

Digital Content Case Study: Irving ISD, TX

DISTRICT PROFILE

The Irving Independent School District (IISD) is located in the center of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolis, and for 100 years it has been offering students the best resources available to achieve a quality education. The district serves about 35,000 students representing 99 different countries and speaking 67 languages. IISD is a minority-majority district, with 67% of its students coming from Hispanic heritage and 39% English Language Learners (ELL). About 73% of students in the district qualify for free and reduced lunch.

DISTRICT INNOVATION

In March, 2009, as the Texas legislature was beginning a debate on the pros and cons of allowing schools to spend textbook money on technology, the Dallas Morning News ran a story on Irving Independent School District — or, more specifically, on the textbooks sitting unused in the district's warehouses.

"The state spends millions of dollars every year on textbooks school districts don't need, but they have to take them because it's the law," began the news commentator, who went on to explain the disconnect between Irving

ISD's increasingly savvy students and the state law (at the time) requiring schools to purchase one textbook per student in every major subject area — whether the book was being used or not. Irving ISD's challenge was that it was ahead of its time. With many of its students having access to laptop computers on a 24/7 basis, the district's teachers were finding it preferable to send students home with computerized versions of texts rather than heavy, easily-lost textbooks.

In addition, says Irving ISD's Executive Director of Technology Alice Owen, the faculty — even those teaching elementary and middle school students where the computer-to-student ratio was not one-to-one — has really shifted its teaching approaches away from textbook learning. "They're using a wide array of digital content," she says. "Students are taking charge of their own learning — collaborating, innovating and publishing, as well as learning from experts in the field."

Not only does this shift better prepare students for the 21st century, it has the potential to save the district a tremendous amount of money. In their newscast, The Dallas Morning News reported that the cost of the 146,000 unused textbooks in the warehouse



was equivalent to 15,000 new laptop computers. With the passage of HB4292, the district was finally able to use the money for such technology-based tools.

Today, Irving ISD is a leader and model of 1:1 laptop program implementation at the high school level. For the 2012-2013 school year, all students in grades 9-12 have laptop computers for use at home and school. Netbook computers are available for all middle school students to use during the school day. This focus on technology and digital content has earned three IISD High Schools the Silver Badge Award from U.S. News & World Report, with all three high schools ranking amongst the top 7.6% of 22,000 high schools nationwide. Additionally, Irving ISD is offering 5 online classes to its high school students, ranging from Computer Science to Webmastering. The instructors communicate with students through an online course website, videos, email, phone calls and synchronous conferencing, offering a flexible learning environment to meet students' individual needs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Irving ISD recognizes that technology innovation is not all about the students. For many years, the district has placed emphasis on quality services,

resources, and programs which support and promote the professional growth of its staff.

IISD provides a great deal of professional development (PD) for its teachers but with 4,000 employees, not all are able to come to every PD event. The district wanted a resource that would allow flexibility for teachers to do some of their own PD. IISD Division Director of Staff Development, Dianna Hopper, was looking for an online, on-demand solution that was user friendly and job embedded. She wanted to provide a versatile resource that would add to staff effectiveness to ensure high achievement for every student.

With the district's forward-thinking policies on digital content, the staff development department piloted PD 360, an on-demand library of professional teacher development resources that leverages technology to make professional learning more effective, convenient, and sustainable. Currently, PD 360 contains over 200 hours of research-based video content, plus tools for follow-up, tracking, reflection, and group training. According to Ms. Hopper, "PD 360 has added another dimension to our professional development system allowing for Just in Time training for new and/or struggling teachers with research-based best practices. We love that teachers are able to use PD 360



on their own as a professional growth tool. When they are in need and looking for help, they can find it.”

THE FUTURE

With a strong commitment to digital content and 1:1 computing programs, both for its students as well as staff members, Irving ISD is a leader in technology integration. Each year, it hosts a Technology and Media Fair to highlight student projects in Animation, Digital Storytelling, Web Design, Audio & Video, Product Design, and Web 2.0 Creation. The academic and creative success of its students is a model of how technology can be used to inspire and teach.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Irving School District:

<http://irvingisd.net>



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