

Digital Learning Initiative Committee Meeting Notes: Thursday, December 10, 2015 (3:30 - 5:30pm)



Welcome

Dr. Kurt Schneider and Mary Morgan Ryan welcomed committee members and described the plan for the meeting.

District 86 Presentation

Hinsdale Township High School District 86 Assistant Superintendent for Academics Pam Bylsma and Hinsdale Central High School Assistant Principal for Operations Bill Walsh presented information on the school and district's digital learning journey.

Ms. Bylsma noted that District 86 is "very aware" that 1:1 initiatives across the country haven't necessarily had the academic impact that some educators were expecting (as demonstrated through standardized test scores and grades), but highlighted the benefits of technology in achieving 21st century learning goals. She explained the challenge that Hinsdale Central faces in having incoming students from seven feeder districts that each have different learning environments and levels of technology. She then further described the 21st century learning goals identified by District 86:

- Learning and Innovation Skills (The Four Cs)
- Information, Media, and Technology Skills
- Life and Career Skills

She and Mr. Walsh then outlined the District's pilot initiative. Four different Chromebook devices are being piloted, each from a different manufacturer (HP, Lenovo, Toshiba, Dell) and with different features (i.e. some with a touchscreen). They explained the models are shifted each marking period and that sets are provided per classroom, not per student. They emphasized that it is an instructional tool used for in-class work. Their pilot is designed so students will be able to try all four devices. They have incorporated a variety of different means for feedback:

- Surveys on the experience with the four devices (i.e. how it impacts collaboration opportunities)
- Google Community - participants can blog about their experiences
- Face-to-face discussions

The administration presented their Board of Education with a preliminary report in October, and will be presenting a proposal in March following the collection of additional feedback. Teacher feedback has so far included some of these highlights (noted from comments shared by Mr. Walsh):

- Having a Chromebook as part of the curriculum has already made me a better teacher.
- It has provided better learning opportunities.
- It is changing the way I think about instruction.
- It is a part of instruction - not THE instruction.
- It creates an opportunity to individualize learning and optimize differentiation.
- The teacher becomes a facilitator and a resource.
- Students take more ownership.
- Devices are extending learning beyond the period and school day.
- There is increased collaboration.
- Ms. Bylsma also noted that the pilot has resulted in teachers seeing students show their learning in different ways and have helped some students become stronger communicators ("digital rock stars"). They have also seen the way devices have created flexibility for students who are very involved in activities

Student feedback has so far included these highlights:

- Teachers are using the devices for a wide variety of instructional tasks (not just typing or research).
- Student survey respondents said they understand concepts better.

- They are 75% more likely to edit their work if in digital format.
- They strongly agree it helps keep them on task and organized.

D86 administrators note that feedback has also shown that the device "gets in the way" for some students, and so it is important to support different types of learners in the classroom. Also, because of the depth of the high school curriculum, "It's not going to be one tool for every content or task."

Teacher feedback regarding challenges has largely been about infrastructure needs. Without it, you will fail from day one, Mr. Walsh notes. Specifically, bandwidth has been an issue and so has the need for more PD. Teachers desire opportunities to plan for the technology to allow students to be more successful. Staff PD has so far included a variety of trainings on Google Apps for Education, etc. In January, teacher trainers will lead their department members through training.

On January 27, D86 is hosting a Vertical Tech Articulation event regarding:

- 8th grade graduate skills
- 9th grade skills needed / expectations
- Tech transition plan for 9th grade teachers
- Tech communication plan for 9th graders' parents

In regard to next Steps, D86 will continue to survey staff and students. They are preparing for a March 7, 2016 presentation to the Board (scope, schedule, budget implications). They are thinking about device distribution based on department course teams. Ms. Bylsma doesn't believe they are ready to hand every student a device. They are also thinking about a person in each building or at the District level who will serve as a technology integration and curriculum specialist. Their focus may be on "personnel and professional development over machines" initially.

Committee members then shared comments and questions.

- A committee member remarked that both D181 and D86 are behind in tech and wondered why given the socio-economic advantages and high academic performance of the districts. Ms. Bylsma noted that some under-performing districts thought tech would be the "magic bullet" for their schools and so jumped into 1:1 environments, but creating 1:1 access is not a solution in and of itself. She noted that some districts (particularly those with less socio-economic advantages) had companies give them technology (without them needing to buy it) to show the gains and outcomes that would be achieved. She commented that traditional standardized assessments don't show clear academic growth due to tech access but they do believe tech access lends itself to other benefits. Committee members commented on the importance of PD in considering whether research shows academic gains and the need to also have strong curriculum and resources as necessary components for success.
- In regard to why the District chose Chromebooks, the D86 administrators explained that different devices are better in different environments (i.e. Science vs. Math) and that other devices exist in some classes / departments, as well. They don't want students to be limited by the devices. They have found that some students are used to touchscreen because of that functionality on their phones.
- A committee member commented on tech-based standardized assessments, i.e. PARCC. It was noted that D86 is planning on a paper/pencil format for PARCC in 2015-16 for one of their two schools due to limited devices.
- D86 administrators commented on the resilience and flexibility of students in regard to coming from varied tech environments in the feeder schools. It has not been a problem in their experience.
- Ms. Bylsma remarked that D86 wants to do their tech rollout in a thoughtful manner that positively impacts instruction and gives students new ways to show their learning, be more globally connected, communicate better, gives more flexibility, etc.
- In regard to why they are assigning devices to classrooms and not to students (1:1), Ms. Bylsma remarked that they "may see a tipping point" when it becomes more sensible to have 1:1 but believe it will be best to follow teacher interest now.

- They confirmed that they already encourage BYOD but again infrastructure has been an issue.
- A committee member discussed the appropriate age for students to have tech access and the balance between spending time on facts vs. "how to think" (per an Einstein quote shared in the PowerPoint presentation).

Comments by Committee Member Dale Pollak

Committee member and community member Dale Pollak was asked to share his experience in regard to technology, both personally and professionally. He shared his personal experience with the struggle of losing his vision while going through school and the impact of that experience through adulthood. He highlighted the ridicule he faced when he was the only student using a special device to assist him and remarked that, "Kids don't want to be different from their peers." He noted that systematic, widespread access to technology benefits all students, and he has been disappointed by the lack of that widespread access in both districts. He also commented on graduates' lack of technology skills, such as inability to create spreadsheets, and perform tasks like copy/paste and file organization, which he said are essential regardless of profession. He commented on the value of tech in life skills today, that the need is evident and imperative. He noted that "paralysis by analysis" is the issue and encouraged both districts to "take the plunge" and accept the risks. Not putting the device in kids' hands denies them the opportunity to understand how it works and what it is capable of, he shared. Committee members shared questions and comments. A committee member expressed that the District is making progress, though not as fast as some would like, and students today are digital natives and so learn quickly. Mr. Pollak commented that the competitive nature of today's schools and work force means that our progress is not good enough. A committee member expressed that technology can be an "equalizer" and allows students to show what they know and can do. She also remarked that educators cannot identify every special need a student has, and technology is a tool to support a wide variety of student needs. A committee member commented on the District's work to create equal opportunities for advanced learning, and that the same philosophy should be applied to creating equal technology access for all students.

Committee Activity

Committee members worked in three groups (community members / administrators / teachers and students) to individually and then as a group, consider concepts and themes that should be included in the committee's proposed philosophy. Mary Morgan Ryan explained that District 181 currently lacks a philosophy, which can guide decisions regarding implementation, staff PD, purchasing, etc. This information will be reviewed at the next meeting as the committee works on developing the draft philosophy language and reviews previous meeting work related to community questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30pm. The next meeting is Thursday, December 17, 2015.