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JOURNAL

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Instructional Technology Initiative Coordinator, Special Projects
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Los Angeles Unified School District is Focused on District-wide Professional Learning

Sophia Mendoza
Instructional Technology Initiative Coordinator, Special Projects,
Los Angeles Unified School District,
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According to Sophia Mendoza, the Director of the Instructional Technology Initiative at LAUSD, "The Instructional Technology Initiative (ITI), a department within the Los Angeles Unified School District's Division of Instruction, is focused on providing 21st century professional learning opportunities district-wide. As the nation's 2nd largest school district, ITI has reimagined models of support to reach the 60,000 educators who serve our student body of over 600,000. The mission of ITI is to lead with instruction, which means strategically selecting digital tools and resources that explicitly connect to established learning goals. While the tools leveraged for instruction may vary, the teacher's role in facilitating, creating, and designing the learning environment remains constant."

ITI's work within L.A. Unified is interdisciplinary, which calls for a synthesis of rigorous, digital-age instructional frameworks and perspectives to develop and design pedagogical supports for all learners. All ITI efforts are guided by the following: Prosci ADKAR Change Management Model, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards, National Education Technology Plan and the K-12 Computer Science Framework.

"To inform professional learning design and development, ITI draws upon a change management framework to build a continuum of supports from individual to cohort-based opportunities," said Mendoza. "For example, ITI structures professional learning sessions following a 2+1 Approach. The 2+1 Approach calls for providing two consecutive days of content and lesson planning, and then inviting participants to go back to their classrooms and try out the lesson they planned. Participants are given a week to implement their lesson. During the third session, participants reconvene to share how the lesson went with their students, and engage in a Critical Friends Protocol, where each participant gives and receives feedback that will refine their lesson. Within the 2+1 Approach, we are reinforcing the ADKAR Change Management Model as a reflection tool to begin engaging educators beyond just awareness of the topic and content covered.

"To support the processing of content within our professional learning sessions, we use the Adaptive School's strategy of Triple Track to organize and integrate content. In triple tracking, the emphasis is on the participants' learning; how it can apply to other adult learners; and how it applies in the classroom. To further support the processing of content, we also layer in Google Apps for Education, which all district educators have access to as

an enterprise resource; and then reinforce the same content by integrating the district's learning management system. Through this approach, content is the primary focus and the digital tools are secondary to the learning."

LAUSD is ensuring digital navigation skills and digital literacy for teachers and their students. "By aligning the district's professional learning sessions to the ISTE Standards, learners engage with pedagogical strategies that support the cultivation of students as empowered learners, digital citizens, and computational thinkers," said Mendoza. "The catalog of ITI's professional learning offerings cover computer science education, digital citizenship, and 21st century learning foundations. All professional learning opportunities incorporate the use of digital tools and resources to ensure an establishing relationship between the tool and instruction.

"ITI's main reimagined model of support is the Practitioner School Model, which is in its third iteration focused on cultivating students as innovative designers. The Practitioner School Model is an evolving model of support founded on 21st century instructional frameworks including the ISTE Standards and the K-12 Computer Science Framework. Through this model, ITI targets schools who demonstrate instructional technology growth and provides direct support through an Instructional Technology Facilitator to guide school leaders in cultivating 21st century learning environments for students."

Superintendent's 3-Part Plan for Digital Transition

Peter Haapala is the superintendent at Warroad Public Schools Independent School District 690 in Warroad, Minnesota. His district has a unique take on personalized learning. According to Haapala, "Public education plays an important role in preparing students to lead successful and happy lives, helping America to prosper. Learning must be more student-centered—that is, it must be built on a foundation of strong relationships, responsive to basic needs, driven by student interests, respectful of their identities, adaptive to their academic needs, relevant to their lives beyond school and not confined within school days and walls.

Peter Haapala
Interim Superintendent
Warroad Public Schools
Independent School
District 690, Minnesota

"Our theory of change is three-fold:

1. If students can develop personalized learning pathways in a competency-based environment then they and their parents will choose to use their Personalized Learning Plan to increase mastery of knowledge and skills over a shorter time frame.

2. Teachers, who work closest with the students, must have larger professional roles in designing and leading schools.

3. Policy must enable and support innovation by creating space, removing barriers and creating a climate of encouragement.

"Warroad Public Schools has contracted with Zia Learning to provide professional learning to their teachers using a cohort model. The first cohort is meeting this year with two additional cohorts in 2019 and 2020." Haapala says "The District has moved to a one-to-one device model which enables us to progress to a blended model and then more personalized learning. We will move to digital curriculum as we progress through our curriculum review cycle. Zia Learning has developed a comprehensive web based SEL curriculum based on the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) SEL Competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The skills students need to succeed in a blended and personalized learning environment are the same skills that are required for college and career readiness."

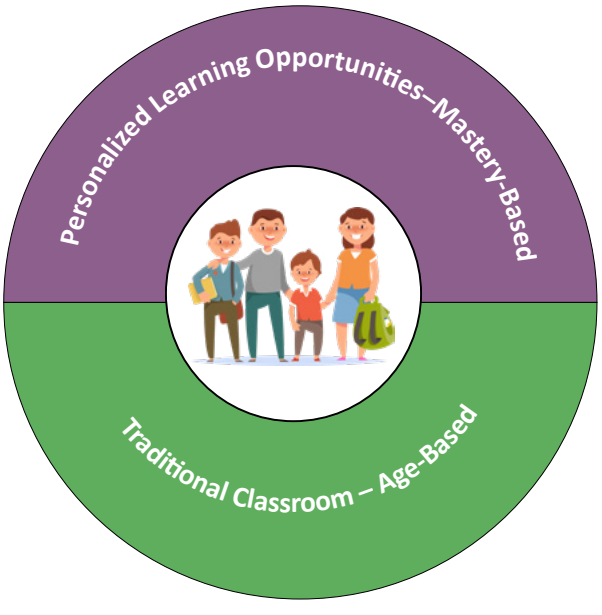
Haapala's district is transitioning to digital learning. According to Haapala, "Change should not be orchestrated from the top-down or forced on anyone. Rather, bold innovation and continuous improvements to our traditional school will happen side by side in a 'split-screen'. Over time the system changes organically, as innovative approaches to learning are tried, refined, replicated, and adopted by others."

Students and parents will be offered the opportunity to choose between personalized learning opportunities in mastery-based classrooms and traditional age-based classrooms with seat time requirements. Teachers will be offered the opportunity to choose between using mastery-based pedagogy, project based, multidisciplinary, and more student-centered learning or continuing with current more traditional pedagogy.

Warroad Public Schools is using professional development to prepare teachers to teach within a new digital delivery reality. "We have engaged Zia Learning to provide teacher professional development using a cohort model," said Haapala. "Our first cohort received PD this summer and throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Two additional cohorts will receive the training in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Students and parents will receive ongoing education regarding the transformation to digital curriculum."

The district is using Open Education Resources (OER) that Zia Learning is providing and reviewing commercially produced digital curriculum for use in the future. To shift the design of learning, they have been one-to-one with Chromebooks K-12 since the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. The availability of these devices allows teachers to implement digital learning. The district also adopted an Learning Management System (LMS) from Schoology with full implementation during the school year.

Learning Opportunities for Students, Parents and Teachers



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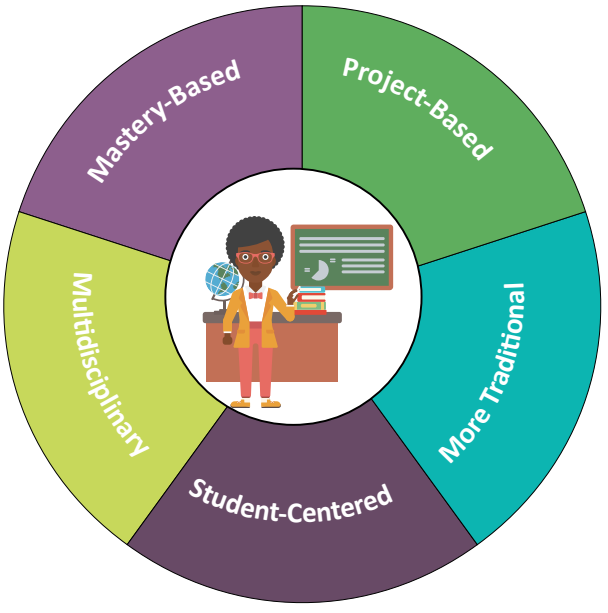

Customized PD and an App Toolbox in Houston

Kristy Sailors, Ph.D. is the Director of Educational Technology for the Houston Independent School District. She works to advance the district's technology initiative while supporting teachers as they integrate technology into instruction to engage students in their learning.

Dr. Kristy Sailors, Director, Educational Technology, Houston Independent School District Houston, TX

Sailors described scaling digital personalized learning in her district. According to Sailors, "HISD has a 1:1 laptop initiative, PowerUp, designed to provide students with engaging, personalized and transformational learning experiences incorporating digital tools, resources and instructional strategies that offer learners with opportunities to explore, create and collaborate. The district has leveraged a learning management system, inclusive of curriculum resources, digital textbooks and instructional materials that align with the transformational goal of PowerUp.

"To further support the vision for personalized learning, the district has developed the App Toolbox, that provides a selection of digital resources evaluated for safety, security and content appropriate for the academic setting. The App Toolbox contains a variety of educational tools that are device agnostic, and available to students, staff and community members. Providing the App Toolbox, and supporting tutorials and quick reference guides, enables users to select the tool that best aligns with the instructional outcome and further personalizes the learning. Because the tools included on the App Toolbox are device agnostic, students can select tools based on their individual technology preferences emphasizing personal choice."

To address student digital skills, HISD developed a student learner profile, inclusive of key characteristics and digital skills, entitled the Global Graduate. According to Sailors, "The HISD Global Graduate profile is made up of six qualities that when applied to the learner's skills set, create a highly functional digital learner. The Global Graduate characteristics include: leader, critical thinker, adaptable and productive, responsible decision maker, self-determined and motivated, and skilled communicator. Through the instructional strategies, teacher supports, digital resources and technologies, the district provides students with opportunities to participate in their own learning as creators and not merely consumers."

HISD recognizes that teachers are integral to a student's success. Sailor says, "The district provides a large variety of professional development opportunities, coaching and instructional supports designed to expand and deepen teacher's skills set and knowledge. HISD leadership places emphasis on the individual teacher's technological skills and offers leveled professional development, presented in a choice session format that allows teachers to select topics that best meet their needs and at their technological level."

Teachers Need the Skills to Facilitate Personalized Learning

Robin Gonzales
Founder and President
Zia Learning and
Zia Professional Service

Robin Gonzales is the Founder and President of Zia Learning and Zia Professional Development Services. With over 15 years of experience in public education, she has served as a classroom teacher, school-level director and district-level official for Chicago Public Schools. Her work centers around using online learning and 21st Century Tools to address the diverse needs of today's learners.

According to Gonzales, "Personalized learning is based on the concept of allowing students flexibility and a voice in how, when and where they learn while tailoring that learning based on individual student need. For students to thrive in a personalized model they must have critical autonomous and digital learner skills which include time management, goal setting, motivation and grit, decision making, digital literacy and communication skills. These skills fall under the social emotional skill set, but we cannot assume that students come to class pre-armed with these skills. In fact, most students have received little if any direct instruction in this critical skill set. Teachers need to ensure that they are explicitly teaching these skills at each grade level.

"Educators may have noticed a simultaneous rise of the personalized learning and social emotional learning (SEL) movement," said Gonzales. "SEL skills are more critical than ever. In many ways the two movements are truly synergistic. Personalized learning requires students to sharpen and enact their SEL Skills and a personalized learning environment gives teachers the ability to step away from direct instruction and spend more time on these critical skills."

SEL and Autonomous Learning

Autonomous learning, also called student-centered learning is tied to the change in focus in the classroom from the teacher to the student. According to Gonzales, "It relates to personalized learning as students are given great voice and choice in their learning paths. However, autonomous learning also requires students to be more responsible learners.

Autonomous learning is a component of self-directed learning, which in a digital model places a great deal of responsibility on students as they navigate online programs and content."

According to the CASEL Foundation, Social Emotional Learning focuses on five core competencies including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, decision making and self-management. These competencies are important in any environment but are especially critical in the new digital classroom that calls on students to have a greater sense of self-awareness and at the same time be more independent, responsible learners.

Personalized Learning at Scale

In a personalized learning environment, teachers need the skills to be facilitators, and explicitly direct student learning. Gonzales says, "As we begin to scale personalized learning across districts we must ensure that we are focusing on quality teaching and learning. There is this assumption that teachers and students are ready for personalized learning. The reality is that teachers have not had adequate training and professional development in the actual pedagogy of facilitated personalized instruction. At the same time, personalized learning models that call on high levels of student motivation and self-direction without teaching those skills have the danger of failing our most at-risk students. Correctly implemented personalized learning has the potential to eradicate the achievement gap by providing each student precisely what they need, exactly when they need it. However, students must be fully supported and taught not only how to use digital curriculum and software, but also how to be independent, responsible and motivated learners."

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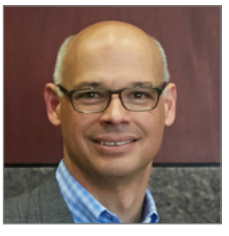
The Learning Counsel helps our subscribing 215,000+ education professionals in the K12 and Higher Ed sector gain context on the shift to digital curriculum. Our mission is to help districts and schools reach real transformation through strategies for digital content and curriculum. Through consulting services and research to events, custom publishing and online editorial, the Learning Counsel provides dynamic and diverse opportunities for private and public-sector leaders to collaborate for positive change.

LeiLani Cauthen CEO & Publisher

A Research Publisher and Media personality for 20 years, LeiLani conducts national research on digital curriculum trends and spend. She is well versed in the digital content universe, software development, the adoption process, school coverage models, and helping define this century's real change to teaching and learning.

Dr. David Kafitz
VP School Relations, Digital Transition Specialist

Expert and charismatic change-agent helping schools move forward with a well-reasoned strategy for digital content and curriculum, professional development and IT strategy, David is a former Superintendent, Director of Technology Services, Principal, and Teacher in North Carolina Public Schools.



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“Technology enables the change that only teachers can make.”

Robin Gonzales, Chief Education Officer, Zia Learning

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