A Culture of
INNOV

Two schools' journeys toward
implementing 1:1 computing.

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*L*ong before devices entered classrooms at Baltimore County's Halstead Academy and Chase Elementary School, leaders at both schools laid the groundwork for these shifts by developing strong, schoolwide cultures of innovation and professional learning. To nurture innovation, and with the goal of 1:1 computing, principals at both schools gave teachers permission to get messy and become artists of pedagogy.

Putting a device in the hands of every student to personalize learning requires teachers to relinquish control and prepare students for more responsibility and choice. Here's how two schools used 1:1 computing to extend educator capacity, enable small-group instruction, and facilitate student-centered learning.

The Impetus

Five years ago, Halstead Academy, a pre-k-5 elementary school, was nearing restructuring status as the lowest performing school in Baltimore County, Maryland. At the time, teachers worked in isolation, instructional rigor varied, and students were disengaged from learning. School leaders knew that teacher mindsets had to change.

Several miles away, Chase Elementary, also a pre-K-5 elementary school, was performing satisfactorily on standardized tests. But school leaders were concerned about a culture of complacency. Growth was sluggish and achievement gaps were persistent. To break through average performance and help every student make progress, school leaders needed to support teachers in personalizing learning to meet individual student needs.

To continue growth, it's critical that schools develop not only cultures of collaborative professional learning, but also cultures of innovation. In such schools, effective strategies are modeled by leadership.

Both schools had recently experienced a change in leadership. The schools' new principals met the teachers where they were and encouraged them to take their instructional programs to the next level. To initiate change in their schools, both leaders rallied their staffs around the moral imperative to completely transform instruction. Both leaders broke down barriers that created cultures of isolation, as well as fostered more collaborative cultures that encouraged innovation, raised the bar for instruction, and provided ongoing support for teachers.

By 2013, both Halstead Academy and Chase Elementary had made major gains in developing school cultures that prioritize student-centered learning and higher expectations. A natural next step was to seek status as a Baltimore County Public School STAT Lighthouse pilot school for transformation in teaching and learning, also known as Students and Teachers Accessing Tomorrow (STAT). It was also an opportunity to focus on personalized learning with the support of 1:1 devices and to deepen innovative professional growth initiatives.

Vision for Innovation

Educational researchers have long connected instructional leaders' ability to build a vision with successful change efforts. For Halstead Academy and Chase Elementary, this vision included supporting effective technology-infused learning by articulating how a 1:1 initiative would support student success and how abolishing the traditional faculty meeting could make room for meaningful professional learning.

Administrators of both schools understood the importance of bringing their communities together around a clear vision, based on prior change efforts. As a result, they set out to integrate the use of 1:1 technology into clear visions for student-centered learning that was informed by teacher and student voice and was centered on empowering students to develop 21st century skills.

At Chase Elementary, setting the vision for a 1:1 initiative began with collecting and reflecting on artifacts of the current school culture, including signage, posters, and student work on school walls, as well as messages on Twitter, Facebook, newsletters, and the website. Teach-

ers and administrators then asked themselves, "What nonverbal messages are we sending to our parents, students, and ourselves?" Next, the school community created newspaper headlines they would like to see describing Chase Elementary by 2018, which occurred during monthly Coffee and Conversation meetings with parents and during student leadership meetings. These collaborations reinforced the need for all stakeholders to work with purpose toward the vision.

Halstead Academy's community came together in a similar way to visualize its future. When teachers expressed low expectations, the leadership team responded with urgency and a resulting vision that ensures high expectations for every student. For example, leaders fostered a culture of learning for all, including teachers, by focusing on college- and career-readiness for all students. Students are now held to rigorous standards for core knowledge and skills in every content area, and students engage in authentic tasks that build 21st century skills of collaboration, critical thinking, and innovation.

As a STAT Lighthouse school, the Halstead staff embraced 1:1 computing as a way to take students—and the vision—to the next level. Students and parents expressed their values through school mottos, a process that united stakeholders around core expectations with shared accountability and roles.

To maximize scarce time for professional learning, leaders at both schools abolished the traditional faculty meeting. Informational items are now conveyed through memos and email messages so that professional development time can focus on meaningful use of technology and student-centered learning. Designed to model the type of instruction teachers are expected
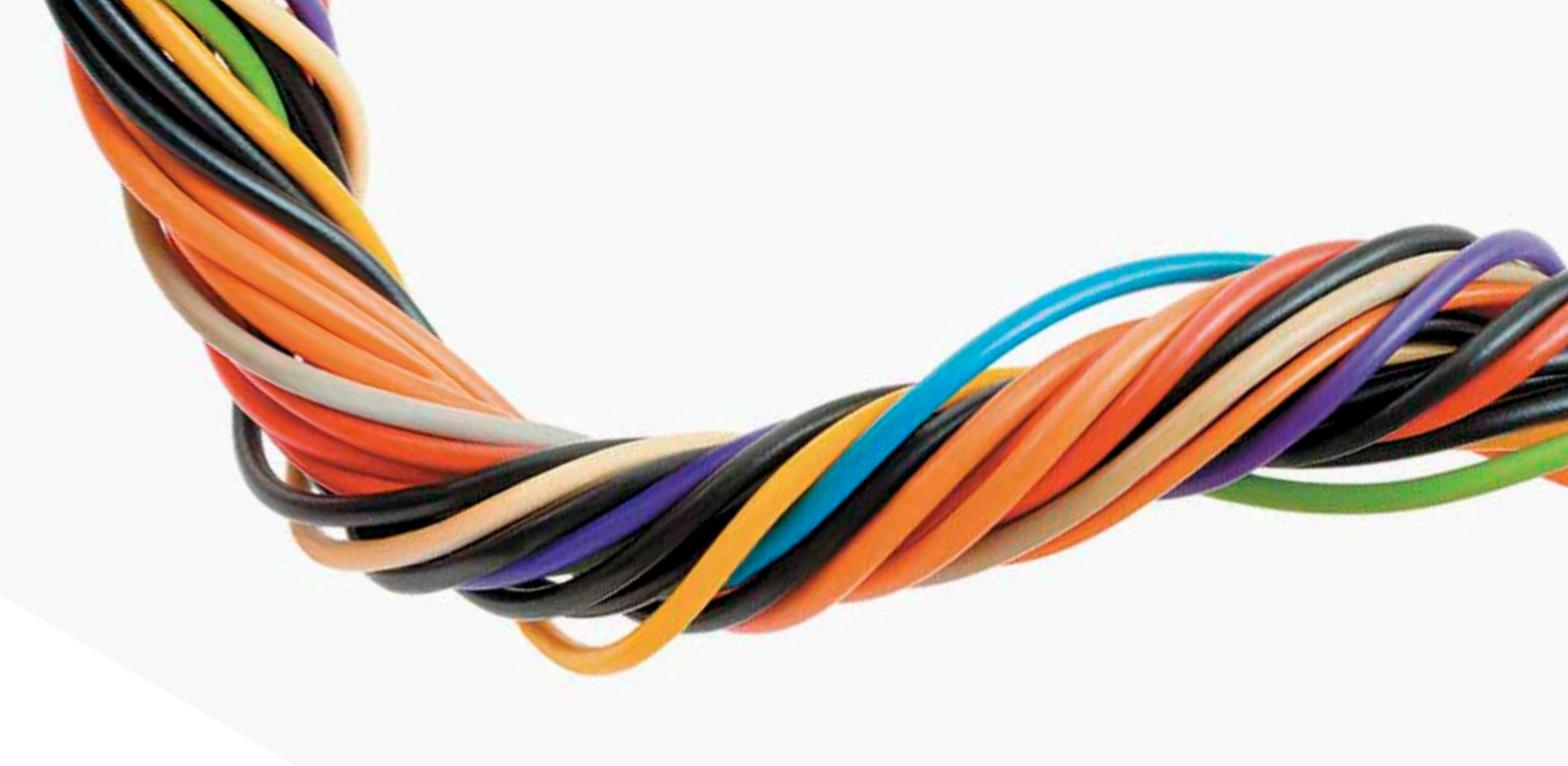
to provide, professional learning is learner-centered, customized, and flexible. This, in turn, reinforces the culture of learning that makes these schools successful.

In place of faculty meetings, Halstead Academy administrators launched Halstead 2.0 to align STAT Lighthouse standards with implementation of the new, districtwide teacher development plans and evaluation system. Teacher development plans now focus on an instructional problem related to implementing and student-centered, 1:1 learning. Through action research, teachers now collect data related to the student learning outcomes in their evaluations. Teachers are given release time to share their findings, and they select professional learning opportunities to support their action research. Through their participation in these opportunities, teachers earn points that accumulate toward certification renewal credits.

At Chase Elementary, leaders replaced their faculty meetings with the Digital Chasedown. Inspired by the International Society for Technology in Education's popular Ignite sessions, presenters have three minutes to share a "cool tool" or best practice for 1:1, student-centered learning. The time limit forces presenters to prioritize information and allows multiple presenters to share. Teachers can then follow up with presenters to learn more.

Fostering an Innovation Culture

To continue growth, it's critical that schools develop not only cultures of collaborative professional learning, but also cultures of innovation. In such schools, effective strategies are modeled by leadership.

To nurture innovation, principals in both schools encourage teachers to take risks and be innovative. In a message to teachers, the administration of Chase Elementary compared the school to animation studio, Pixar, recognizing its creative culture and emphasizing the value of taking risks: "Like Pixar is setting the standard for what animation should look like, we will be setting the standard (and in some ways already have) for what instruction should look like in a school that is adopting a 1:1 environment."

These memos to teachers are an important means to nurturing innovation. Chase's Monday Message is designed to inspire teachers to try new approaches by sharing best practices. Teachers who are seen implementing innovative strategies are recognized, which motivates teachers to read the newsletter and spread the culture of innovation.

Both schools also recognize the difference between failing and failure. "Fail" is used as an encouraging acronym—first attempt inciting learning—an idea learned from Discovery Education's Hal Davidson during a professional development session for STAT Lighthouse schools. Innovation and failure are a part of professional learning. To reinforce this, the "gotcha" observation process is a thing of the past. Instead, observation conferences help teachers become more reflective practitioners and guide them, as experts making decisions in the best interest of their students, in selecting professional learning opportunities. Undergirding this freedom is a culture of trust developed over time.

Equally important to creating a culture of innovation is building leaders' involvement in the innovation process. Chase Elementary

administration, for example, abandoned the boring "welcome back" speech to teachers at the beginning of the school year and replaced it with an Animoto video made up of staff summer "self-ies," which highlighted the summer adventures experienced by teachers and administrators.

At Halstead Academy, school leaders regularly attend teacher planning meetings and co-teach to demonstrate their engagement in and support for the innovation process. During one co-teaching session, the first lesson failed, showing that the principal does not have all the answers. The principal, however, worked with the teacher to change the lesson. School leaders must strive to model the types of innovative learning environments they want to see in the classrooms, and let people know that they can fail.

To spread innovation, Halstead Academy teachers and leaders give a "Hi-5" card to acknowledge that a teacher is trying something new. The innovative strategy is then added to a schoolwide digital library of best practices. So far, all but two of the Hi-5 cards were given peer-to-peer by teachers. Chase Elementary's Digital Chasedown presentations also serve this purpose.

Teachers in both schools are seeing the benefits of taking risks, and are working as a community to create learner-centered environments. "Each learner gets what they need, and they get the support that they need, in the small group that they need," explains Amy Piunti, a Chase Elementary teacher.

Sustaining an Innovative Culture

Through deliberate efforts, Halstead Academy and Chase Elementary leaders are sustaining the vision of personalized learning enabled by 1:1 technology.

In his book, *Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge* (2012), Michael Fullan emphasizes the principal's role in guiding teacher leaders. Administrators at both schools have capitalized on the leadership potential in their schools to drive their change efforts, promote a culture of professional learning, and support the implementation of 1:1 computing.

With the infusion of devices and new learning tools, staff at Chase Elementary saw the need for a technology troubleshooting plan that would resolve basic issues quickly and efficiently, while creating a systemic ticketing process for larger, more complicated concerns. Teachers nominated peers who either stood out as natural problem-solvers or had some technical know-how to serve as technology leaders with a

DO THIS

Take these steps to get started.

- **Refocus** faculty meetings on technology use and student-centered learning.

- **Encourage** teachers to "get messy" and take risks.

- **Nominate** teachers to serve as technology leaders.

caseload of teachers to support. As a result, problems are often addressed within hours or even minutes, instead of days or weeks. A spirit of collaboration and problem-solving eased the early phases of implementation.

The administrators at Halstead Academy considered it an imperative to have a building full of teacher leaders. Halstead 2.0 has allowed leaders to emerge naturally and has created unexpected leaders. Teachers are encouraged to seize opportunities by starting book studies, observing peers to help refine their craft, and submitting conference proposals to share their learning with others.

Halstead teachers are comfortable taking initiative because they are treated as professionals. The administration encourages them to challenge the status quo, to think of the individual needs of their students, and to provide data that support their decisions. In this way, leadership skills are fostered in all teachers in the building.

Leaders at these schools are now preparing to share what they've learned with other elementary principals as STAT Lighthouse programming is implemented throughout the district. As they continue to deepen implementation through ongoing professional learning, they will support other school leaders to transform classrooms into student-centered digital learning environments. **P**

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