Tech Integration, One Room at a Time

Furnish a **model classroom** with tech tools to create a hub of experimentation.

By Kirk Koennecke and John Carder

All principals face space and money issues. Having worked for different schools and districts of all shapes, sizes, and levels, we've had to get creative. We have learned that some staff members will complain if they don't receive new tech toys or equipment directly. Oftentimes this equipment goes unused and is not accessible to all students. According to Sharon Watkins, an education research specialist at The Ohio State University, "The reality is, with the exception of early adopters, most technology integration takes time, ongoing coaching, and professional modeling in order for regular use to become the norm."

One formula that has allowed us to get the maximum impact of technology and space is the model classroom approach.

What Is a Model Classroom?

A model classroom is a safe space where teachers and leaders can join with students to model methods, share best practices, play with technology tools, and present. Teachers can learn to use tools, or teach others. Students can learn to integrate technology into their work. Leaders can use a model classroom to push the culture of their building toward integrating best practices with technology, through individual and small group activities over time. No one teacher or class has residence in the model classroom; instead, teachers and students in the entire school use the model classroom for specific lessons and tasks.

Most schools have computers on carts that are mobile and that can move to a space. And most schools do not use their media centers to draw in students. However, many districts also face budget
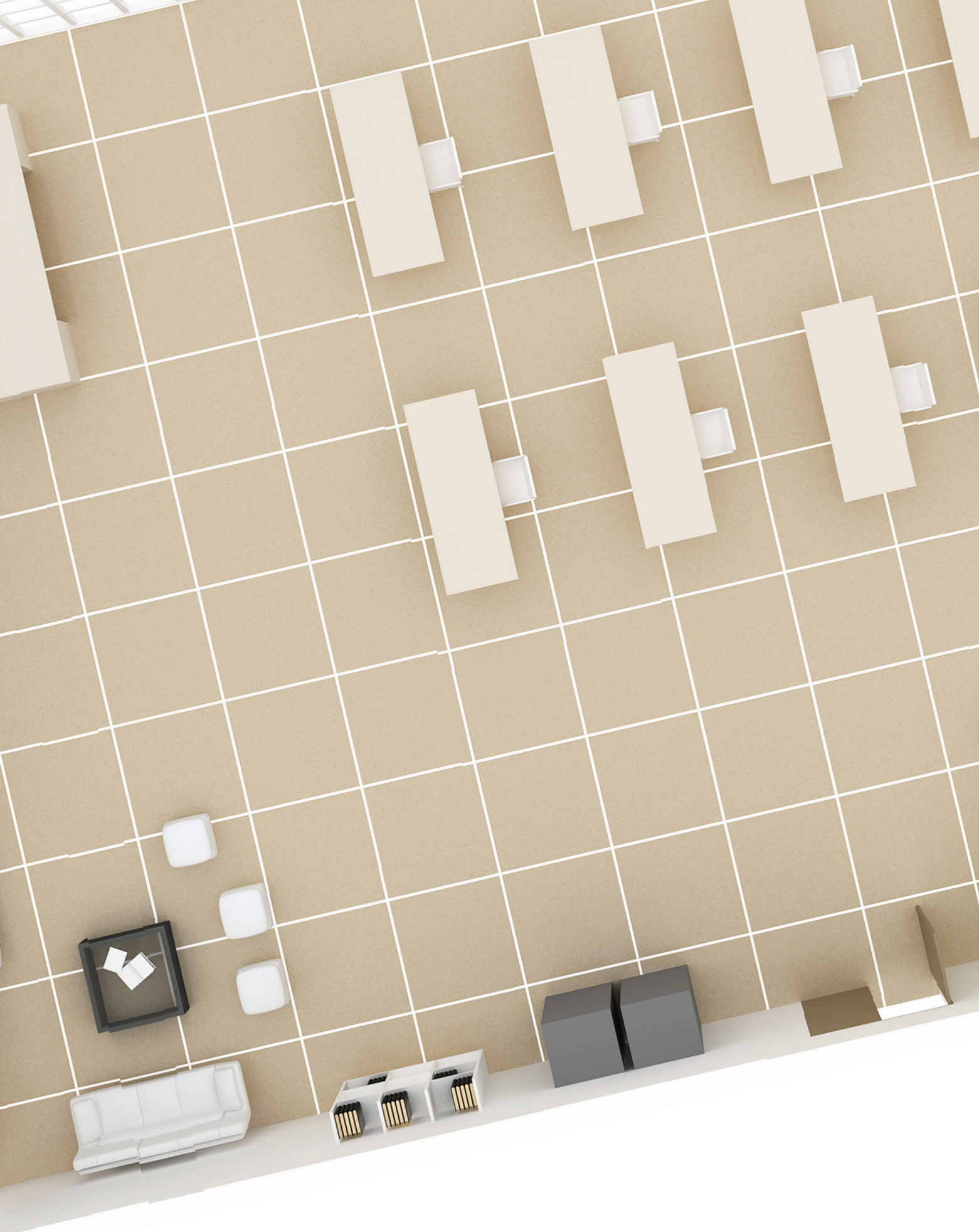
crunches that force them to choose between staffing and equipment, making integration plans piecemeal or inconsistent across entire faculties. This is why a model classroom concept works.

Setup

Creating a model classroom for your district or school can be an opportunity to develop leadership capacity in your staff and give students the opportunity to have ownership of their own learning spaces. To begin, lead instructional methods conversations with teachers. Ask them for their input on what a model classroom would look like to them. Focus on what you're already working on and seek to celebrate it. Use the following steps to get started.

1 Set no barriers—monetary or physical—and allow your teachers to dream big. Create a prioritized list of needs and wants provided by teachers and students, and make the list transparent to staff.

2 Work with staff on being fiscally creative to implement the wish list in the model classroom.

3 To build your space, find one room in a high traffic zone of your building. Remove all desks and use existing furnishings to place a round collaboration table in the space. Use small tables to create two workstations, and use folding chairs to provide audience seating that can be reconfigured daily.

4 Furnish the room with colorful paint colors and equip it with a small 3-D printer, a digital camera/recorder, a presentation screen, and a laptop or Chromebook. For less than $3,000, you can have a professional development center, a makerspace, and a presentation room all in one.

5 The fun starts once the space is identified and furnished. Here are some ideas: On one wall, display QR codes linking to the four to six adult technology resources you want staff to learn about. On another wall, do the same for students. Use the third wall to mount a TV or screen for presentations, and the fourth wall for a whiteboard and billboard spaces to post directions, provide links, assign roles, or build a presentation agenda.

6 Link your physical space to Google Classroom or another platform to store your celebration pictures, show off presentations or products, and turn your teachers and students into stars.

7 Finally, develop a plan for implementing future wants down the road, and commit to improving the space for the future with the help of some interested teachers.

Put It to Use

After the room is set up, create a schedule and sign-up method to use the room, and encourage teachers who struggle with instructional delivery to try a lesson in the room. As the school leader, capture teachers using the model classroom in a way that wouldn't be possible otherwise. Share those pictures with your staff and on social media, and highlight them within your district. Allow teachers to use the room during professional meetings and parent meetings. Speak with your district representatives to allow other teachers in different buildings to tour, observe, and even teach a class in the model classroom.

As teachers and students begin to use the room, create a system for them to provide feedback on how they've used the technology resources and areas for improvement. Your goal should not be to create a fixed system, but instead to develop an experience that is fluid, easily adaptable to the variety of instructional needs of the 21st century school system, and serves as a physical space where teachers can experiment with instructional methods.
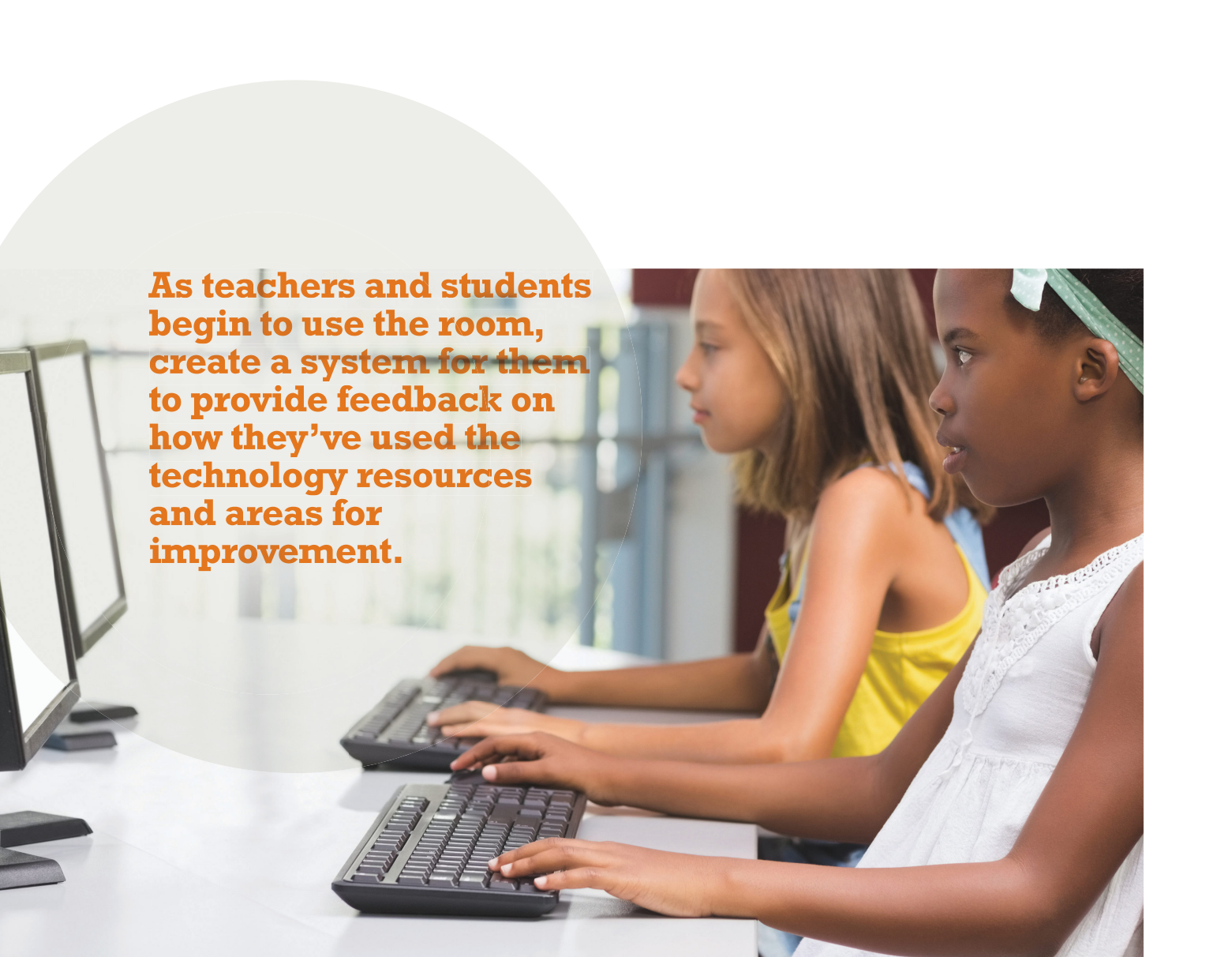
Teaching Transformation

Working with your teacher teams to implement a model classroom can transform your school culture. Teachers often are unsure of how to restructure their classroom for better instruction. Some teachers are afraid to try something new for fear of failure in front of students. The creation of a model classroom takes away most, if not all, of these barriers for teachers. They can modify the model classroom to fit their needs or they can simply copy a template model of a classroom setup. They don't have to finance the furniture or equipment because you've already done that for them. And the new

TO DO
Want to implement the ideas in this article? Master the use of QR codes. Generate and use them not only in model classrooms, but also to communicate with parents in school newsletters and at community events.

space is new for everyone, so the fear of failing is reduced.

When you do encounter the occasional laggard who pushes back, incorporate the use of the model classroom as a professional learning goal or growth plan outcome for them. As the overt use of the model classroom becomes more regular, cultural peer pressure takes over.

School leaders should also model the use of tools. At Graham Elementary School, this means two principals using Chimpmail for their e-newsletter format, and teaching others how to create hashtags to follow best practices during faculty meetings held in the classroom. At Grove City High School, it's the assistant principal using Tweetchats during team meetings in the classroom to model the use of the tool and spread influence over time. Kim Lutz, a veteran math teacher at Harding High School in Marion, Ohio, knows the feeling. "One day I am asked to meet there with other department leaders to learn about a Quomo Board, and the next thing I know, my classes are presenting with this tool a week later," she said. "The room calls to you to experiment."

Hub of Experimentation

The true value of a model classroom is not in the equipment you buy or the use of space. It's not about the technology toys or even the color of the room. The room itself becomes a hub of experimentation for all. It becomes a meeting space for other district professionals and community members, a safe space where professionals and their ideas can be shared and celebrated, and a performance stage for students and adults. This makerspace for adults becomes a part of the culture because it is a room where learning is made. ◱

Kirk Koennecke is superintendent of Graham Local Schools in Saint Paris, Ohio.

John Carder is assistant principal of Grove City High School in Grove City, Ohio.