"Let's Make Sure All Teachers Are Implementing the New Technology Initiatives"..."Wait, Let Me Make Sure I Understand This Before I Lead This!"

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As a classroom teacher, I took attendance by pen and paper. The school I worked in did not have ipads or a computer lab at the time. There were no phones in the classroom and so most of my instruction was based from textbooks, anchor charts and worksheets. Leaving the classroom and working as a Dean of Students and an Assistant Principal my focus was student discipline and teacher evaluations. When I became the principal, I realized that our district was very technology centered and that as the instructional leader, I was responsible for much of the implementation. Given that I did not have classroom experience of using technology, I did not feel I was qualified or comfortable leading with technology so I decided to delegate much of the technology professional development to technology coaches. After sitting in on the professional development and working with teachers, I realized I could not delegate this responsibility, but would have to grow in my knowledge of technology as the instructional leader of the school. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was educate myself in educational technology so that I could be a resource for teachers.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered "What can I do to educate myself better on educational technology? And "How can I assure my students are benefiting academically from it?"

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I began by surveying our 6th grade students and teachers. That grade level had shown significant growth compared to the rest of the school and they were the grade level that relied most on technology. After getting my results, I decided to invest in the educational licenses that had the best reviews from students and teachers. I then began to write down ways that I was learning more about the new technology we purchased for the school. I invited technology coaches to speak to our staff, I set up web conferences about the technology and I even tested the different programs on my own children at home. At first, some teachers were overwhelmed with the change, other teachers welcomed it and were excited for the new options.

In order to assure that we, as a school were all involved in using the technology, we set up school wide incentives that were based on obtaining certain levels of proficiency using the technology. This motivated students to do well academically and challenged me to keep track of the progress. I charted the results by week in the main hallway and communicated the technology results to staff at our monthly data meeting. I also communicated the learning results of our district assessments and compared it to the levels of technology in each classroom. This kept me accountable for understanding the technology and being able to understand the pro's and con's of some of the educational licenses we purchased, by listening to teachers monthly.

The data collection started in September and ended in March. My focus was on communicating time students were spending on the technology, copy paper use per classroom, and ways I was actively seeking out knowledge to grow as an instructional leader with technology. I also benefited from the teacher feedback I received at monthly meetings. Looking at the test results and comparing to the technology use helped me value certain licenses more than others and helped me understand where to continue to invest and explore for student learning.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data 3 important things I learned include 1. Student use is directly tied to academic incentives. 2. We saved over 600,000 sheets of copy paper compared to the previous year. 3. While student scores improved in both ELA and Math, math scores showed a higher rate of growth.

We started the year off by offering a field trip to students who mastered math standards that supplemented the curriculum with technology. Students were reminded that if they achieved a certain level of proficiency, they would attend a dance. After looking at our district assessments, it was evident that our math scores went up, but at the expensive of much smaller growth in ELA. The next round, the academic incentive was to go Ice Skating. The difference was students had to show a level of proficiency in ELA and Math to attend this trip. While math still showed higher growth, our ELA scores started to grow more than before.

Our school is larger than most elementary schools and it did not surprise me when I learned that we used more copy paper than any other elementary school in the district. I did have special technology professional development with our staff to show educational apps that would reduce the need to rely as much on the copy machine. I also sent out a monthly report of how much copy paper each person in the staff used. This did surprise some people at first, but the overall use went down by over 40% from the previous year.

During our monthly data meetings, I compared how we did on district assessments and compared our results with the district average. We saw between 1% to 15% growth from the previous year in ELA in all 4 grade levels. In math, we saw between 15% to 25% gains in all 4 grade levels.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Overall, the action research cycle helped keep me accountable to grow as an educational leader in technology. I learned that I am much more comfortable demonstrating technology and discussing it with teachers than I was prior to the action research cycle. I have learned that teachers are much more open to using technology as evidenced by the reduction in copy paper and the daily use of educational technology. Charting ways I am learning about new technology has also allowed me to see the benefits of actively exploring new and exciting developments in educational technology. This is an exploration that has just begun.

I have learned that this year was a learning year and our staff was becoming accustom to the new technology. In the future, we now have a basis of how to use technology to enhance student growth. Our next steps are raising expectations of academic achievement. Students and teachers are no longer trying to figure out how to effectively use technology. Now we must continue to set the bar of achievement high and believe the best in our students.

References:

N/A