School Improvement Plan for Woodward Academy Lower School

Kim Mulkey

This school improvement plan is for Woodward Academy’s Lower School. The school is a located in College Park, Georgia and is a division of the college preparatory school, Woodward Academy. The Academy is the largest independent school in the continental United States with an enrollment of just under 2,800 students ranging from Pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The Lower School consists of children in fourth through the sixth grade with a teaching faculty of 30 plus an additional 12 support and specialty staff. The school is not a standard traditional elementary school, in that (except for our Transition Program) our students are not self contained. Each class of students rotates through different teachers for seven periods each day.

Due to the division of disciplines among the faculty and the strenuous college prep curriculum, the biggest issue in need of improvement is staff development in the area of technology integration. “Recent research in the area of educational technologyintegration has suggested that staffdevelopment is a key factor for the implementation of technologyin schools” (Cifarelli, 1988).

It is difficult for the teachers to integrate technology into their 45 minute periods of one discipline, so getting them to look at alternative ways can sometimes be a struggle. At this time, most teachers use computer technology for word processing, rewards, and free time play. If the LoTi (Levels of Teacher Innovations) plan of assessing the level of teachers’ use of technology is used, the Lower School would score low. Most of the teachers do not know what is available to them or what to do with these applications and tools. There needs to be a shift in pedagogy about student centered learning. Teachers need to be trained on technology applications that are available, and how these applications can enhance the learning process. They also need to find the balance between teaching the traditional content and allowing students to experience 21st Century skills. This is a difficult concept for teachers that have been teaching effectively for many years.

 There are many options for the provision of professional development. Teachers can go back to graduate school or go to workshops and conferences. These solutions could be costly, but are included in the budget for our school on a limited basis. Up until last year, teachers could go to graduate school at the expense of Woodward Academy for a cost of up to $6,000 per calendar year. With the falling economy, only those who have begun a program have permission to use the funds. We send teachers to conferences and workshops, but the problem is that usually the same teachers, interested in making changes, are the ones who go. It is also limited to a few and not the masses. Another option for professional development is to bring presenters to Woodward at a smaller cost. This is a viable option and has been accomplished this year for training in the new Office 2007 suite. There is also a full time instructional technology training employee that aids in our technology goals. The last and probably most effective option is to provide our own development at the Lower School. It can be customized for teachers that are at different levels and pedagogical practices.

 With these many options of professional development, there will be barriers. Financial issues can put a limit on the amount of opportunities that will be available. Encouraging interest in making changes is a barrier for some. The biggest barrier to these options for the Lower School is time. When are these development options going to occur?

The action plan for this endeavor is to provide “in house” staff development opportunities for the faculty at the Lower School. In choosing this option, all three of the fore mentioned barriers will be addressed. There are several factors that influence the structure in achieving this goal. There will be whole group staff development opportunities where teachers can be divided by grade level. The new principal at the Lower School changed the schedule this year, so that each grade level has the same planning periods. There will be three of the same class offered during the staff development, so that time is no longer an issue. “Specials” teachers will choose one that works in their schedule. One on one instruction will be needed for teachers that need extra help. The teachers can “sign up” for the technology teacher’s time at a time that is convenient for them to get this individual instruction.

Even with low funds teachers will be sent to technology conferences and other available workshops. There will also be instruction available by providing access to webinars, resources, and tutorial instruction using Jings, videos, and Moodle for customized courses. The Lower School has its own Ning for sharing information, so this will be a venue to provide the overall organization of the staff development and opportunities for self learners to engage on their own. Woodward also has a subscription to Atomic Learning which has thousands of tutorials to provide to the faculty.

The classes offered will focus on several areas of development, such as basic computer skills, training on specific applications, changing pedagogy, and implementing technology into the existing curriculum. Many teachers need to learn basic information about computers, such as how files are organized, keyboard shortcuts, vocabulary, and network use. Basic computer use is a struggle and they need to understand these simple items. Our computer lab has a large variety of software applications. Teachers need to know the purpose of this software and how to use it before they will attempt to use it with their instruction and projects. Many teachers at the Lower School use the computers for word processing. They see it as a “add on” or a publishing only tool, instead of a tool for learning. Pedagogical practices need to be explained, such as HEAT (Higher thinking skills, Engage the learner, Authentic learning, and Technology) and 21st Century Skills. They need to see examples of how to use the technology as an integral part of instruction, learning, and assessment. All of the staff development will be geared toward the final goal of teachers implementing a project based technology project each year.

The timeline for this endeavor is endless; however, the expectation that each person will set personal goals for technology integration will be visited each year. There will be a grade level class every 4-6 weeks providing at least 6 per year. Over a three year period, it is anticipated that each teacher in the school will be doing at least one project based learning activity per year. Some will do more.

The technology facilitator (TF) will be responsible for the completion of this action plan. In addition to creating the content and implementing the whole group/grade level classes, it is also the responsibility of the TF to provide information and new innovations to the staff. In order to supply the teachers with current innovations, the TF will need to attend conferences, be active in professional organizations and professional learning networks. Small items that need to be addressed or learned can be provided to the teachers through the use of creating Jing tutorials, videos, and Atomic Learning. Information can be conveyed to teachers through the use of email, the Ning, and by attending grade level meetings. In an effort to provide communication with the parents, the TF will also, publish technology integration projects on the school’s technology integration blog.

**Action Plan Summary**

**Staff Development for Woodward Academy Lower School**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this plan is to provide technology integration support and development for the teachers.

**Goal:**

Each teacher incorporates at least one project based technology integrated project a year.

**Cost Allowance:**

The cost for this endeavor is $4,724.00. This does not include the cost of Atomic Learning or Academy wide training courses. The cost of guest speakers will vary and both of these come from a different budget.

**Actions:**

* Provide at least six classes per school year in the development of technology integration
* Provide one on one instruction as needed
* Inform teachers about new technologies, opportunities for further development, and where to gather resources
* Create tutorial videos to reach mass audience and for future reference
* Topics :
	+ Basic computer use
	+ Technology integration
	+ Application training
	+ Pedagogical instruction (21st Century Skills, HEAT, ISTE standards)

**Timeline**

The goal should be reached by the end of the third year with the current technology facilitator and action plan.

References

Cifarelli, R. (1998). Anytime, anywhere professional development. *The Journal*, *26*(2), 57. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.