

# The TRF Newsletter

## Spring is Here!

And with it, the next edition of the TRF Newsletter. We've got some exciting developments to share this month, so sit back, relax, and enjoy!

### Da Vinci Charter Offers Advice to Schools Planning iPad Implementations

Over the past year, many schools have rushed to purchase tablets for their students in an attempt to provide them with access to the latest technology. While the impetus behind this drive is commendable, not much research is available to show the benefits of such devices in the classroom, or to guide best practices. In order to address this lack of information, The Riordan Foundation partnered with Da Vinci Charter Schools in 2012 to start building a case study on the use of iPads in an educational setting.

Established in 2009, Da Vinci Charter Schools operates two high schools and a K-8 school as part of the Wiseburn school district in Hawthorne. Their innovative approach to instruction, numerous community partnerships, flexible structure, and a strong record of evaluation and reflection makes them an ideal candidate with which to partner on such a project.

While the case study is ongoing, Da Vinci has offered some early observations to guide others in their own implementations. Here are some highlights (emphasis ours):

#### What we have learned so far:

- Students are very quick to learn how to use the iPads, and we had to play catch up to capture what they know and do with them
- Students quickly take ownership of the devices and go beyond what is required in the classroom

- Ability to avoid start up allows the class to move forward productively compared to utilization of computers
- While still staying compliant with CIPA, management of iPads by IT department is eased by removing restrictions on what students can do with their iPads
- School must be able to quickly modify policies and procedures to align with teacher needs to ensure students can accomplish projects
- *School must anticipate time teachers need to get used to and adapt to iPad environment*
- *School must anticipate considerable amount of IT time to implement the program*

#### Challenges:

- Teacher iPad use in the classroom is individualized and precludes generic professional training
- Wifi modification is needed due to the amount of devices on access points
- Some students are targeted for iPad theft when walking to/from school
- Distraction caused in classroom by using iMessage and playing games
- Specific hardware and software needed to print from devices
- *IT department staff are viewed as teacher tech mentors but IT department is not equipped/staffed to train for classroom environment*
- *One of the greatest challenges with the device is the difficulty of producing work from it (keyboard limitations)*

#### Considerations when implementing the technology:

- Need for flexible, on-site IT department willing to make modifications to infrastructure
- Assign project manager to ensure complete implementation of program
- Establish one account for students to download school-approved apps
- Identify/assign an IT person to be the main source as iPad guru
- Document process throughout implementation
- *Provide teacher tech mentors that help teachers implement iPad into classroom and curriculum. IT department cannot do this*
- Sign three-year lease with Apple

At this point, "there is no present empirical evidence as to whether the use of the iPad improves student achievement," however, we will continue to monitor the results. We are extremely grateful for Da Vinci's honest reflections and continue to praise their success!



## Blended Learning Bus Tour Prepares Los Angeles Educators for May 8<sup>th</sup> Conference

Blended learning, a system of instruction in which students learn partly through computer programs and partly from direct teacher instruction, is currently of extreme interest in the education community as a way to reduce issues of large class sizes and to personalize learning for each student. Though many schools are interested in implementing such a system, very few understand the complexities of the shift in instruction, the infrastructure required, or what a successful blended classroom looks like. To shed some light on this growing trend, The Riordan Foundation invited educators from across Los Angeles to join us on April 12<sup>th</sup> to observe blended learning in action at two local schools.

Over forty-five participants loaded onto the bus, heading first to KIPP Empower Academy Elementary School near Florence and Normandie. Visitors broke into three groups to observe classrooms and talk to students about how they learned in their blended classrooms. At the end of the tour, our hosts answered questions from about how they decided on this system of instruction and what it takes to implement successfully. Some important take-aways were the need for leaders and teachers to have the flexibility to adjust the program constantly and to make sure teachers did not have to waste time trouble-shooting technology issues.

From KIPP Empower, participants traveled north to Alliance Tennenbaum Family Technology High School. There, students acted as the tour guides and took small groups to classes of all subjects. Participants were encouraged to ask questions of the students and find out how blended learning worked from their perspective. The overwhelming consensus was that students liked instruction at Tennenbaum more than at their previous schools and they felt empowered in their own learning. The teachers admitted that the transition to teaching in a blended environment is not easy, but they see the benefit to students.

During lunch, participants debriefed with their colleagues and had a number of great discussions about their excitement, questions, and doubts. These important conversations will perfectly transition to the Blended Learning Learners workshop that The Riordan Foundation will host on May 8<sup>th</sup> at the California Endowment. This hands-on event will feature Education Elements, one of the premiere blended learning consulting groups, and will allow educators to experience learning in such an environment.

We want to thank our hosts at both schools for an amazing day!



Bus tour participants ask questions of a panel of Tennenbaum Technology High School students and teachers.

## Instructional Innovation Grant Winners to be announced in Early May

TRF staff spent the month of April travelling to schools across Los Angeles as part of the Instructional Innovation Grant review process. We have met some amazing students and educators with great ideas to improve instruction, from project-based learning to internship/work-study programs.

The site visit is the last phase in the decision process and award winners will be announced in early May. Applicants are judged on a range of criteria including project vision, shift from traditional classroom, and evaluation procedures among others.

We can't wait to see the results of this new program!



A group of students work independently on computers during a rotation at KIPP LA Prep.