Technology Change Proposal

For the Kent School District:

ClassDojo

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Case Study 5: Technology Change Proposal

Introduction

The Kent School District in Washington state has a combined enrollment of over 25,000 students across 42 schools and academies across the diverse communities of Kent and its surrounding cities. The students and families that comprise the school district come from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. Nearly half of all students in the Kent School District come from families that are non-native English speakers. This combination of multi-cultural students, high proportion of ESL (English as a second language) students, above-average student to teacher ratio, an ongoing global pandemic forcing schools to adopt remote learning, and the district's subpar adoption of eLearning tools make effective communication and collaboration between students, teachers, parents, and staff difficult if not impossible. The introduction of the communication and classroom management solution ClassDojo will help to alleviate the current problems with remote learning and communication, as well as to prepare classrooms in the Kent School District for a more connected future once schools reopen.

ClassDojo

ClassDojo is a classroom management system as well as communication and community building platform for schools. The product has been designed from the ground up to be approachable and easily usable by students and parents alike, making it steps above what the Kent School District is currently using to communicate and collaborate with students and their families. Students in ClassDojo build portfolios with the help of their teachers to show off their accomplishments and progress to their parents and family. In addition, ClassDojo has slightly gamified this process by allowing students to build their own monster avatars and teachers to grant achievement stickers to students for contributing to the classroom. Another primary feature of ClassDojo as a communication tool is its built-in messaging feature between students, parents, and teachers which allows all parties to communicate in their native language and have their messages automatically translated into over thirty languages.

Kent School District

The Kent School District, being an educational institution, is highly resistant to change. In addition to the district itself being averse to change, there are multiple other entities affiliated with the school district that hold some sway over the technologies being used in classrooms. Many entities within the district affect its technological trajectory, which will be enumerated below. The district's current solution for parent-teacher-student communication is between non-existent and underperforming. The district currently uses primarily email to communicate with families, which often necessitates using roughly translated messages in one or more of the most spoken languages in the district. Not only is this communication strategy often ineffective, but it also puts undue burden on many families within the school district to correctly interpret official district communication in order to properly help their students as best they can. Many families even rely on their elementary-aged children to translate district correspondence.

Organizational Posture

The organizational posture of the Kent School District as it relates to technology changes is divided. On a district-wide level, the organization is very change averse, primarily due to the many working parts that all must participate in a sweeping change, and secondarily due to the district-level change actors being more out of touch with the direct needs of those affected by the current technology's limitations. On a more micro level, individual schools and classrooms are much more willing to make technological changes that benefit their level of the organization but are often either powerless or unwilling to push for changes on a wider level. Additionally, while county, state, and federal education guidelines may not affect the adoption of a technology like ClassDojo, the necessary adherence to these guidelines does further push the Kent School District towards being more change averse unless that change is coming from top-down regulations.

Change Actors

School Board

The school board of the district is primarily responsible for the funding, budget, and standards of education for the entire Kent School District. Being a body made up of only five individuals and serving a community of over twenty-five thousand students and over three thousand teachers, the school board makes its decisions with the necessary level of consideration. Additionally, as the five members of the school board are elected locally from specific geographic areas, the board's aversity to change and capability at managing change can fluctuate wildly year to year. As elected officials, the school board's members are generally averse to changes that have a likelihood of upsetting voters.

Labor Unions

There are multiple labor unions in the Kent School District, but those with the most direct effects on technology adoption are the KEA (for certified teachers) and KAP (for paraeducators). While these unions do not hold power over the day-to-day adoption process of technologies within the district, they do handle much of the training within the district. Additionally, since labor unions are bargained with individually for budget allotments, it is possible that if a union were to be more averse to change than the other it may hold up the budget approvals for the school year. Generally, the teacher's union (KEA) is very friendly to change, especially to changes that benefit the teachers and students of the district, while the paraeducator's union (KAP) is more averse to technology changes due to a general lack of distributed training programs.

Teachers/Principals/Staff

The teachers, principals, and staff of the Kent School District are a major actor in any proposed technology adoption, as they are generally the ones responsible for implementing new

technologies and ensuring their benefits are seen withing a timely manner. The level of change

aversity among teachers, principals, and staff greatly depends on their individual histories, but

generally those who have been in their professions for longer are more change averse when it

comes to new technologies. This pattern can be seen in classes across the Kent School District

during the COVID-19 pandemic, as some teachers threw their classes into new technologies and

tested various child-friendly learning management solutions in the early months of the

pandemic while others still primarily rely on email and synchronous video call as the primary

method of communicating with, assigning, and receiving assignments. If teachers and principals

are not convinced of the benefits of a new technology being adopted, they will generally be

much more likely to push back against that adoption.

Students/Parents

The students and their parents are the final major players in the actors in the technological

changes of the Kent School District. Students who are uncomfortable with a technology change

or are thrust into a new technology without proper instruction and training, are much less likely

to adopt the use of the new technology. Parents likewise must be aware of the benefits of the

new technology being adopted by the school district and instructed on its use as applicable.

Students and parents are overall change-neutral entities, but a mishandled technology adoption

when it comes to students and parents can greatly decrease the effectiveness of a new

technology.

Organizational Pushback

An initial deployment of ClassDojo's free tier across the Kent School District is likely to encounter some

pushback from nearly all actors in the organization. While the school board would probably not push

back against the deployment of ClassDojo's free tier, they may be wary of the possible future

introduction of a paid tier for how it will affect the school district's budget. The labor unions serving the

teachers, paraeducators, and staff of the Kent School District may offer some pushback against the

adoption of a new technology, as they would likely bear much of the burden of providing training and

support for teachers and staff. The expected pushback from teachers, principals, and staff varies greatly

depending on the individual school and classroom. More change averse staff would likely push back

against the introduction of another new technology in the classroom, as the past year has forcefully

introduced arguably too many new technologies as teachers were thrown into remote teaching without

much guidance. Teachers that are already using a similar product to ClassDojo independently from the

rest of their school or the district will likely push back against the adoption of a single solution, since

they already spent the energy learning and instructing their students on the use of their solution. Lastly,

students and parents, much like teachers, are likely to push back against the introduction of a new

technology if they are not properly convinced of its benefits compared to the current solutions being

used.

Traps

Delayed Participation

The Kent School District as a whole is arguably already hip deep in this technology trap.

Solutions like ClassDojo have been around for the better part of a decade, yet the only widely adopted

form of communication between teachers, students, and parents in the district has been either phone

or email. If the district begins the top-down adoption of ClassDojo, it is possible that individual schools

and classrooms may fall into this trap again and opt to continue using their own solutions for

teacher/student/parent communication. The district can address this trap in multiple ways. The bluntest

way to address the trap is the top-down enforcement of district policies, with will likely ruffle many

feathers. An alternative, less direct, way of addressing this trap is for the Kent School District to provide

adequate trainings and special sessions on how to use the technology and its benefits, so that teachers and principals are aware of the features that ClassDojo has that an email does not.

Sticking with the Familiar

This trap is similar to the previous one and will likely have the same effect and solution. Teachers and staff are very comfortable with the current methods of communication being used with parents and teachers, so they are likely to fall into the trap of maintaining the use of email as the primary method of contact with families. The best method to combat this trap would be to fully inform teachers and principals of the need for a more comprehensive method of communication between the school and families, especially families that are not native English speakers. The district could collect first-hand stories from families negatively affected by the current method of communication and use those as evidence to prove the need for a better solution.

Reluctance to Fully Commit

This trap will likely only be encountered if school principals allow individual teachers to make the final decision on what mode of communication they will use between the school and families. Some teachers who are more change averse may only use ClassDojo when absolutely required and may fall back on using their previous preferred modes of communication. Teachers can likely be persuaded away from this half-commitment by the district conveying that since the adoption is district-wide that any teacher not using the same method of communication will set up their students for a hard time when it comes to switching to classes which do make use of the new technology.

Lack of Persistence

This trap is very unlikely to be encountered by the Kent School District, as there is not exactly a bottom line or output that can be measured and panicked about when it comes to the communication method with families. Additionally, the effort required to switch back to phone and email as the official modes of

communication within the school district would likely require as much time and effort as the original switch to ClassDojo.

Change Plan

Create Urgency

The best way for the Kent School District to create a sense of urgency for change to ClassDojo is collect stories of those affected by failures in communication both before and during the pandemic. Parents and families that were uninformed or underinformed about important dates and events due to language barriers or the difficulty of getting into contact with the school; teachers that have trouble contacting parents about students who are out of line or missing assignments; students who often must act as translator for their parents when reading school documents. With these stories, the likelihood that the school board will buy into ClassDojo, and that individual principals and teachers will accept the change, will be greatly increased.

Form a Powerful Coalition

The school board is only five people and while they may technically have the most power, they are often the most effective in instituting changes. A powerful coalition to enact change within the Kent School District would need to include principals, teachers, and parents who have experienced the lack of effective communication between schools and families.

Create a Vision for Change

The vision for change of the Kent School District adopting ClassDojo as its primary method of communicating with students and families is to remove communication barriers between the district's diverse population. The vision of no student or parent feeling overwhelmed, uninformed, or

underinformed due to their cultural background or a lack of clear, consistent communication with the school.

Communicate the Vision

Since the vision is communication, communicating the vision seems straightforward. The coalition of teachers, principals, and parents should begin using ClassDojo in order to better communicate with one another. Coalition teachers should begin using ClassDojo in their classrooms prolifically in order to build evidence of its effectiveness to other teachers and principals that are not convinced of the change.

Remove Obstacles

Teachers, principals, and parents unwilling to use the new technology are the only known obstacle to the change adoption, as the solution is free and can run on nearly any device. Teachers and principals can be shown the evidence of effectiveness generated previously in the change plan. Parents are harder to address since they can neither be removed nor forced into action.

Create Short-Term Wins

Prioritizing the adoption of ClassDojo in the elementary schools with the most diverse population and with the highest percentage of non-native English speakers (or non-English speakers) would guarantee that the direct benefits of the platform are most immediately obvious to naysayers.

Build on the Change

Once ClassDojo is fully adopted in the most diverse schools in the Kent School District, its benefits over the previous mode of communication will become apparent. These benefits can be used to propel the change into other schools throughout the district, using the adopting schools as the baseline. It can also serve as an example of how technological changes can better bring equity to the communities served by the Kent School District, which will possibly decrease the startup cost of future technology changes.

Anchor the Changes in the Culture

With the complete adoption of ClassDojo as the de facto mode of communication between teachers/principals/staff and students/families, the Kent School District will likely be more willing to consider the wide adoption of newer technologies to replace those that have been around for decades. While it is unlikely that the school district every truly adopts a culture of change, building a culture that is somewhat less dramatically change averse would be a good start.

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