

Shifting to a Culture of Student-Centered Learning Through Technology Integration

DISTRICT PROFILE

Metro Status: Suburban

Grades: 9–12

Total Enrollment: 2,700

Hispanic Population: 55%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 76%

ICLE COACH

Jill Bromenshenkel

“At the very beginning, some of the staff were reluctant to actively engage in what they considered another top-down strategy implementation. Our ICLE coach recognized this and began offering individual support sessions and tailoring the professional development to meet our needs.”

GOALS

- Create and grow a professional culture that gives leaders and teachers the confidence they need to leverage digital tools and leadership strategies to effectively impact and improve instruction.
- Think about instruction differently and become more student-centered in the approach while simultaneously using technology.
- Implement and use an instructional technology initiative to target student and teacher engagement.
- Build competency with technology with the aim of branding and communicating more effectively.

CHALLENGES

La Quinta High School had a general goal of incorporating digital leadership into the school and drawing on an investment in Chromebooks in 70% of the content areas, but it needed a plan that would understand its particular school character, its strengths, and its areas for improvement.

Partnering with ICLE in this initiative, it was clear from the start that addressing the resistance to technology and change was essential to structuring a truly successful integration of digital tools. Administrators and teachers cared deeply about learning and instruction, but all could not initially see the connection between moving forward digitally and improving instruction. Many teachers thought of classrooms as places where students should sit in rows and listened to top-down instruction. Technology in the schools was not part of the strategic plan or the day-to-day operations. “Siloed” and “anti-technology” were terms used to describe the teacher culture.

SOLUTION

ICLE recognized that no matter how skilled teachers were in using technology or engaging their students, they all believed that student needs come first. “How do we show we are all in this together?” and “How can technology positively impact student achievement?” became guiding questions for ICLE coaches and the leadership team, as they knew that a shift in perceptions and attitudes about instruction would lead to a shift in school culture. Digging down into the school’s belief system was essential to developing a customized program that would respond to the unique needs at La Quinta High School. The approach ICLE developed with the school leadership team included:

“The confidence that is building within our teachers is now manifesting itself into our own teachers sharing with and assisting one another.”

■ Create a collaborative, more open professional learning experience for adults

Through the structures of collaboration that ICLE introduced at La Quinta High School, and the readiness of the staff to adopt a new model, the school transformed into a Personal Learning Network (PLN) in which teachers saw one another as resources. One noticeable shift in teacher ownership occurred after an unconference-style professional learning day. The unconference day was a model of voice, choice, and relevance in learning, which resulted in rich conversations and opportunities for teachers to showcase digital integration across the school. As confidence grew, teachers began to attend group meetings around their own needs. They drew on such strategies as applying visible thinking routines in whole and small group collaboration and conducting walkthroughs in which they intentionally stop looking at how the teachers are behaving and switch to focusing on students, so it is not about teacher performance but about student learning.

■ Model student-centered learning experiences

Teachers at La Quinta High School brought their deep investment in student learning to all of the work they have done with ICLE. They learned that the tenants of student ownership are to: curate, collaborate, have choice, and connect. They were able to customize lesson samples to align with a clear learning outcome or goal. Personal devices, Chromebooks, and other technology have helped to the move the classroom from a teacher/student dichotomy to a group learning environment. The quality of thinking and interaction has grown. La Quinta reports that because students are sharing their work and thoughts publicly with each other, it has raised the bar in their types of answers and participation. This is evident across the campus.

“As a digital non-native, I was extremely cautious, afraid, and uninterested in moving in this direction... Our ICLE mentors have helped me understand the importance of integrating technology into my curriculum. I can now assess students at a higher DOK level, increase students’ technical reading, and offer opportunities for more in-class learning and collaboration.”

■ Empower leadership teams to model a culture of learning

Addressing La Quinta’s approach to leadership and format of faculty meetings, ICLE’s leadership coach modeled how to embed digital tools into professional learning. She also modeled how to use social media (#LQpride) to share ideas and information and interact with students and the community to tell the story of La Quinta High School. Building and instructional leaders began to see themselves as pacesetters for the new norms and practices, modeling and learning new tools, connecting digital practices to learning goals, showing that they are risk-takers, and offering teachers suggestions on tools to try.

■ Get buy-in from resisters to transform teaching and learning

ICLE gave teachers who were resistant to technology integration the space they needed to get accustomed to new approaches. Taking ownership of the new practices motivated them to overcome their fears and biases. Any small steps of success they had were honored and connected to student needs or the needs of their content. The more relevant the resisters saw their new skills to their day-to-day teaching, the more the walls came down. ICLE also worked to leverage the “top third” who were engaged and who could sway and support others. Eventually, the majority of the teachers began arriving with work in mind to transform or a digital site they had tried with students and wanted to explore further. Teachers who continued to have reservations or barriers to address were still supported, coached, and guided to sites and instructional solutions.



SUCCESS

A year ago, almost 40 percent of La Quinta High School teachers said they never used technology in their classrooms; that number is now only 3 percent. More teachers are using technology as instructional and communication tools, applying it for formative assessment, immediate feedback, student-sharing platforms, and extending from there to any number of other directions. Conversations around learning have become different. Teachers from various departments now gather to discuss “How can we improve learning in the classroom?” and tweet the occasion out to the community, reflecting a basic change in their identity as instructors and collaborators.

As a whole, the number of students in any given classroom who are participating and contributing has risen substantially. A year ago, approximately 50 percent of the student population was engaged at any given time. Now, at least 90 percent of students are actively engaged in academic content, language, and tasks.

Overall interaction and quality time spent with the targeted concepts have both significantly increased schoolwide. Classrooms are more alive with genuine collaboration between teachers and students, and among students themselves. For example, International Baccalaureate students are recording their oral responses and sending them to their teachers for review and evaluation. Students, also confident and ready to tap their network of peers, are quickly teaching each other the digital tools and then moving on to engage in the learning tasks at hand.

The overall mindset of the school has changed to one of growth and confidence. Teachers and leaders feel as though they can realistically set goals for technology integration and digital leadership for the 2016-2017 school year, with a focus on schoolwide collaboration, flipping lessons to provide more time in class for students to apply learning, and using platforms such as Google Classroom to enhance communication, collaboration, and co-creation. They are also learning to embrace digital strategies to enhance curriculum and provide greater opportunities for real-life connections and student achievement.

“Working with ICLE this year has changed the way I approach my classroom. Throughout the year, I learned and applied new tools and concepts to fit my classes. At the unconference day, I learned about Genius Hour and decided to give it a try. My students’ motivation has completely changed because of the voice and choice they have in their research process, as well as the digital opportunities to collaborate and share their work.”

