital curricula are now blended across the online academy and the district's brick and mortar buildings. Educators, fueled by regular professional development, continue to find new ways to enhance student engagement with digital learning. Even with all of the changes, the IT infrastructure has been reliable, enabling educators to concentrate on educating without little worry about technology performance. And, the entire team is now focusing on its next set of transformational priorities including full district-wide 1-to-1 personalized learning.

About the North Hills School District:

Current Enrollment: 4,240 students, 24% on reduced or free lunch

District Size: AAAA*

* "AAAA" is the state of PA's largest school rating. In the case of football, AAAA or "Quad A" stands for school districts with total male population, grades 9, 10 and 11 of 506 or higher.

Behind-the-scenes of this successful case study there is a story of the district leadership's successful pilot of digital curricula in its online school. There is also the role that dedicated district educators played in digital curriculum development. Just as important is the role that the district leadership played in establishing real professional development. Also critical to success, is the story of IT outsourcing bringing process definition, IT staff realignment, and customer service prioritization. The "rest of the story" will provide the reader with a little more insight into the on-going solution.

The Rest of the Story

Over the years, North Hills successfully developed culture where digital curriculum led the district's digital transformation—something difficult for many districts to achieve.

But, behind-the-scenes of this successful case study there is a story of the district leadership's successful pilot of digital curricula in its online school. There is also the role that dedicated district educators played in digital curriculum development. Just as important is the role that the district leadership played in establishing real professional development. Also critical to success, is the story of IT outsourcing bringing process definition, IT staff realignment, and customer service prioritization. The "rest of the story" will provide the reader with a little more insight into the on-going solution

Online Academy Launches the Curriculum-Building Culture

The decision for NHSD to offer an online academy multiple years ago was right for a number of reasons, not the least of which was to stem the erosion in state funding tied to the exodus of students to area cyber schools. This decision, and the resulting "bookless" biology curriculum that led to "bookless" social studies, ultimately led to a culture of developing digital learning across online and brick and mortar offerings. And, students can now take required courses online to graduate with a NHSD diploma from its online academy.



Moving to 1-to-1 with Apple iPad with E-Reader Decision

The online academy opened with each enrolled student receiving an Apple computer. As the digital curricula spread to the brick and mortar schools in the district, district educators made a case to purchase iPads with E-Reader capability, and completed a successful blended classroom digital learning pilot. The success of those early pilots and the recent launch of iBooks Author made it easier to create digital books, and the vision was set for iPads with E-Reader as part of a soon-to-come 1-to-1 district wide initiative.

Leading a Collaboration with IU/Other Schools

NHSD shared its experience in curricula development, joining and providing leadership to a team comprised of the area's Intermediate Unit (IU) and area districts. The resulting jointly developed digital algebra curriculum validated NHSD's advanced approach, and enabled NHSD and other districts to more rapidly develop another highly engaging digital curricula.

Teachers Willing to Put in the Time

The curricula changes were encouraged from the top down, but would never have been so successful without the dedication of a core team of district educators willing to build digital curricula, and then take the time to pilot and further mold it into a truly engaging product.

Help from Educational Technology Management Outsourcing

All of these moves to digital teaching and learning led NHSD to engage in an outsourced technology management solution with Questeq. This solution enabled NHSD to keep its employees working in the district, save significant variable staffing costs, and gain the experience of IT best practices developed across dozens of transforming school districts. Some of the first efforts of the Questeq/NHSD IT team are defined in the New Processes and Staff Re-alignment sections below.

New Processes New Responsibility

Clearly NHSD IT staff members had escalating responsibility in the midst of the districts ever-progressing technological transformation. It became necessary to define some new processes, including:

- Definition of the areas that technical support must cover, specifically:
 - Network
 - Systems and Foundational Applications
 - Administrative Applications

- Instructional Applications
 - Multimedia Assets
 - Computer/Peripheral Assets
 - Budget
- A new tiered escalation procedure allowing for more efficient routing of IT help-needed tickets based on functional areas of support and on staff level of skill.
 - Implementation of a technology help desk. This service and software solution introduced a structured method of fielding and tracking technology issues in a comprehensive, structured way.
 - Establishment of a technology management lifecycle, clearly setting a timeline that an evaluation of new technology must follow.
 - Formalizing a digital asset lifecycle. Existing assets are put on a regular schedule of upgrades until such time that they needed to be replaced with new assets.

IT Staff Realignment

The transition to district-wide digital delivery necessarily changed the roles of an IT staff that was built to support the traditional legacy IT environment. Partnering with Questeq, the NHSD IT team re-defined each staff member's role in the transitional process and gave each person a new job description that was based on functional areas of support and level of skill.

IT Decisions Based on Customer Service Prioritization

The decision for the IT Department to become a dedicated customer service-providing entity is another part of the vision that helped the NHSD transformation become successful. The goal is to let educators focus on educating, not the technology. The constructs of tiered escalation, helpdesk, and technology lifecycle procedures all serve as mechanisms to create a positive educator/administrative/customer experience with the IT Department.

Professional Development Becomes a Culture Cornerstone

Administration, IT department, educators and students all contribute to making the NHSD digital "ecosystem" work. But none are any more important than the professional development system put in place by the superintendent and team. Every NHSD educator takes two CE digital delivery classes per year. And, teachers are organized into cohort groups that share experiences learned by teaching digital curricula across multiple grade levels.

Results

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