

# classroom technology rollouts

Teachers in this district learn how to use technology in the classroom through the Academy model, using 21st century thinking skills.

**H**ave you ever attended a mandatory professional development session that had little or no relevancy to your position?

How about a class where you left excited to try new things, but just never had the time, and the binder sits dusty on your shelf?

I once attended a professional development session about differentiation when a colleague turned to me and stated what is now obvious: “Why do they expect us to teach using differentiation strategies, yet we are all receiving the same exact training with no regard to our ability, experience or relevancy?” Why indeed?

At Cambrian School District, we are trying a new approach as we investigate new technologies. Rather than roll out a one-size-fits-all mandate that you will use this new “box,” which may also sit gathering dust, we have implemented a new model. Early in the last school year we announced the Digital Media Academy, and in March 2012, the iPad Academy, the focus of this article.

In the Academy Model, any teacher with an interest may apply to participate. Teach-

ers are expected to use the technology with their students, create lesson plans, research and develop best practices, and share what they have learned with colleagues.

Teachers are using the same 21st century skills we hope to instill in our students: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, creativity and communication, as well as skills developing information, media and technology literacy. In return, teachers receive hardware and software; targeted, relevant professional development, and the time to try out new ideas in their classrooms.

With the Academy model, our goal is to provide the information and technology to a few willing and dedicated individuals, who will then encourage others through their example. As more teachers see meaningful, effective and productive ways to use the technology, we will get more creative in finding ways to fund the rollout of emerging technologies to more classrooms.

## **Making it happen**

Cambrian is a small district in Northern California. Although we are in the heart of

Silicon Valley, like many districts, we have had to make difficult decisions and find every way possible to stretch a dollar, while still making the best choices for our students’ success. We have had to get creative and take a strong stand on what is important for our students’ future.

Working with administrators, teacher leaders, parents, community members and board members, in 2010-11, we developed a meaningful, relevant and achievable strategic plan to help take our students and teachers well into the 21st century. Our strategic plan created a strong vision for the future and generated a call to action for our staff and community.

Once adopted by our Board in August of 2011, it set direction and provided the support and expertise to make the vision a reality, both in fiscal and human resources. Included in the plan is a foundation and justification for meaningful investment in appropriate technologies.

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*By Deborah Blow and Sandy McConnell*



In March 2012, all teachers in our district received an invitation to apply to the iPad Academy. Applications were reviewed by district-level administrators and principals. Participating teachers are expected to meet the following criteria:

- Commitment to integration of technology into instruction;
- Required participation in monthly sessions throughout this school year and next;
- Maintenance of a digital journal/portfolio; and
- Attendance at an end-of-year colloquium in spring 2013.

Teachers are also expected to:

- Undertake action research to investigate the use of iPads to individualize learning for all students;
- Understand the components of instruction necessary for our 21st century students;
- Be able to integrate technology into standards-based instruction in a way that leads to measurable student achievement gains; and
- Use technology to engage students with challenge-based learning opportunities.

### Teachers as tech evangelists

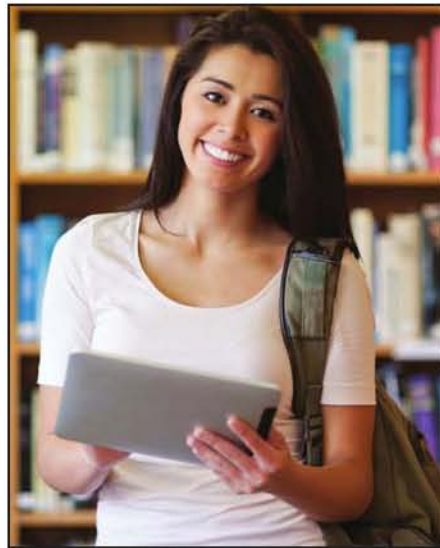
One teacher was chosen from each site based on their applications. In her application, one teacher summed up what we were looking for in our applicants: “Some teachers are apprehensive or unaware of the benefits of using technology in the classroom. I’d like to be able to share tools, procedures and apps that will help allay some fears of implementation in their own classrooms.

“I see the role of teachers in the iPad Academy as being tech evangelists. Learning with an iPad provides additional opportunities for differentiation and compacting, as well as an opportunity to present information to students in a variety of modalities. ... With iPads, students can create their own learning opportunities and teach each other. I would love the opportunity to bring this technology, and these opportunities, to my students and other teachers.”

Each participant in the academy would receive a class set of iPads, an iPad and Mac Book for teacher use, an iPad cart for storage and charging, an Apple TV, and an opportunity for further technology incentives

if participating in 21st Century Learning Academy in future years.

Selected teachers first met in the end of March, when we discussed our goals and immediate plans, and each teacher received a MacBook and iPad. We knew we had about two weeks before we got our class set of devices, so we planned to use the time to learn as much as we could about the iPad and find



free apps that would meet our educational goals. An Apple representative walked us through the basics of using the iPad.

As we were discussing how to share what we learned with each other, one teacher downloaded the free Edmodo app and created a group for us to share ideas, discoveries and concerns. Other teachers set up digital journals. Even before we left the meeting, we had a methodology for communication and collaboration!

Right around spring break our class sets of iPads and carts arrived. Of course, the students were ecstatic. Even before any apps were loaded, students were making short videos, taking pictures, finding their houses and our school in Google Maps and using the Apple Notes app to write summaries and ideas. Once the iPads were in their hands, we started learning even more about what works and what doesn’t. Students participated in creating the rules, training each other how to use the iPads and creating procedures for working with them. This collaboration enforces the learning and social skills that foster real growth.

Several of us were concerned that our students would bury their heads in the devices, never coming up for air, but the iPads have actually fostered teamwork and collaboration. We reminded ourselves that these kids truly are digital natives, and for them, the device is just part of the process of communicating, creating and sharing.

We have all had to be flexible and let the process unroll, be willing to take risks and share control with our students. And our administration has to be OK with this as well.

### Seeing students gain independence

It is incredibly rewarding to see kids, especially shy or reticent students or those with limited English proficiency, open up and share what they have learned with others. Allowing students to control the Apple TV, or determine how they will demonstrate their learning, has helped them become responsible and independent as thinkers.

Rolling out the iPads in the spring gave teachers the opportunity to establish relationships of trust with their students and put strong classroom management processes already in place before the “disruption” of introducing iPads. The iPads changed the way our classes ran and the way our students learned, and we rolled with it. Change drives creativity, and creativity fosters change!

### Equity of access

This model and the investments we are making in technology are not without their detractors. Some question the financial investment in technology, while others question the equity of one teacher per site getting a class set of iPads that are not widely available to other students. However, as the collaboration we desire is fostered in our teachers, we all become partners in the process.

We did grapple with the equity issue. We talked about rolling out iPads at one site instead of spreading them out across schools. We also talked about sharing the carts with multiple classrooms. In the end, after weighing pros and cons, we decided the Academy model really did ensure that motivated teachers would use the technology they received. The one-to-one instant access of the cart in a teacher’s room allows for spontaneous use in teachable moments, as well as



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thoughtful differentiation and access during small group work.

At one school, a teacher co-applied with the teacher of the Special Day Class, and both were approved. In addition to working with their two classes as one team, both of these teachers have expanded use of the equipment to larger groups of students through mainstreaming and co-teaching models. For example, when students from other fourth-grade classes came into her classroom for reading RTI, the teacher used her iPads for word work and other activities.

When the SDC teacher's third-graders were reading "Charlotte's Web" in their mainstream class, they used iMovie to create alternate endings to the book. Once other kids saw the iMovies, they clamored to have the student experts show them how they could make their endings into a movie, too. In addition to sharing the technology, students with special needs were in the happy position of being able to teach other students what they knew!

At another school, the teacher has sent the iPad cart to other second grade classrooms for them to use for story writing. In summer school, a teacher brought along her iPad cart to use with two science classes she was co-teaching with another teacher, reaching more kids and exposing more teachers to the technology.

### Investment pays off

Because creating 21st century citizens is written into our strategic plan's vision, mission and goals, the plan has been a useful reference point when requesting funding for initial phases of the academies. The overall investment for these academies to date has been about 25 percent of the expenditure on the strategic plan and has impacted the same percentage of teachers and students.

The investment is paying off. In the words of one of our Academy members, "Teaching with this tool has been transformative for my students and for my teaching!" And isn't that what it is all about? ■

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