

Peer Coaching Helps Longview Teachers Support Learning Initiatives with Technology-Enhanced Instruction

Partners in Learning

Participation in the Microsoft Peer Coaching Program has helped the Longview School District think more strategically about their use of technology to enhance classroom learning, and it has encouraged more collaboration among classroom teachers.

Longview School District

Web site:

<http://www.longview.k12.wa.us/>

Organization size: 13 schools

Country: United States

Peer Coaching Program

Peer Coaching trains teachers to assist their peers in developing engaging, technology-rich learning activities that align with learning standards and objectives. The program curriculum focuses on three distinct areas: technology skills, instructional strategy, and peer coaching skills.

Customer Needs

Located in the southwest corner of Washington state, Longview School District comprises 13 schools that enroll a total of 7,300 students. Teachers and administrators at Longview are deeply committed to creating a rich and vibrant learning environment for their students; and they know that fulfilling such a commitment requires a progressive and systematic program of staff development and innovative curriculum.

Ann Cavanaugh, Executive Director of Student Learning and Support at the Longview School District, continuously strives to find the most cost-effective and results-oriented means of helping teachers to employ instructional technology to meet learning objectives. Although technology today is readily available, Cavanaugh acknowledges that the district struggled in past years to support teachers in using it effectively to promote student learning.

Gail Wells, a former elementary school teacher and current math coach at Longview, agrees with Cavanaugh's assessment. "Just giving teachers a desktop computer and a printer for use in the classroom isn't sufficient," says Wells. "Instructors need support on how to use technology to optimize students' potential for learning."

This gap between the promise of technology to improve learning and the lack of support to achieve results was discouraging for teachers and administrators alike. Then Cavanaugh discovered an opportunity to provide Longview instructors with just the support they needed. In 2002, Cavanaugh attended a conference presentation about the Peer Coaching program, then known as the Teaching + Technology Coaching Initiative or T2CI. Armed with funding from a Title 2D grant, Cavanaugh immediately signed on the Longview District to participate in the program.

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Ann Cavanaugh, *Executive Director of Student Learning and Support, Longview School District*

Solution

The Microsoft Peer Coaching program trains teachers to serve as peer coaches for their colleagues. Working together, coaches and their mentees identify technology-rich learning activities that engage their students and enhance standards-based instruction. Initially funded by a United States Department of Education Technology Innovation Grant, the program is now sponsored by Microsoft Partners in Learning. Each school district that participates in the Peer Coaching program can structure its deployment to meet the unique needs of their staff and schools.

Longview School District opted to pay for one coach/mentee group per school, with each school having the option to purchase an additional coaching slot. All Longview coaches are compensated for the time they spend training to become coaches, and both coaches and their mentees receive the technology package provided by the District and release time to work together. In addition, the District provides each teacher in the program with a laptop, projector, and document camera to use in their classroom.

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In fact, the Peer Coaching program has been so successful at Longview, it is now the mainstay of the District's state and federal mandated technology plan; it is also embedded in each school site's action plan. More importantly, the program has yielded significant benefits for the participating schools.

Peer Coaching Enhances Classroom Learning

For starters, peer coaching has changed the role of technology in Longview classrooms. Instead of promoting technology as simply a tool for creating documents or recording grades, the program addresses how technology can be used to support learning initiatives.

"The coaching program doesn't just teach the mechanics of using technology, like how to hook up a projector or use FrontPage®" says Wells, one of the first teachers in the Longview District to become a coach. Instead, it gives teachers models for technology-enhanced learning activities that align with their classroom objectives, and provides resources to help them accomplish those activities.

"When we're in the classroom, we get this narrow vision of how to use technology," says Wells. "This program helped me look at the bigger picture. I began to think about how students could answer higher level questions with the technology, not just make glitzy presentations." Rather than just have her second graders learn to use Microsoft PowerPoint® or Microsoft Word as an end in itself, for example, Wells began to employ the technology to help her students work cooperatively on projects and share their ideas with each other.



Wells and other participants in the coaching program also received guidance on how to identify where their mentees were on the continuum of using technology, and to help them enrich their existing curriculum with technology-based instruction.

“As a result of this program,” says Wells, “I think we have a lot more teachers in the classroom who are secure in their use of technology for learning, not just to present information.”

Program Promotes Strategic Technology Planning

In addition to shifting how teachers use technology in the classroom, participation in the Peer Coaching program also prompted a more strategic approach to planning and deploying instructional technology at the district-wide level in Longview.

After the first year of participating in the program, Cavanaugh established a Technology Advisory Group comprised of teachers from the district that works closely with the district’s Technology Communications Committee. Aware of the funding challenges ahead of the district, particularly when it came to replacing outdated technologies, Cavanaugh’s goal was to promote more communication and broader-based decision-making around district technology requirements.

“Ultimately, the program prompted the Technology Advisory Committee to look in a systematic way at our technology and map it out, so when the school board starts to make decisions about how to spend money, the technology is better considered,” says Cavanaugh.

To drive these benefits down into the classroom and ensure that the program helped teachers to develop activities relevant to their existing instructional objectives, Cavanaugh conducted an assessment to determine what teachers really needed and wanted. She then worked with trainers to ensure that the program could deliver on those needs. This included adding a training pre-session that dealt in depth with the technology and creating a training session for teachers on how to use software that supports English as a second language students and students with different learning styles.

Teachers in the district are also encouraged to share successful lessons they developed by using skills gained through the program.


Peer Coaching Creates a Collaborative Learning Environment

Perhaps more important than its influence on the Longview school District’s technology plans, the Peer Coaching program has also become the cornerstone of the district’s professional development program.

Cavanaugh is clear about her primary motivation in adopting the Peer Coaching program. “I wanted to impact the culture of the district so that we became more of a coaching district, and this program created a collaborative learning environment for us.” The peer mentoring aspect of the program was not just a mechanical means for sharing technical information; it quickly became a new model for how teachers could interact with and support one another in a highly collaborative way.

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In fact, since they have implemented the Peer Coaching program, Longview School District has also established math and literacy coaches at their middle schools, and changed their reading teachers to literacy coaches at the elementary schools. More importantly, it has changed the way in which teachers in the District relate to one another and how they think about their profession.

“Participants in the Peer Coaching program don’t just help their own mentees; a lot of teachers ask coaches for assistance with integrating technology into lessons,” says Wells. “Ultimately, I think the program has helped teachers to see themselves as a supporting community of learners.”

Ann Cavanaugh agrees. “This little program has driven so much within the District. It has really changed the way we do business at Longview.”