Professional Development for a New Learning Management System

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Description of the Capstone Experience and Results

Across the nation, teachers are expected to participate in professional development in to meet the needs of 21st century learners. Adairsville Middle School values the use of technology as a tool to enhance student learning and increase student engagement across the curriculum. Unfortunately, teachers at Adairsville Middle received new technology and software without proper training, which led to a technology gap in which many teachers felt left behind. The goal of this capstone project was to assist the teachers at Adairsville Middle School in the use of a new learning management system, and using it efficiently and effectively to enhance student learning. This capstone project will greatly benefit the students and teachers at Adairsville Middle School while directly addressing goals in our Student Improvement Plan.

Adairsville Middle School has seen numerous technology-related changes in the past five years. In 2013, the school underwent a 1:1 initiative in which all students received a MacBook Air. At the same time, Bartow County purchased Blackboard, a learning management system designed to assist and enrich the 1:1 initiative. In 2017, Bartow County replaced Blackboard with Schoology, a different learning management system. Also in 2017, Bartow County replaced all MacBook laptops with Dell laptops. Unfortunately, teachers did not receive any type of coaching or training on the uses of the new learning management system, and were additionally faced with learning a new operating system and laptop. This capstone project was designed to meet professional development needs for Adairsville Middle School teachers concerning the new learning management system, Schoology. The project began in May 2017 and included a series of technology-related professional development session based on the use of the new learning management system to enhance and improve student learning. Professional development sessions were held during required grade-level meetings and one-to-one sessions.

The capstone project was designed to address the issue of some teachers becoming resistant toward the use of technology. Teachers were not trained on the new learning management system prior to its implementation. Watson (2006) states, "Research indicated that the level of a teacher's computer and internet self-efficacy also affects student achievement and self-efficacy" (p. 155). Many teachers felt as if they were learning the program along with the students and several were just not willing to take the time to learn yet another new program. If teachers are not proficient with the new learning management system, they are not only handicapping themselves, but also their students. Cifuentes, Maxwell, and Bulu (2011) note that professional development is necessary because simply using technologies in schools does not positively impact student achievement. Addressing this need will help teachers create a more blended-learning environment that allows for more rigorous and relevant lessons.

Before designing the training, a needs assessment survey was sent to all eighth-grade staff members. The survey was designed for teachers to rate themselves regarding their use of the new learning management system and included the following: (1) On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate yourself on the use of Schoology in the classroom? (2) On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate yourself on the following: I need training on how to incorporate Schoology into my classroom; I feel prepared to incorporate Schoology into my classroom; I know I can use Schoology to create and manage discussion boards; I know how to create student-lead activities in Schoology. (3) Please list, in order of importance, three topics you would like to see presented in professional development sessions. (4) List any limitations/weaknesses you have regarding the use of Schoology. Responses helped to guide the direction of the training sessions by addressing teachers' most important needs.

The needs assessment survey was distributed in May 2017. The survey showed teachers were not as confident in using Schoology, as they were used to Blackboard. The survey results indicated that the staff would rate their level of proficiency with Schoology as a C (on a grade scale of A-F). Using Schoology for discussion posts and synching Schoology's gradebook to PowerSchool were addressed as areas of concern. Below is a potion of the survey results from the short response questions regarding topics and areas of weakness:

List any limitations/weaknesses while using Schoology	
I have no idea how to use it because I'm new to the school	
synching grades to Powerschool	
Discussion boards	
Teaching the kids how to use it when I don't know how myself	
making tests and quizzes	
using discussion boards	

Please list in order of importance THREE topics you would to see discussed.			
discussion boards			
collaboration using Schoology			
Using discussion boards, how to track data, adding video links			
transferring grades to powerschool			
general Schoology setup, how to use in a math class			
How Schoology and Pschool work with each other, discussion posts			
using Schoology in general, how to share items with other teachers			

After receiving the results of the needs assessment, a meeting was held with administration and the county technology specialist for middle and high schools to discuss the results and plan for professional development sessions. The goal of the capstone was to demonstrate how to effectively implement Schoology's features into classrooms. Modeling the use of Schoology and delivering professional development sessions during grade-level meetings was the decided course of action, with one-to-one coaching sessions offered as needed. Agendas,

tutorials, and screencasts were uploaded to the Adairsville Middle School Schoology page as well as One Drive, so teachers could access materials from any computer at any time.

Training sessions began during pre-planning in July 2017 with a brief session that introduced the purpose of the capstone. Once school began in August 2017, sessions were conducted once per month during grade level meetings. Each session lasted approximately 45 – 50 minutes. The original timeline spread out the training over the course of the school year, however, it was determined that shorter monthly sessions during the first half of the school year would be more beneficial to teachers. The sessions focused on the overall layout of Schoology, creating and monitoring discussion boards, how to enter grades and provide feedback to students through Schoology, and additional tools that can be used in conjunction with Schoology. One-on-one sessions were offered as needed when teachers had a specific question or concern.

The post survey was administered to teachers in December 2017 to evaluate the effectiveness of the trainings that had been given, and to provide feedback and suggestions for future sessions. Gaining feedback throughout the training helped to ensure that teacher needs were being addressed. Teachers were encouraged to share issues, strengths, and limitations throughout the training. The post survey results showed an overall increase in self-evaluation from the needs assessment survey. On a scale of 1-5, teachers ranked themselves 3.5 or above on all questions, which was a significant increase from the initial survey results in which they ranked themselves at an average of 2.4.

The administrators at Adairsville Middle School were pleased with the results of the training and coaching sessions. As of January 2018, teachers in other grade levels have begun to develop their own professional development sessions for topics they would like to cover for the current semester. Teachers are required to lead a professional development session as part of

their TKES evaluation. Some teachers have expressed that the implementation of this capstone project has inspired them to create their own technology-related professional development sessions.

Discussion/Reflection

After completing the capstone project, the candidate learned numerous things about the facilitation of technology and leadership. As the capstone project progressed, the candidate continued to grow as a technology leader and gained a deep understanding of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to be an effective technology leader. The candidate learned that strategic planning was imperative in order for the capstone to fully benefit teachers and lead to enhanced student learning. For successful professional development to be implemented, the candidate learned how to develop sessions that incorporated input from teachers. Creating and implementing the professional development sessions at Adairsville Middle School has led the candidate to a better understanding of what is required of a successful technology leader.

Utilizing the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) standards to guide the creation of professional development sessions was crucial. The candidate learned the importance of inspiring and participating in the development and implementation of a shared vision to promote and support change throughout the school. For effective technology learning to take place, the candidate learned to allow staff input to guide the topics covered during professional development sessions. The candidate anticipated in advance that the first session may not go as smoothly as planned, as it was clear that many teachers felt that the information being presented would not be beneficial to them or would be a waste of their time. The candidate learned that creating, contributing, and communicating a shared vision while also considering input from teachers lead to a more supportive environment for technology innovations. It is

essential that a good technology leader be able to adapt professional development session to fit faculty members' needs.

The capstone project allowed for the candidate to conduct needs assessment surveys, develop technology-related professional development sessions, and evaluate the impact of the sessions on instruction and student learning. An important aspect of facilitating technology awareness during the capstone involved clear communication between administrators, teachers, and the candidate. The candidate used knowledge of learning management systems to show teachers how to create effective, digital-age learning environments to maximize learning for all students. The candidate used surveys, observations, and feedback to guide the training sessions. The capstone project took more time than the candidate initial thought due to some teachers requesting one-on-one sessions, but the time spent working closely with teachers led to valuable technology coaching experience.

As a future technology coach, the candidate learned the importance of keeping a positive disposition throughout all interactions with teachers and administrators. Prior to the capstone implementation, most teachers held a negative view toward Schoology, as they saw it as one more technology-related item thrown at them without proper training. Knowing this in advance, the candidate knew that it would be necessary to push though the negative points of view and multiple levels of technology experience to show how Schoology would be beneficial and not a waste of time. By maintaining a positive attitude, teachers were able to see how the use of the learning management system could meet the needs of a diverse population of students through modules, discussion boards, scaffolding material, creating groups, and much more. Hearing teachers discuss Schoology outside of training sessions led the candidate to feel as though a positive impact had been made.

The candidate has advice to share for those who may consider addressing a similar issue within their school. First, it is essential to have a clear timeline to share with administrators prior to the implementation of the professional development. Conducting a needs assessment survey prior to designing training sessions will allow for tailoring the training to meet the real needs of teachers. It is important to maintain a positive disposition when dealing with teachers, but it is also important to remain realistic and be prepared to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the technology, instead of acting like it works perfectly every time. Allow time for teachers to vocalize their thoughts and feelings throughout the process. Finally, it is important to take into consideration the amount of time necessary for the project. Teachers' time is valuable, and therefore they are usually not willing to give up precious planning time for things that are not beneficial to them. Plan effectively and concisely, and value the time of those you are training. Technology leaders may face many challenges throughout their work, but remaining positive, planning effectively, and creating an inviting atmosphere in which teachers feel comfortable taking risks will lead to a rewarding experience for all.

References

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