Empowering Teachers and Students Through Effective Use of Technology

“This is finally professional development that helps me get better at teaching. It’s not hypothetical. The practices are real and we can do them.”

GOALS

■ Develop a coherent and goal-oriented, districtwide vision for technology use with a focus on exposing teachers to the potential impact of full integration of digital tools in the classroom.

■ Draw on research-based, best teaching practices in conjunction with digital tools to build the capacities of teachers across the district, especially in concert with Common Core implementation; model the use of digital tools to increase learner engagement across the content areas.

■ Develop competencies in students to use 21st century tools to solve problems, create new work products, organize information, access the web, apply the Common Core and ISTE Standards, and push their potential output to a new and higher level.

CHALLENGES

Two years ago, Coalinga-Huron was a district limited to using technology solely for the purposes of taking attendance and supporting administrative functions. When district leadership established its goals to fully integrate technology into instruction and student learning, it faced unique challenges. With a large EL population and a median household income of around $20,000 meant that most students had not experienced technology at even an introductory level of exposure—not even iPad—much less knew how to use one for learning. Many teachers were limited to using a locked-down laptop to “talk” to their SMART Boards.

This profile meant that ICLE’s foundational work in the district would be considerable. A related challenge was the resistance on the part of the staff to embrace something new. “I don’t want this to be another thing [put on me]. If we do this I want it to be helpful,” was something expressed repeatedly on the part of teachers. Setting reasonable benchmarks and expectations for initial success so that growth expectations were manageable was a big part of the initial challenge.
SOLUTION

■ Develop a Multi-Year Vision/Plan for Effective Technology Integration

In collaboration with Coalinga-Huron USD, ICLE developed a comprehensive, three-year plan focused on a vision for technology integration that prioritized instructional excellence, as well as the true blending of face-to-face and digital instructional approaches.

■ Empower Teachers to Integrate Technology Across the Content Areas

Before their work with ICLE, teachers in Coalinga-Huron lived in a culture of isolation, one that has transformed into a culture of collaboration and sharing, especially in the area of blended pedagogy. Teachers have learned to observe one another, self-assess, and give one another feedback through micro-teaching—practicing teaching strategies and approaches they are learning. Collectively, they have built an understanding of best teaching practices, having learned to view their colleagues as resources and to trust that change can be empowering and positive.

Teachers no longer try to jam technology into old design methodologies. Instead, they employ innovative design methodologies, including the Digital Learning Matrix, SAMR, and the Rigor/Relevance Framework®, to ensure that designing transformative lessons is efficient and replicable over time.

■ Establish a Common Understanding of What High-Quality Technology Integration Looks Like

To help teachers start to think differently about the elements and approaches to instruction, Coalinga-Huron needed professional learning. The teachers in the district needed more than a “one-and-done” mode of delivery; a change in the district’s instructional DNA was necessary. By collaborating first on defining specific needs, ICLE was able to format a customized professional development solution for the district. The solution included 11 instructional coaching modules, or topics, with four different cohorts, combined with 36 full days of in-class coaching in grades K-12 districtwide. The coaching model was not just advising before, after, and from the margins of the classroom, but a full partnership with observing and team-teaching classes, collaborating on instruction, and demonstrating sound blended instruction and learning practices. ICLE also provided post-observation and post-team teaching conferences, as well as video and written coaching to participants districtwide at the end of each week.

The instructional coaching modules ICLE provided were based in creating and reinforcing models, giving teachers the experience of effective blended practices from a learner’s perspective. Teachers were given time to practice and micro-teach to develop and apply practices for immediate implementation. ICLE also worked with leaders, providing an abbreviated version of the teacher professional learning, for solid alignment and capacity at the macro level to ensure continuity in goal-setting and instructional expectations. It also helped prioritize engagement over compliance.

“...reach teaching for over 20 years so I have attended lots of seminars and trainings. From the moment I entered the first professional learning day, I have been hooked on the importance of getting technology into our students’ hands. My students are becoming responsible digital citizens. ICLE gave me the confidence to put the world at their fingertips and to help me share the amazing future that technology holds for our kids.”

■ Develop Ongoing Opportunities to Celebrate Success

Through a districtwide focus on high-quality technology integration, Coalinga’s staff has become the driving force behind substantive change. Through the implementation of technology to engage student learning, they have increased student attendance and have developed more rigorous and relevant instruction and technology-rich learning experiences. The most significant and lasting improvement has been the cultivation of positive and productive relationships among students, teachers, administrators, and the larger community.
SUCCESS

After completing the first year of the partnership with ICLE:

■ **100%** of administrators reported increases in technology use and positive attitudes toward blended learning from staff members. Teachers have been able to learn, grow, and develop with appropriate expectations and reliable and deep levels of support. All teachers have a device and use them for instructional purposes.

■ **85%** of secondary students in Coalinga Huron are using devices. Along with middle schools, they are projected to be at 100% use rate by the end of the 2015-2016 school year.

■ **75%** of elementary students or classrooms have devices. Google Apps for Education and Google classroom are being used in the district.

In addition, the Learning Counsel recognized the district as one of the top 10 in the nation for its work in blended learning. Coalinga-Huron was selected for its success in introducing digital curriculum and content, including working through the process of selection, procurement, deployment, and professional development, with the goal of a 1-to-1 learning environment for its students.

“ICLE has initiated a real purpose for technology in the classroom that is revolutionizing our school. ICLE teaches valuable strategies for immediate implementation and provides present-day resources that boost the motivation and learning of our students. As a teacher of nearly 20 years, I am inspired by what I have learned and I have found new and innovative ways to bring that inspiration to the forefront of my students’ learning.”