

**Policy Case Study for Griffin-Spalding County Schools**

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## **Executive Summary**

This policy paper examines the current state of eLearning in the Griffin-Spalding County School (GSCS) district. Although the district has invested heavily in hardware and software, as seen in the ever increasing number of Chrome books available for usage, professional development related to this technology is lacking. One of the Technology Coaches, Leslie Fagin, is attempting to remedy this issue. Many of Fagin's professional opinions align with current literature related to growth and leadership for eLearning. One example in particular is her belief in the power of networking via online platforms. Based on Fagin's interview, suggestions for leadership, organizational, and change management strategies were developed.

## **Policy Case Study for Griffin-Spalding County Schools**

### **Overview of organization**

During the 2018-2019 school year, the Griffin-Spalding County Schools (GSCS) district, located in Griffin, Georgia, served 10,353 students at 21 different schools, and employed 864 teachers (Griffin-Spalding County School System, 2019). In terms of technology, 12,019 Chromebooks were available for students and staff, and teachers made 37,050 posts to Google Classroom, the LMS for the district. During the 2017-2018 school year, only 9,384 Chromebooks were available (Griffin-Spalding County School System, 2018). The district recently invested in 700 hot spots to support students who did/do not have acceptable access to the internet.

Multiple IT employees maintain and support the hardware and software used within the district, and two technology coaches are available to assist teachers with instructional technology (Instructional Technology, 2018). The district has heavily invested in hardware for the schools, including Mac labs, cameras for journalism, STEAM equipment, 3D printers, and the push to be 1:1 for Chromebooks; however, opportunities for professional development for this technology is, at least somewhat, lacking (L. Fagin, personal interview, September 5, 2020). Leslie Fagin, the technology coach for the middle and high schools, agreed to be interviewed about the role of instructional technology within the district.

### **Introduction of Interviewee**

Ms. Leslie Fagin did not start her educational career as an instructional technology coach, but when the position was created, she jumped at the opportunity. Mostly self-taught, she relies heavily on social media to connect with other technologists and to keep abreast of areas of growth and technology issues for her teachers. She has presented at Georgia education

technology conferences, served for ISTE, given TED talks, and is close to becoming Google certified. Her most current accomplishment was the completion of a mobile STEAM lab, although, frustratingly, the corona outbreaks and subsequent school closings has hindered the usage. She is proud that during May 2020, she trained over 400 teachers during professional learning opportunities. She is a strong advocate for Twitter as means for teachers wishing to increase their knowledge about educational technology. When working with teachers, she is flexible in how she can present trainings, and will work with teachers one-on-one in a semi co-teaching relationship to ensure a teacher becomes comfortable with the technology.

### **Description of current stage of life cycle**

Characteristics of organizations in the growth stage of the eLearning life cycle include a shift from in-person training such as conferences to online resources like webinars and online videos (Michelle, 2019) and ever more students accessing learning and content through “educational videos, apps, software, and online courses offered by Coursera Inc., EdX Inc., and many other platforms” and the use of gamification to increase engagement and understanding (Rajput, 2018). Organizations in the growth phase may still struggle with low completion rates (Kovačević, 2018).

GSCS has steadily increased its online training offerings over the past few years. For example, in the past, an entire day was set aside during pre-planning for teachers to attend an in-person training to cover topics such as safety and ethics, but two years ago all of the material was moved to a Google Classroom for teachers to complete at their own pace.

Covid has forced the district to dramatically increase the growth in students accessing content online through a variety of apps, websites, and multimedia, and thus requiring a drastic growth in the knowledge and usage of technology among teachers. Even prior to covid, the

distract had already begun to invest more in software and licenses for programs that promote gamification for learning, such as Brainpop, Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Quizlet (Haiken, 2020).

In terms of lower completion rates, while some online training is mandatory, most of the technology professional development at GSCS is optional, with no follow-up as to whether the teachers completed the trainings and applied them to their professional practice.

### **Leadership strategies**

As GSCS tries to move past the growth stage and into true innovation, leaders should allow -- and even encourage -- learners to shape their own paths. Instead of dictating all eLearning courses and trainings, leaders should encourage bilateral knowledge sharing, wherein “participants share their knowledge, such as experiences and relevant information, and keeping (sic) communicating with others. On the other hand, participants receive knowledge, such as downloading resources shared by others so as to enrich their knowledge and come up with creative ideas” (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 1965). Leadership can further encourage knowledge sharing and potential creativity “by identifying and articulating a vision associating with personal reward and showing high performance expectations” (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 1975).

Furthermore, leaders should accept the mindset change as education moves further and further from curricula determined solely by administration to more student-centered models (Cordie et al., 2018). Leaders can have expectations but also need to meet learners (in this case teachers) where they are at and support with trainings and material that are personally relevant to the educator.

### **Organizational Policies**

In order to move from the growth to the innovation phase, GSCS must still work to overcome barriers that are generally ascribed to the adoption phase of the elearning life cycle. As

noted previously, when pre-planning training for safety and ethics moved to the Google Classroom, teachers were expected to complete these activities at their own pace, but the time previously allotted to learning about these issues in person was then devoted to other trainings. In short, teachers were expected to now cover twice as much material in the same time span as before. Zaineb (2016) notes that people are less likely to embrace eLearning if time is not set aside during the workday to complete trainings, and employees must instead use personal time.

In the same vein, given that knowledge sharing can increase creativity (Zhang et al., 2018) -- a hallmark of the innovation phase -- teachers and staff must have the time to develop these social connections and create these networks. Leslie Fagin spoke again and again of the utility of social media for social networking as a way for educators to share their knowledge (personal communication, September 4, 2020).

However, since time is a finite resource, limiting the scope of trainings and professional development can be beneficial. Zaineb (2016) notes that elearning opportunities “have to be designed to address specific learning goals.” eLearning needs to be more personalized so that staff can quickly access the knowledge and skills that they need at just that moment. A common complaint from teachers is feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of educational technology available. A month-long focus on one single type of ed tech would be preferable to weekly lists of the latest and greatest tech tools.

### **Change Management Strategies**

First and foremost, leaders should not interpret being nervous about change as being resistant to change. As Dent and Goldberg (1999) note, “[p]eople may resist loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort, but these are not the same as resisting change. The belief that people do resist change causes all kinds of unproductive actions within organizations” (p.26).

Leaders should not automatically view employees as recalcitrant and instead acknowledge the fear and stress, and work from there. Misunderstanding and a lack of trust can contribute to resistance, but education, participation, and negotiation can help overcome any real resistance (Dent & Goldberg, 1999).

Leaders could also manage change more effectively and successfully by improving communication efforts. Light (2017) cautions about sending change messages via email, which is exactly how GSCS currently shares news of change. Instead, Light (2017) suggests that eLearning changes potentially be shared on the company/school LMS. Finally, Light (2017) recommends following up to see if learning occurred and knowledge acquired, which is one area where GSCS is lacking.

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## Appendix

### *Interview email*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16ZRB0Ml4eVhy3cx3YqYkdklMk6DOMGdX/view?usp=sharing>

### *Interview Questions*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U7uc7tfuGXGmxX-nKZLgHkud4wMT2Bzj/view?usp=sharing>

### *Interview (two parts)*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13db3agWSrrTyJmS7EuQhFGfE2QjGoei7/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Huhbw4tGpOgHxBcZVhQw6W75sAPkrcNO/view?usp=sharing>