IES Institute of Education Sciences

Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest

Leveraging Technology for Student Success: Lessons From the Field

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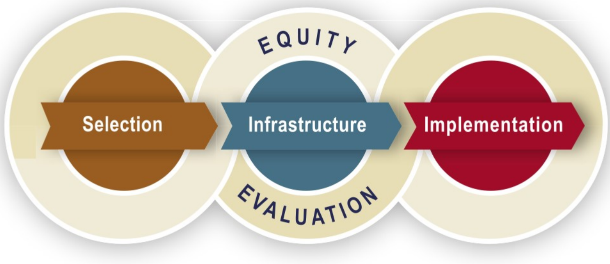

REL Northwest, in collaboration with the Washington Rural Alliance, partnered with three rural Washington school districts to support leadership in identifying challenges and developing plans for their technology-enhanced learning initiatives. Using the REL resource Leveraging Technology for Student Success* (and additional resources marked with an asterisk and described in the References document), the partnership focused on three critical phases of technology adoption.

Phase 1: Selection

Districts begin by defining their goals for using technology and selecting tools that align with these goals while meeting the diverse needs of students.

Actions for a district to consider:

- Develop a logic model* to establish a vision of how technology can support goals.
- Assess how technology can meet all learners' needs, including those with specific challenges.
- Identify existing tools that no longer align with district needs and explore ways to repurpose tools using the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition Model.*

Phase 2: Infrastructure

Districts focus on assessing technical (technology) and non-technical (people) infrastructures to determine readiness for implementing technology initiatives.

Actions for a district to consider:

- Use the K–12 Digital Infrastructure Brief* to guide discussions about digital readiness.
- Evaluate technical needs, including software, hardware, and internet access.
- Assess non-technical supports like professional development, instructional resources, and professional learning communities to ensure effective technology adoption.

Phase 3: Implementation

Technology integration requires ongoing training and data-driven strategies to address evolving needs and challenges.

Actions for a district to consider:

- Provide continuous professional learning opportunities to ensure effective technology use.
- Use easy-to-administer evaluation tools to identify disparities in adoption and usage, then address these gaps.
- Establish a culture of continuous improvement by embedding discovery, learning, and improvement into the process.

EQUITY in technology adoption. Equity is woven throughout each phase of this process. Every school community is unique, and technology implementation must address their specific needs through accessibility, cultural relevance, and community connections. Partner districts used the Technology, Accessibility, Experiential, and Identity (TAXI) Equity framework* to ensure fair and equitable access to educational technology at every step.

EVALUATION for continuous improvement. Technology adoption is a dynamic process that requires ongoing reflection and adaptation. Leaders must define clear goals and success criteria for all three phases and use data to make informed improvements over time. REL Northwest supported districts in creating logic models to serve as both planning and evaluation tools.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Selection

INCHELIUM SCHOOL DISTRICT

Revitalizing cultural connections. Inchelium School District, in Eastern Washington, set out on a mission to engage students by connecting them to their Native American heritage. The first step was to clearly define this vision to make sure it aligned with the community's values and goals. As the district explored the tools to bring this vision to life, it quickly discovered that technology was not the ideal solution. Instead, it needed approaches more deeply rooted in personal, cultural, and community experiences.

Key lesson learned

Start with the "why"
Define your goals before considering technology solutions.

Technology isn't always the answer
Solutions should align with the vision; they should not be dictated by the available tools.

Infrastructure

CASCADE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Building capacity for digital resources. Cascade School District, in Western Washington, aimed to create, organize, and share instructional and informational videos with its community but faced significant challenges. With no videos on the district's YouTube channel and limited staff expertise in video creation and accessibility, it developed step-by-step instructions for creating accessible videos and set criteria for curating resources. This process emphasized building internal capacity, enabling multiple staff members with the tools and responsibility to maintain and grow the resource.

Key lesson learned

"Share the pain"
Avoid relying on one person or team; build internal capacity so that more people can contribute and maintain the resource, which can help promote sustainability.

Implementation

LIND-RITZVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Harnessing internal expertise. Lind-Ritzville School District, in Central Washington, had invested heavily in technology over several years, but its implementation across classrooms was inconsistent. Skill and knowledge were scattered, with some teachers creatively using technology to enhance learning, while others lacked familiarity or confidence with the tools. By identifying pockets of expertise among teachers, the district created opportunities for peer mentoring. This collaborative approach helped unify and elevate technology use district wide.

Key lesson learned

Leverage internal expertise
Tap into the knowledge and skills already present in your district through collaborative opportunities.

Build a culture of collaboration
Peer learning strengthens implementation and builds community.

*Scan the QR code for access to the resources and references for this handout.

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