

Schools Where Technology

Works for Learning

Video script

September 6, 2002

Jennings Junior High

This is an advanced technology classroom at Jennings Junior High. In it, you'll find 15 networked student stations with Internet access, a networked teacher workstation, a video projector, a classroom printer, a scanner, a TV monitor, a VCR and an interactive SMART board. In it, you'll also find a teacher who's completed an extensive professional development program. And, most importantly ... students who are genuinely excited about learning.

In these advanced technology classrooms, inquiry-based instruction has replaced more traditional learning styles. Students are given an overarching question and expected to find answers. Technology adds value to the classroom by helping them to find information and to present what they've learned. The Internet is a readily accessible tool that helps students in their quest for information.

Students are encouraged to formulate their own questions ... to follow their hunches and interests ... and to translate these into key words for search engines. They work together to formulate strategies for finding information and for sharing their results.

The seventh and eighth graders who are learning in advanced technology classrooms are from low-income families – 85% qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch. Approximately 95% are African American. Jennings Junior High is located in a first tier suburb of St. Louis and has a student population of approximately 500.

At Jennings, the move to inquiry-based instruction supported by technology started in 1994 when new superintendent Terry Stewart established it as a district goal. Two Jennings teachers were selected to complete extensive professional development training through a statewide technology initiative called MINTs – the Multimedia Interactive Networked Technologies.

When the teachers returned to school, they put what they learned to work in the classroom. They changed their instructional style and integrated use of the Internet into the curriculum

It didn't take long for students in the advanced technology classrooms to improve their academic performance. That early success led to a commitment to use district resources to fund training for more teachers and for additional advanced technology classrooms.

...everybody ha[s] their own different style. But whatever style they may have, if they're not able to pull the best out of those students... Because technology won't do that. Technology's only the tool, which has allowed you to have the different resources at your fingertips. By the end of the day the teachers that go home, and talk with the team, if they're having a problem they talk with the team, and they talk all that over, that's how you are able to sustain it.
-- Stanley Engram, Principal

The district-supported professional development in technology is voluntary and unpaid. To be considered for advanced technology classrooms, teachers commit to weekly meetings for about

nine months. After they complete their training, they're encouraged to continue to collaborate with their peers to refine their instructional approach and use of technology.

In the advanced technology classrooms, teachers seek a new role for themselves and their students. They are no longer fully in charge of the information – students find relevant information themselves and make sense of it. Students have more freedom to move around and talk to others. However, the teachers are still very much in charge of their classes and at the center of the interactions there.

The data shows that the number of students scoring “proficient” or “advanced” from Jennings Junior High increased at a rate higher than students statewide. According to both teachers and student, other things have changed as well. Students voluntarily stay after school to work on assignments and are willing to attend Saturday school so they can access technology to complete their work. There are fewer discipline problems and students are more engaged in learning.

The teachers we saw, we interviewed, and observed in their classrooms at Jennings Junior High were ordinary people. One of the social studies teachers had taught for over 25 years and reported that he felt more invigorated about his instruction now than ever. Because it really brought him back to the engaging aspects of his teaching. He was reconsidering his curriculum, he was talking about instruction with a peer, and it really engaged him in his craft. It made him feel like he had new things to learn and new things to contribute and was improving as a professional. And he was able to accomplish that through really the approach that Jennings junior high took. After a year where they brought all the folks who were going to be receiving an advanced technology classroom, they got them together for a year, for sustained professional development over time. Then, they had chosen pairs of people to participate in that training so that when they returned to their school and got their advanced technology classroom they were right next-door to someone who someone else who had also done that. So they really built it in structurally so there was professional collaboration, and peer support after the training was over and then were also supported on a continual basis by staff members at the district office. So it didn't just end after that year, they had that peer, and professional development from the district level continuing.

-- Sara Dexter, Project co-Director

Video Credits

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For further information on this project contact project co-directors
Ronald E. Anderson <rea@umn.edu>
Sara Dexter <sdexter@umn.edu>

Video Producer/Editor: Kate Conners, [4th Canyon Productions](#)

Videographers : Sara Dexter and Bobby Jeanpierre

Script: Teresa James, Sara Dexter, and Ronald E. Anderson

Research Team Members

University of Minnesota

Ronald E. Anderson
Sara Dexter
Bobby Jeanpierre
Karen Seashore

SRI International

Carlos Espinoza
Robert Kozma
Christine Korbak
Raymond McGhee