Griffin Middle School’s Technology Needs Assessment

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Learning to embrace the ever-expanding frontier of technology is a daunting endeavor, even for our brightest technology experts. One cannot begin to fathom the infinite possibilities technology delivers to our fingertips every day. Those professions which cannot or will not adopt and adapt will surely be left behind. This presents a very real challenge to the field of education. Experts say that teachers are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist and for technologies that haven’t even been invented. As greater demand is placed on teachers to deliver student achievement at higher levels, and as teachers seek to ascertain the expectations placed upon them with the introduction of the Common Core curriculum and the “Race to the Top” requirements, advancement in technology innovation in the classroom is becoming increasingly important. Every school should have a basic understanding about their own technology integration status, from its current reality to its recognized need for additional training. This report is an attempt to assess such a status at Griffin Middle School: its strengths, weaknesses, and potential for continued growth.

**Data Collection Method**

In an effort to understand exactly what the teachers’ technology needs are and how to go about delivering them, a survey was emailed to the entire faculty every day for a week. Response to the survey consisted of 65 replies, comprising about 67% of our total staff. This Google Docs survey specifically conveys the following information: how teachers perceive their own level of technology competence—both with specific technology tools as well as their overall proficiency, how they understand the level of student-centered technology in Griffin classrooms, how comfortable teachers feel with Blackboard (implemented just this year), and how technology is used for teacher-to-student and teacher-to-parent communication. The probe also indicates the level of complexity with which teachers use technology in conjunction with critical thinking skills (LOTI levels). And finally, the inquiry seeks to understand what it is that teachers want in the way of technology professional development, how much time they are willing to sacrifice in order to accomplish this end, and the time of day they most prefer for their training. In this way, technology coaches can effectively target where training is needed and desired, and can work with teachers in a way that is convenient and meaningful.

**Survey Results**

**Usage**

The results of the survey were very interesting. Of the 65 staff members who responded, 78% reported that they considered themselves average to above-average in their technological “savvy.” Only 9% felt they were advanced in the use of technology. Regarding student-centered technology, 40% of the teachers surveyed believed their students used technology in the classroom about 50% of the time. These results seem somewhat surprising, considering the limited access students have to computer labs and laptop carts. However, one could conclude that teachers may maximize the use of the few computers they do have in their rooms, perhaps utilizing the stations concept regularly and the like. One could also conclude that those teachers who are not interested in technology may have opted out of doing the survey at all, which would have somewhat inflated the overall results. Be that as it may, the results also indicate room for growth in both student and teacher use.

**Frequency of Technology Use in Communication**

Interestingly, teachers use technology (blogs specifically) to communicate with parents and students fairly regularly, with 43% to 45% of teachers surveyed updating blogs daily or weekly for both parents and students. However, 23% of the teachers surveyed reported that they *never* used blogging to communicate, which is an interesting statistic, considering that maintaining a blog is required at our school. This indicates that some teachers may not feel comfortable with using technology in this way, or may not have the time to fulfill the requirements of their jobs. Frequency of technology use in communication, therefore, could be considered a weakness at our school and could very well be an opportunity for some coaching and/or training.

**Integration of Blackboard Technology**

Because Blackboard was introduced to the entire staff this year as a required technology tool, the survey was designed to evaluate specifics needs related to its use. Of the survey respondents, 55% felt an average to above-average comfort level with using the tool, and 17% felt very comfortable, leaving almost 30% feeling less than comfortable with the tool. This indicates another possible area for additional training and/or coaching.

As for the frequency of use, statistics were encouraging. According to Figure 1 below, teachers are using Blackboard with increasing frequency. 97% of those surveyed now use Blackboard at least on a weekly basis, with 22% using it at least once a day or more. Because the Griffin leadership wants teachers to use Blackboard as a springboard for vertical and horizontal communication as well as a wholesome teaching resource for Common Core and the school-wide literacy initiative, frequent use indicates compliance in these other areas as well.

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| Figure 1  How Often Teachers Visit Blackboard?     |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Frequently each day | **3** |  | 5% | | Once or twice a day | **11** |  | 17% | | Once every few days | **23** |  | 35% | | Once a week | **30** |  | 46% | | Blackboard? What is Blackboard??? | **2** |  | 3% | | | | | |
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**Purpose of Technology Use**

The survey indicated some very interesting data when teachers were asked *why* they used technology in their classrooms with students. Figure 2 below shows some interesting results. Because teachers were allowed to check more than one answer, the results do not add up to 100%. Instead, the reader must look at how the answers rank. The number one answer to the question about why teachers use technology with their students is “to engage students in higher level thinking skills.” Excellent. However, the second most popular answer was “to present what students have learned.” Clearly, there is a “disconnect” about how teachers can use technology to promote higher level thinking skills. Perhaps one can conclude that some professional development regarding integrating technology to enhance authentic learning and critical thinking skills may benefit teachers. Developing an awareness about mastering higher LOTI levels in their use of technology may be of some benefit to teachers as well.

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| Figure 2  Why Do You Use Technology in the Classroom?     |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | To engage students in high-level, critical thinking |  | **47** | 72% | | Because students will get bored if I don't allow them to use technology at least sometimes |  | **16** | 25% | | To give students a way to explore the world |  | **36** | 55% | | To research |  | **42** | 65% | | To present what they have learned |  | **45** | 69% | | To solve problems |  | **25** | 38% | | To communicate |  | **32** | 49% | | |
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**Ranking Technology Proficiency**

In order to obtain an accurate idea of what kinds of technology training would be useful to teachers, it is necessary to understand how teachers realize their own proficiency with technology tools. In Figure 3 below, teachers were asked in which technology tools they feel they possess a fair level of proficiency. From the data, it is fairly predictable that teachers are proficient in what they use most, like Word, PowerPoint, and Outlook email. What becomes interesting is how teachers view their proficiency in equally functional but less frequently used tools.

Figure 3

What technology tools do you feel proficient using regularly?

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| \*Please see percentages listed on next page. |  |  |  |
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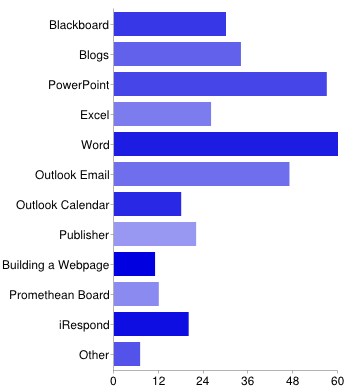
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Figure 3 (Continued)

What technology tools do you feel proficient using regularly?

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Blackboard |  | **30** | 46% |
| Blogs |  | **34** | 52% |
| PowerPoint |  | **57** | 88% |
| Excel |  | **26** | 40% |
| Word |  | **60** | 92% |
| Outlook Email |  | **47** | 72% |
| Outlook Calendar |  | **18** | 28% |
| Publisher |  | **22** | 34% |
| Building a Webpage |  | **11** | 17% |
| Promethean Board |  | **12** | 18% |
| iRespond |  | **20** | 31% |
| Other |  | **7** | 11% |

This is how it is determined where meaningful professional development could take place—in the areas in which teachers feel less proficient: Blackboard, blogging, Excel, webpage design, using Outlook Calendar, etc.

Coupled with this data, the survey probed another very important question about which tools teachers would enjoy learning more about, or feel they need additional training. Ranked first on the list was Blackboard. This is great news, because teachers understand the potential for such a great resource, and want to learn more about it. Web-based presentation tools like Prezi, Glogster, and Voicethread ranked second in this part of the survey, with Google Tools, and Screencasting/Podcasting, and Social/Academic Networking ranking third, fourth, and fifth. It is evident that teachers could all benefit from training about the many wonderful web-based tools which can be used in the classroom.

**Willingness and Time**

The last part of the survey asked teachers about their willingness to learn more about how they could use technology in their classrooms. As frazzled as teachers have been this year with limited time for planning and massive amounts of professional development already underway, the results were astounding. 83% of teachers surveyed said they would love to have more training in technology. This is a great illustration of the extremes teachers will go to in order to provide the best for their students.

**Conclusion**

Technology training for Griffin teachers will certainly be beneficial for the school as a whole and for the goal of increasing student achievement by way of cutting-edge technology innovation. The survey was conducted in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in technology competence of Griffin teachers, and these strengths and weaknesses are inherent in the results achieved. It is clear now what training can be offered that will be beneficial to teachers, and it is equally apparent into which kinds of trainings teachers are willing to invest their time and energy. While the technology revolution continues to gain more strength every day at exponential rates, Griffin teachers will not be left behind. Their willingness to learn and embrace change will ensure that Griffin students will follow suit to achieve the high levels of academic rigor, fortitude, and stamina that are now the new norm.