Proposal: Technology Coach for Parents
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The problem

Technology is the defining element of our age. Preparing our students for the inevitability of a future dominated by technology, in every field, should be among among our highest priorities. Our district has done a remarkable job in laying the groundwork for our students success in the digital age.

Technology, however, is a double edged sword. On the negative side, it can be a distraction. It can be the cause of poor reading habits, and a gateway to dangerous social behaviors. The body of research is growing, and showing that technology is having a significant negative impact on our student's development. Research shows that students are dramatically distracted by their cell phones even when they are not in active use. Just students having them in their pocket diminishes a student's level of concentration. Recent studies indicate that students that have 24 hour access to their phones are likely to perform a full grade lower than similar students that surrender their phones to parents before bedtime. In an informal study I recently did with my students, an overwhelming majority of students reported having their phones with them when they go to sleep. As educators, can we have influence over what happens in the home?

Students' ability to read deeply and analytically is being impacted by the skimming and jumping habits they have become accustomed to when they read on their phones. To what degree are our literacy initiatives being compromised by the habits of the digital age? If parents understood the impact the reading off of a screen has had on their child, and we provided them with strategies to circumvent the effects, would it have a positive impact?

We are well aware that what goes on within the digital realm our students live in can be socially traumatic and can lead to our worst fears becoming reality. Do the parents of our students know how to monitor online social activities? ISTE has developed digital citizenship standards for students, teachers, coaches and administrators, but none exist for parents. Are the digital habits prescribed by these standards achievable, if they are not practiced at home?

Imagine a student with a learning disability...they spends hour every evening in front of a game screen, their sleep is disrupted by texting with friends late into the night. In class, their attention is divided between learning and what update might be on the screen in their pocket. What do we owe this student, and what can we possibly do to impact what is happening in their home?

A thorough description of what is being proposed

My proposal is based on a program in the Grand Rapids School System called Parent University (https://parents.grps.org/). The program provides education for parents on a variety of issues, from promoting attendance, to math skills, to character education. In addition to classes for parents, the program also fosters cooperation on these issues within the community, through networking and informational campaigns. My proposal promotes this model on a smaller scale. Over time, the model can expand into something more comprehensive.

I propose the district establish the position of Parent Technology Coach. The position is intended to remediate a growing list of concerns related to student technology use, and to provide parents with tools to improve parenting skills in the digital age. The coach will be responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining the program. Among the issues the coach will address are:

- Healthy use of social media.
- Maintaining a positive digital footprint.

- Promoting the ISTE standards at home.
- Establishing media use guidelines at home.
- Digital citizenship.
- Technology monitoring.
- Google Classroom and Infinite Campus for parents.
- Media and its influence on the confidence gap in girls.

Concrete descriptions of the individuals/daily tasks involved

The model I am presenting is adaptable and scalable. The program can be run by: a single full time teacher on special assignment, a part time TOSA, a committee of teachers with release time, or a committee of teacher volunteers. For the purpose of this proposal, I will assume the district will fund a full time position, as I believe it will result in a higher quality program and greater efficacy. I do, however encourage the committee, if it feels a full time TOSA is beyond the capacity of the district, to consider one of the other options mentioned above.

The coach will:
- Conduct research and attend trainings on issues that are relevant to technology and student performance/health.
- Develop a series of classes for parents that address technology issues and needs that are currently being unmet.
- Facilitate promotion, registration (through the staff development center) and space allocation for the classes.
- Teach classes to groups of parents in a wide variety of settings and times.
- Develop and maintain an online presence, including: a web site, digital classes, resources and references.
- Create a community network, comprised of: PTAs, parents, doctors, churches and business owners, to promote positive technology use.
- Use a variety of platforms to disseminate an information campaign regarding positive technology use, including: print (newspaper, newsletter, poster, lawn sign, flyer), social media/web and shoutpoint.
- Provide staff development within the district, to turn key the training.

Projected costs

The cost of this program will depend on how the district chooses to implement it. I am proposing a full time TOSA. The full time option will provide a quality of programing and commitment to its implementation, that will likely be lacking in the other staffing options I mention. In addition to the 1.0 FTE, a small budget for training will be needed. Based on my preliminary research, there are many online resources available that offer a full range of topics, $200 would be sufficient, to cover the training for my proposal. Promotional strategy is a centerpiece of this program, much of this work can be accomplished using district resources, but an additional $500 budget for print promotions (poster, flyer, lawn sign) would be useful. It is my recommendation, that if the program is successful, it be funded annually and expanded to other topics. It is conceivable that there are grants to help support this initiative.

Implementation timeline

With the district not having budgeted for the expense of this program in this school year, I am assuming a start date of September 2019. The coach would begin implementation with a narrow focus on one topic. The coach will need to conduct research and complete training prior to any course development. The initial, narrow focus will permit the first class to be offered by the end of September. Simultaneously the coach will have to work with the SDC to establish a

registration process, schedule locations and promote the class. Ideally a schedule of classes will be prepared by the time open houses are in session. After the initial class the coach will work to establish a web of participants who can use social media to further promote the program and its goals.

Subsequent months would introduce additional classes, while maintaining a consistent schedule of all prior classes. In addition, the coach will be responsible for developing a public information campaign about positive technology use. The coach also has to develop efficacy measures on an ongoing basis.

Anticipated outcomes

This program will result in a culture of parenting within the district that will help mediate some of the negative aspects of contemporary technology. Among the benefits I forecast are:

- A change in current parent culture, to reflect greater awareness of technological concerns.
- Greater parent awareness of their child's academic performance.
- Healthier interactions on the media spaces our students use.
- Reduced social media related anxiety and depression, in our students.
- Improved status of our student's digital footprints.
- Reduced screen time for students.
- Expanded ability of parents to monitor and control their child's digital life.
- Improved implementation of the ISTE standard via support at home
- Reduced cognitive lag associated with excessive phone use.
- Greater awareness of the confidence gap in girls and how media impacts it.
- Improved digital citizenship in our students.

Measures by which it may be evaluated for effectiveness

The coach will be responsible for developing metrics to measure the efficacy of the program, they may include:

- Enrollment data of parent classes.
- Stakeholder participation numbers.
- Pre and post surveys for parent participants.
- Data tracking of participant groups.
- Teacher surveys.
- Students surveys.

Conclusion

The Kenton Forward initiative is laudable, the proposal that I am making is central to the Kenton Forward goal of technological innovation, though in a way that we don't often think about. Few things are as relevant to our students social and emotional security than their online behavior. As a team, school and parents, should be making an effort to exert more influence over that behavior. Our Kenton forward goal of improved social and emotional health for our students must focus on the central role of the family. There is research to show that when schools expand their sphere of influence beyond the schoolyard boundaries, significant impact can be made on some of our most difficult educational issues.   I believe that my proposal offers a way to begin moving beyond the boundaries, and it offers a format that can be adapted to much more than technological concerns. Thank you for the call to innovation. I hope you will consider my proposal.