



New Technology Enhances Teaching and Learning

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Institution

Known as one of the leaders in innovative and instructional technology, Sarasota County Schools was the first district in the U.S. to install interactive displays in every classroom throughout the district in 2006. The public school district is composed of 53 schools serving more than 43,000 students residing in Sarasota County, FL.

Situation

Many of the interactive whiteboard projectors from 2006 were at the end of their life in the Sarasota district. At this point, the common complaint throughout the district was that the bulbs dimmed over time.

This created two problems for the district IT team and teachers.

1. If the bulbs weren't replaced as soon as they started to dim, teachers had to change the lighting in the classroom to ensure that students could see - or they had to change the way they prepared lessons. "For a kindergarten teacher whose lesson is covering colors, the colors would come out distorted on the projector," shared Joe Binswanger, Director of Information Technology at Sarasota County Schools. "To work around the issue, a teacher would have to manipulate the color on their computer manually to ensure that the colors projected correctly."

2. New bulbs were costly and required the district to spend a significant amount of money on replacements.

The Instructional Technology (IT) team at Sarasota County Schools decided it was time to search for a replacement for its aging projectors and whiteboards. With the advancement of touch technology on the horizon in education, the IT team began looking at interactive flat panels to roll out district-wide.

Evaluation

"Before we consider integrating new technology into the classroom, we always ask ourselves 'How is this enhancing or supporting the teaching and learning to happen in the classroom?'" said Binswanger. Binswanger and his team created an evaluation committee made up of teachers, administrators, and support staff to uncover how each product enhanced and complemented teachers and students' daily activities. Binswanger and other members of the IT team at Sarasota created a checklist of everything that they wanted the new display to accomplish.

"We had a set of tasks that we assigned to different members of the evaluation committee," explained Todd Alexander, Manager of School Support Services for Sarasota County Schools. "We made sure to include simple tasks, such as turning on and off the display. While that may not seem like a significant task for someone to complete, it makes a huge difference when you're integrating new technology with teachers that vary in expertise."

Interactive Solution

After testing a variety of interactive displays from different education technology companies, the votes were unanimous. "With the Promethean ActivPanel, teachers saw the potential that it has in the classroom," said Binswanger. "The ActivPanel was versatile, not only for various teaching styles but also with where we knew the technology was eventually heading."

The ActivPanel's stunning display was what Sarasota needed after experiencing dimming light bulbs with the older interactive whiteboards. The interactive flat panel comes with a built-in light adjuster that provides ideal lighting when interacting and viewing the screen in the classroom. Additionally, interactivity was a requirement as that was already the norm with the district's old interactive whiteboards. The ActivPanel provides a highly-accurate touch detection, enabling teachers and students to collaborate with ease as well as its interactive lesson delivery software, ActivInspire, and ClassFlow.

Binswanger and his team were also happy that continuing their relationship with Promethean meant that the district wouldn't have to go through much change. The partnership with Promethean meant that they would minimize the costs and burden for teachers to migrate their lessons to a new lesson delivery software. Despite that added benefit, Alexander explained that the ActivPanel would have still come out on top on its own merits.



One piece of feedback that the team received as they were evaluating technology was that teachers wanted greater flexibility when it came to rearranging their classroom. "Adding a (wall) mounted display would make flexible learning challenging," shared Binswanger.

Because the ActivPanel comes with a variety of mounting options, the team decided to include a mobile stand with each display. "The mobile stand available for the ActivPanel not only supported flexible learning, but it also helped as the district went through reconstruction," added Binswanger. "With the mobile stands, we didn't have to uninstall and reinstall ActivPanels during construction. We simply wheeled the ActivPanel out of the classroom when construction began and wheeled them back in as construction completed."

Professional Development

Providing professional development to teachers remains essential to Sarasota County Schools. "A great professional development plan is one of the supporting legs for great teaching, and we make sure to include it with every technology that we roll out district-wide," said Binswanger.

"We recognize that if we don't provide that professional development layer, there's going to be a segment of teachers that never adopt a new technology or use it optimally because they just don't know how."

As part of their partnership with Promethean, Sarasota County has an Education Consultant from Promethean's Professional Development team embedded within the school district. "Teachers want to hear from other teachers," added Binswanger. "As a former teacher, the Education Consultant can bring our teachers their own classroom experience, adding a layer of credibility."

Promethean's partnership with Sarasota has remained strong for more than a decade, and the district's IT team knows that continuing to partner with Promethean to replace their old interactive whiteboards across the district was the right decision for their teachers and students.

Student engagement has come a long way from chalkboards and projectors. Interactive flat panels continue to make a positive impact on student engagement.

"If Sarasota's graduating class of 2019 spent their entire K-12 experience in Sarasota County, they would have never known education without a Promethean interactive display. Students would have never experienced a moment in the classroom that wasn't interactive," shared Binswanger.



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