Moving from Reactive to Proactive

Moving from Reactive to Proactive with Education Technology

Today, there are a number of technologies that have drastically changed how we live, work, and learn. In educational settings in particular, advancements in everything from wearables to virtual reality present new opportunities for students to engage with their studies. Not all schools have fully embraced a proactive approach to education technology, though, and tend to adopt tools only when it becomes absolutely necessary. **To stay competitive in education, schools need to move from reactive to proactive with the adoption of education technology. Here's why that matters (and how to do it well).**

Why Proactive?

A proactive school is constantly evolving and adapting to improve the quality of education by both utilizing new technologies and finding innovative ways to use existing ones. For example, a San Marino, CA high school social studies teacher recently encouraged his students to use a smartphone app (called StoryCorp) to interview those from the Vietnam era for a project. Because of this proactive approach to technology adoption in the classroom, students not only chose appropriate questions for their interviews, but they also received assistance in uploading their work to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

A reactive school, on the other hand, can lag behind until change becomes a necessity, not a thoughtful choice. This approach does not benefit students or educators, and even the US Office of Educational Technology recently released its National Education Technology Plan that pointed to an increased need for "a vision of equity, active use, and collaborative leadership to make everywhere, all-the-time learning possible" via more access to technological tools.

Tips for Educators

Classrooms have been undergoing a technological evolution for some time. A recent report projects that trend will continue, highlighting bring your own device (BYOD) environments, using online and blended learning approaches, and employing digital tools to move students from consumers to creators as three trends to watch in the K-12 space. Here are some tips for educators who want to stay ahead of the curve on these and other ways of integrating tech into classrooms:

Choose tech tools for teaching wisely.

It's incredibly important to consider how a new technology will practically encourage learning in the classroom—and we know many of them do just that, of course. In fact, a recent study found that tailored education-based software and corresponding education-based hardware results in more student success. Educators should choose carefully, though, and avoid using technology for technology's sake.

Have a long-term strategy.

The CEO of SMART Technologies recently spoke at the Education World Forum about the importance of applying the same type of long-term thinking many districts use for planning curricula and pedagogies to the technology that will support those plans. Tech considerations should be part of a comprehensive, student-centered strategy for years in advance, not an afterthought when it's time to examine budgets.

Focus on software.

Hardware is an essential component of educational technology, but it should not be the focus of school districts looking for an implementation strategy. Because hardware can become obsolete much more quickly than software, starting with the latter can make a district's dollars stretch and leave more room for growth down the line.

Be on the lookout for new ways to use technology in the classroom consistently.

Aim for as much technology integration in the classroom as possible. This includes teaching students about technology *even when they're not connected*. For example, consider having a discussion about what makes a good digital citizen or talk about safety tips for students as they grow up in an increasingly internet-dependent society.

What's Next?

Today's students are growing up with technology as an essential part of their everyday lives. In order for educators to not only teach this always-on, always-connected generation but also prepare them for their eventual entrance into the workforce, it's vitally important that schools embrace a proactive approach to technology in the classroom.