



Case Study: Teacher Training

Issue

Adult education teachers have a wide range of skill levels and comfort when it comes to using technology in and out of the classroom. However, since computer-aided learning is a movement that will only continue to grow over time, technology products are critical to positive student outcomes.

Challenges

Hillsborough County Schools in western Florida, encompassing the city of Tampa and its surrounding suburbs, is the ninth largest school district in the United States. In addition to its K-12 mandate, Hillsborough offers adult, continuing, and technical education to upwards of 5,000 students across 70 different locations.

Since most of Hillsborough's adult education students are seeking pathways to a better job, basic technology skills are critical. In addition, the need to serve a widely dispersed student body makes online learning programs a key component.

However, as Willie Eller can attest, not all teachers are ready or willing to embrace new technologies. Eller is a teacher, trainer, and program coordinator for Hillsborough's Adult Education program.

"Students are generally receptive to the idea of an online program, but teachers find it challenging."

He knows first-hand that it takes more than overcoming teacher resistance – teachers need to actively embrace solutions in order to better serve their students. But how best to make that happen?

Solutions

In the test uses cases of Hillsborough and other schools, the most successful approach was two-pronged: teacher buy-in and teacher training.

"Once teachers saw that their students were receiving a benefit from it, they became more enthusiastic users," Eller said. He also cited the immediate value of curriculum presented in the context of a career pathway search as something that increased both teacher and student appeal.

Teacher training was also a key element of Hillsborough's successful implementation. However, Eller stresses that timing is key.

"Our first round of training was premature, and we probably spent another two months doing refresher trainings once we had the product up and running."

But beyond tool-specific training, a broader cultural shift toward the integration of learning and technology means that many teachers will need to build their own online skill set. This increases confidence and engagement in the classroom.

Students are already using computers for other aspects of their lives, including both leisure and work. Some teachers may be intimidated by technology, but it is

even more critical that they be given training and support. Some districts even go so far as to make trainings in general technology mandatory as a way of reaching resistant teachers. “Moving forward, we’re going to be in a computer-based learning environment,” Eller stresses. “That’s just the way it is.”

Benefits and Outcomes

Eller considers the training and adoption process for *Workforce Connects* to have been a success. To combat new program fatigue, Eller stresses the adoption of consistent tools from a vendor who will provide updates to keep the tools current.

“Giving teachers the best tools, and supporting their implementation, creates best practices,” Eller said.

Of the 100 teachers in *Workforce Connects*-enabled classrooms, he estimates that 20 use it daily and that number is rising as more teachers see the tangible benefits it has to students.

Teachers may need reinforcement that online learning tools are just that: tools. It is still the teacher in the classroom who is guiding students and opening up new possibilities to them.