



A Tidebreak Case Study: Flagler County Public School District

TIDEBREAK INSPIRES EXCITEMENT FOR LEARNING AMONG FLORIDA STUDENTS

“To hear the excitement in their voices and watch them learning with such engagement is pretty amazing to see.”

— Anna Crawford, assistant principal

Faced with budget shortfalls and staff reductions, educators are looking for cost-effective ways to improve student performance and inspire students to take an active role in their education. One school district — Flagler County Public School District (FCPSD), located in Bunnell, Florida — tackled this problem by developing a unique strategy designed to change how curriculum is presented and promote an active learning environment.

Anna Crawford, assistant principal at Belle Terre Elementary School, which is part of the FCPSD, explained the situation.

“Historically, many teachers stand at the front of the classroom and present material to their students. Unfortunately, this method of teaching does not always inspire students to learn and it promotes a ‘work-alone’ mentality. We examined how our curriculum was being presented to students and came to the conclusion that we needed to make changes.”

“The goal of these changes was to create a challenge-based learning environment where teachers would pose questions to students who, working in teams, would work together to solve problems. This style of teaching allows the teacher to move freely from group to group instead of lecturing from a specific position in the classroom. By shifting from a teacher-led classroom to a student-led classroom, we hoped to foster an environment of creativity, collaboration, and digital citizenship. By creating a more customized learning environment we felt that the students would learn problem-solving skills rather than simply memorizing facts.”

The leaders of FCPSD have a long history of incorporating technology into the curriculum. Over the past decade the district has worked diligently to develop ways to use technology throughout its schools. Every classroom has been equipped with interactive whiteboards, overhead cameras, and laptop computers which help teachers incorporate many different types of technologies into their presentations. While most people would consider this to be an ideal set-up for a school district, FCPSD envisioned something even more compelling.

Building a Better Sandbox

In 2009 representatives from FCPSD flew to the Bay Area to visit Apple Inc.’s corporate headquarters and Stanford University to see demonstrations of technologies that were designed for use in education. One of the professors at Stanford was using software from Tidebreak in an interactive learning environment and the team from FCPSD was fascinated by what they saw.

“During a visit to Stanford University we saw Tidebreak’s technology being used and realized that the company shared our vision for how to energize a classroom,” said Joey DiPuma, senior network technician, FCPSD. “We were impressed with how easy the technology was to use which is important when you’re working with children. I felt as though Tidebreak could help us improve the quality of education in our schools.”

DiPuma lead the charge to design a new lab called the “Sandbox.” The idea was to create an environment where teams of five to six students could work together on group assignments. Each station has a flat-panel display and an Apple Mac Mini that together form a shared “public” workspace for the group to use to work collaboratively on their assignments.

The teacher is free to move around the room working with each group instead of lecturing to the entire class from the front of the room.



“In the past, the best we could do was have one student working on the computer and the other students would stand behind and watch. With Tidebreak all of the students can work together as a team sharing ideas and content. I see a genuine excitement for learning....”

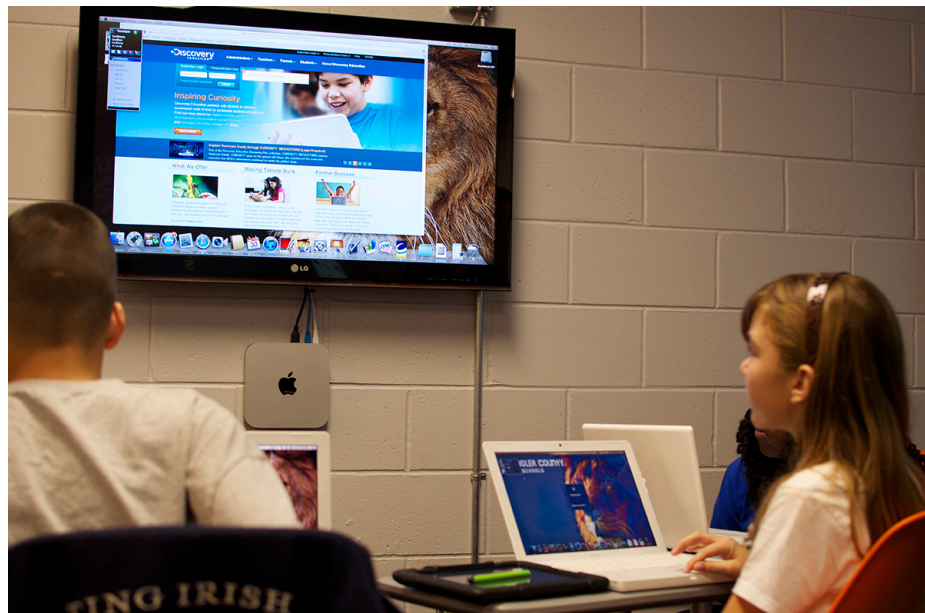
BROCK O'SHELL, TEACHER

The beauty of Tidebreak's technology is that it allows students to work closely together as a team using a combination of personal devices, such as laptops, tablets, or smartphones, and the public workspace to explore ideas, co-create content, and develop deliverables. Throughout this process the teacher is free to move around the room working with each group instead of lecturing to the entire class from the front of the room. The teacher can also call on individual teams and have them display their results on a large monitor at the front of the room so the class can consider different approaches that each team may have taken.

Measuring a Positive Impact for Teachers and Students

Once they had identified Tidebreak's software as the technology to fulfill the district's vision, DiPuma and his colleague Ryan Deising, the director of technology for FCPSD, built a lab at Belle Terre Elementary School in 2011. First, two students were selected to test the lab so that DiPuma and Crawford could get a better idea of what worked and what needed to be changed. Next, a handful of teachers were trained using Tidebreak and they were tasked with introducing the technology to their classes. Two of the initial users were fifth-grade teachers, Brock O'Shell and Joe Jakubowski, who were amazed at the instant impact that the technology had on the students.

“In the past, the best we could do was have one student working on the computer and the other students would stand behind and watch,” said O'Shell. “With Tidebreak all of the students can work together as a team sharing ideas and content. All of the kids on the team can contribute which gives them a feeling of accomplishment, something that didn't happen in the past. I see a genuine excitement for learning and the kids really want to share their results.”



Crawford, who is responsible for curriculum development for the school, says she saw other benefits for the kids who use Tidebreak.

"Beyond the goal of designing curriculum to motivate our students to work together is the energy that Tidebreak brings to the learning process. I watched a group of five students work together and share ideas simultaneously. To hear the excitement in their voices and watch them learning with such engagement is pretty amazing to see."

The technology has worked so well that even the instructors are changing their methods for teaching.

"I have been teaching for seven years, and my style has always been to lecture in front of the class," said Jakubowski. "Now I design my lesson plans around the interactive nature of Tidebreak. I have changed my teaching philosophy in how I deliver my lessons and the expectations I have for my students."

Promoting Team Building

Watching the students actively participate in group projects has caused Crawford to reflect on the original goals behind creating the Sandbox.

"We can talk all we want about the classroom of the future, but what is so exciting to me is to see our students working together as a team to solve problems. Plus, it is energizing students and inspiring them to *want* to learn. We found a great partner in Tidebreak and are thrilled with the results."

In looking to the future, DiPuma sees a tremendous opportunity.

"In the past we used technology that was pretty basic and was just powerful enough to meet our needs. Now we are improving the performance of the teachers and the students," said DiPuma. "We wanted to create an innovative learning environment that could be easily copied throughout each of our schools. Based on the success we've had at Belle Terre Elementary School we are now looking to deploy Tidebreak in one of our high schools. Eventually, we want to have all of our schools equipped with Tidebreak so that all of our students can benefit from working together as teams rather than as individuals."

Read more case studies at www.tidebreak.com/casestudies.

Tidebreak, Inc.

958 San Leandro Avenue, Suite 500
Mountain View, CA 94043
USA

+1 650 289 9869 Voice
+1 650 472 8940 FAX

Copyright © 2014 Tidebreak, Inc. Tidebreak and ClassSpot are trademarks of Tidebreak, Inc. Any other trademarks are hereby acknowledged as belonging to their respective owners.