

Strategic Leadership: The Windham Elementary Chromebook Initiative



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BACKGROUND OF THE WINDHAM ELEMENTARY STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

At Windham Elementary School interactive whiteboards and a limited number tablets/laptops were available for instruction throughout the school. Lessons with the interactive whiteboards were teacher centered and the use of the tablets/laptops was sporadic. Using the strategic leadership essential skills, school faculty members determined that their students needed greater access to a collaborative digital environment if they are to be prepared to enter a 21st century work arena. As a result, Windham Elementary implemented a 1:1 Google Chromebook initiative in grades 3-6 over a three-year period to meet the collaborative and creative 21st century needs of the students and faculty. The faculty needed a platform that would allow for the sharing of lessons, insights, findings, and resources in a digital environment (Spire, Oliver, & Corn, 2012). Chromebooks provided an easily managed electronic environment (Yim, Warschauer, Zhang, & Lawrence, 2014).

THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Strategic Leadership in K-12 school settings offers the principal and teacher leaders a means of persuading other faculty members to use short and long term goal planning to strive for continuous improvement. Dealing with change is difficult for school organizations and it takes buy-in from teachers and administrators for this to occur. Starting with planning, moving forward through implementation and then institutionalizing the innovation is crucial for the long-term success. Using the essential skills of strategic leadership, school leaders can focus on a shared vision and direction for school growth.

Schoemaker, Krupp and Howland (2013) outlined the six essential skills for strategic leadership. Strategic leaders anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align and learn. During anticipation, strategic leaders in schools conduct action research to understand what challenges they face. During the challenge phase, strategic leaders question the status quo and try to figure out ways to continuously improve the school. Moving to interpretation, strategic leaders look at all of the information and then discover new patterns and opportunities and then make decisions. Sometimes they do not have all the information but they make the commitment to change knowing that they have several possible options. Strategic leaders then align the decision by finding common ground with the faculty. Finally, strategic school leaders study the successes and failures of themselves and others outside the school organization.

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STUDENT 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

Student-centered, technologically integrated instruction is needed to adequately prepare students in a competitive digital society. McLeod (2015) stated, “we owe our children regular and substantive opportunities to master their current technology-suffused information, economic, and learning landscapes if they are to flourish in the present and prepare for their futures” (p. 2). Students need to experience problem-solving, in a digital collaborative environment (Claymier, 2014). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2007) proposed that students need the following skills in order to be prepared for the virtual and global workplace. These technology-based critical thinking skills include:

- Creativity and innovation
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication and collaboration
- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Information, communication and technology (ICT) literacy

Windham Elementary, like other schools across the nation, have turned to a 1:1 initiative as a platform for integrating 21st century skills into a collaborative online environment (Brown, 2014; Donovan, Green, & Mason, 2014; Yim, Warschauer, Zheng, & Lawrence, 2014; Zheng, Arada, Niiya, & Warschauer, 2014).

1:1 INITIATIVE

Laptop 1:1 initiatives are becoming more pervasive in schools (Spires, Oliver, & Corn, 2012). Bocconi, Kamylyis, and Punie (2013) reported 1:1 initiatives are needed to improve student learning abilities. Digital technology provides students with the ability to locate data and information, which in turn, can be used to find creative solutions in problem-based instruction. Lei and Zhao (2008) announced similar findings from interviews of teachers, students, and parents, that such programs can bring out creativity and resourceful in the classroom. They discovered students used the computers to research problems, communicate with classmates, and exploration. Storz and Hoffman (2013) uncovered that the employment of a 1:1 environment may also position educators to provide a more collaborative model for instruction. Such an environment might see a shift towards teachers as facilitators, skillfully guiding students through a digital landscape of resources in search of timely solutions to relevant issues (Crook, Sharma, & Wilson, 2015; Spires, Oliver, & Corn, 2012). Chromebooks lend themselves as the new computer of choice for 1:1 initiatives because of the low cost, collaborative nature of Drive, and easy to manage aspects of the devices (Castelhano, 2014; Herold, 2014; Molnar, 2014).

ANTICIPATE: PILOTING THE CHROMEBOOKS

Using the essential skill of anticipation, Windham piloted the Chromebooks in four fifth- grade classrooms. Each Chromebook was set up with a generic username. Student email was not set up. The devices were managed as student workstations for formative assessment purposes with web-based educational resources. The administration wished to see if the devices could stand up to daily student use. The

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