Teaching and Learning with Technology

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Last spring, I introduced readers of *The Park Parent* to Park School's new strategic plan. As we enter 2012, Park is determined to continue to be a leader within the independent school community in thoughtfully embracing innovation. We must ensure that our faculty and program provide our students with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind they will need to be leaders in the 21st century. Specifically, work is now underway in six areas:

PARK AS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

1. The Peter Amershadian Faculty Leadership Program
2. Local/national/global partnerships
3. New approaches to faculty supervision and evaluation

BEST PRACTICES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

4. Reframing math and science education
5. Preparing students for global citizenship
6. A new vision for teaching with technology

A number of these initiatives have been described in Park Parent articles over the course of this past fall. My focus this month will be on exciting new work across all three divisions in the use of technology as a tool to expand and deepen the learning environment for Park students.

All of our lives have been changed over the past 15 years by the Internet, e-mail, smartphones, and other electronic devices that are now ubiquitous in our homes, our offices, and our pockets. Over this relatively brief period of time, there have been many new challenges to address in our work with children as educators and parents: among them safety, privacy, access, and information overload. There also have been several waves of excitement about the capacity of each new technology tool to transform teaching and learning.

At Park, we have made a significant commitment to technology infrastructure, equipment, personnel, and training. Today, we have one remaining desktop lab and over 300 laptop computers in use across our wireless network by students in Grades Pre-K – IX.

WE EXPECT STUDENTS TO USE TECHNOLOGY AS:

- A tool to make connections with people and information from around the world
- A tool to find the answers to their questions and how they relate to the opinions, beliefs, and experiences of others
- A tool to process vast amounts of information and to form conclusions, opinions, and relationships based on what they have learned
- A tool to share their understandings and views with others
- A tool to prepare them for future learning experiences and opportunities

As the instructional use of technology at Park School continues to evolve, our efforts will be guided by the belief that technology has the capacity make learning more engaging, more collaborative, and more connected. Furthermore, we see strong evidence that technology has the capacity to enable students with differing skill levels, learning styles, and interests to take more control over their learning experiences.

Raymond Stewart, Park's new Director of Information Technology, is currently working with the other members of his department to support new initiatives in each of our divisions as follows:

- In the Lower Division, creating a ubiquitous technology solution for each Grade K-II classroom, including LCD projectors and whiteboards, enabling teachers to move to classroom-based presentations and interactive activities.
- In the Middle Division, implementing a "stay-at-school" iPad pilot. During the first phase of this pilot, each student in Grade III will receive an iPad, preloaded with applications in support of ongoing instruction in language arts, math, and social studies. (*Note: Grade III parents will be receiving more information about this program well in advance of its implementation.*)
- In the Upper Division, focusing on online and "cloud-based" tools (Jing, Moodle, Google Docs, etc.) that enable students to demonstrate mastery in new ways, while facilitating collaboration with classmates and teachers both in and outside of school.

I expect that the lessons learned from these current initiatives will inform Park's thinking about when and how to replace heavy student backpacks with a single tablet or laptop device. I expect that over the next few years we'll see more opportunities for teachers to utilize technology to "flip" instruction that is presented in class (new concepts) with assignments that are completed at home (applications). Finally, Park will need to keep it's eye on area secondary schools to ensure that our students are well prepared for the expanded online learning expectations they will be faced with in the years ahead.

It is an exciting time to be an educator, and Park is well on its way to remaining a leader in the use of technology to expand and deepen learning across the curriculum.

INNOVATE, COLLABORATE, LEARN.