St. Cloud State University

The Repository at St. Cloud State

7-24-2023

3 Education Wins Sustained by District Technology Directors Post-pandemic

Jennifer Hill
St. Cloud State University

Tracy Reimer
Bethel University

Recommended Citation

3 education wins sustained by district technology directors post-pandemic

By **Tracy Reimer and Jennifer Hill**   *July 24, 2023*

District technology directors were at the helm and executed herculean initiatives as the COVID-19 pandemic required school systems to quickly transition to remote learning.

Tracy Reimer and Jennifer Hill.

Abruptly changing demands caused terms such as "pivot" and "navigate" to become authentic, yet overused, pain points for educators. Schools heavily invested time and resources to function in the short-term as learning models vacillated between fully remote, hyflex and in-person.

The demands left minimal bandwidth for reflection, monitoring effectiveness or investing in continuous improvement.

As school communities enter the endemic, some pandemic practices have proven to better serve students and families and have been sustained. Minnesota district technology directors participated in focus groups and shared three "wins" for school communities.

1. Marked increases in teachers' technology proficiency and improved digital pedagogy

Districts acknowledged teachers' steep technology learning curve at the start of remote learning. Technology directors shared admiration for the gains and desire to sustain effective instructional technology practices, tools and platforms. An increase in Chromebook distribution to students, especially at the secondary level, and Google gaining popularity as a software platform were highlighted as direct results of the pandemic.

One director reflected, "We were a Google district prior to that, but this really forced us to jump in at the enterprise level." Another explained a change in mindset, "We said we have to have Chat and Google Meets open, where students can create a Meet and can Chat each other because it's part of the learning process."

Teachers honed their technology expertise. They are now posting to learning platforms at a greater frequency and exploring how software such as GoGuardian can be used to enhance

classroom management at a distance. A director explained that the use of software in the classroom is an evolving conversation, moving from technical skill to effective pedagogy: "Evolving is deeper, more rich conversations about how to effectively integrate technology—technology for intentional purpose rather than technology for technology's sake."

2. Addressing educational equity barriers through online learning models

Technology directors emphasized an unpredicted outcome that emerged was the preference for a remote learning modality even after the pandemic: "We came out of the pandemic and started a fully certified online school." There was an acknowledgment that remaining in a remote learning modality is what is best for some students, including those with disabilities, multilingual learners and learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

More from DA: Which states boast the best public school systems? WalletHub reports

A director stated, "There was a real eye-opening, around special education in particular, that distance or online learning is actually a better situation for some kids with special needs, particularly kids who have social issues around anxiety or overstimulation, or kid-on-kid interactions."

Some multilingual students experienced unpredicted success, "The EL population also had some surprises in terms of a mindset change of 'EL students can't possibly do well in online learning', to some EL students actually thriving in an online environment because they're surrounded by their family." Technology directors learned that families can be better served by providing multilingual supports. One director shared, "We hired a family support technician who's bilingual, and she is wonderful and is our first person to work with families."

3. Reimagining schools vs. long-held traditional educational models

Technology directors expressed optimism about the opportunity to reimagine school as a consequence of the pandemic. One director pondered, "There's the ability to facilitate, but there's also re-imagining." Another finished the thought, "We're really trying not to do school the same way we did school before." They reflected upon the role of innovation in instruction, what learning means, and what challenges persist.

Directors expressed that much change has occurred as a result of the pandemic and school systems are still grappling with the impact of this change. Lingering difficulties and new opportunities coexist. Leaders are questioning, "What skills actually need to be acquired

through school, and what skills might be better accessed in other ways?" This is addressed by "rethinking instruction, what learning means, and how we engage."

Educators have faced a barrage of challenges over the last three years. It is wise and healthy to reflect on what schools are doing well and acknowledge that new practices may better serve students and families.

Tracy Reimer (t-reimer@bethel.edu) is the program director for the Leadership in K-12 Administration program at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Jennifer Hill (jchill@stcloudstate.edu) is the graduate director of the Library Media program within the Teacher Development Department at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Categories: Tech & Cybersecurity   FETC   Op-ed

👁 410

3 Evidence-Based Trends for Effective Learning Environments

By **Demco**   August 1, 2023

As one of the fastest-growing learning environment companies in the USA, we're always looking for the best ways to help school leaders maximize the potential of their spaces. Often referred to as "the third teacher," learning environments have a major impact on both student outcomes and educator effectiveness. With concerns about learning loss and teacher retention at the top of leaders' minds, creating impactful and engaging spaces is more important than ever.

Here are three science-backed recommendations for updating and elevating your school spaces.

Flexible Classrooms and Improved Outcomes vs. Traditional Classrooms

Traditional classroom layouts operate under the assumption that all students learn in the same way, which we know is not true. Flexible classroom solutions are all about improving outcomes for students by allowing them to choose a seat or desk that works best for their learning style. For those who need more movement, standing desks or active seating allow them to move without disrupting others. In a study in the *American Journal of Public Health*, 70% of parents of students using stand-up desks felt standing in the classroom had a positive impact on their behavior. Teachers reported students were more focused and could pay attention for longer.

Flexible classrooms can also help educators empower students to be involved in their learning. Moveable chairs and desks with multiple configuration options encourage collaboration between students and allow for more independent learning. Another article in the journal *Learning Environments Research* found students who used flexible classroom furniture were more satisfied with their learning environments than peers using traditional furniture. They also found flexible classrooms gave greater options for student autonomy and learning.

Take a 360° virtual reality tour of a flexible seating classroom.

Optimized Classrooms and Greater Focus vs. Cluttered Classrooms

Clutter can be a major roadblock to learning. Research from Dr. Sabine Kastner of Princeton University's Neuroscience Institute shows our brains have a hard time blocking out clutter. Her studies show when we try to focus on one object while other objects are present, there is both a "push" effect toward the desired object and a "pull" effect from the other objects. The more distracting things in one's environment, the more difficult it is for the brain to focus on the task at hand, which causes fatigue and reduces function.

Creative storage and organization solutions can help reduce the visual noise in your learning environments leading and lead to better outcomes. For example, a study from the University of Salford found that academic progress was higher for students in classrooms without overstimulating decoration and clutter. Cluttered classrooms can also be detrimental to teachers, who experience major disruptions to their day when limited storage options make finding supplies a long, frustrating process.

Solutions like Demco's Show and Stow System, can transform cluttered spaces into distraction-free learning zones. by visually reducing clutter and keeping essentials on hand.

Project-Based Learning and Better Engagement vs. Traditional Lessons

Unlike a traditional classroom with stationary desks in rows and a lecture-style "sit and get" instruction, flexible classrooms promote hands-on engagement and independent decision-making — a strong foundation for project-based learning. By creating collaboration zones throughout the classroom, educators can bring more unique lesson plans to their students and help them engage in more hands-on learning.

Lucas Education Research analyzed multiple studies and found that "rigorous project-based learning" is an effective way to improve student outcomes and teaching practices across multiple subjects and grade levels. With STEM jobs expected to grow by 11% by 2030 according to the Education Commission of the States, project-based learning is critical to preparing students for the world of tomorrow.

Learn more about Demco's Makerspace and STEM solutions to spark curiosity and ignite learning in your classrooms.

Ready to get started?

When you're ready to make a change to your learning environments, turn to the trusted experts at Demco to get your project started.