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Capstone Project, Part B

**PART I**

The experience with the implementation of the Capstone project was nothing less than phenomenal. The project began with the idea of creating a makerspace in the media center at Midway Elementary School; however, it ended up changing during the process and became much more than a makerspace. Because the implementation of a District-wide and Regional Technology Fair was in the works, the decision was made to use the fairs as the Capstone project due to the time and efforts it was taking for the technology fairs. Through initiating, projecting, implementing, and undergoing District and Region-wide technology fairs, an illustration of shrinking the digital divide was demonstrated throughout Southeast Georgia.

Prior to implementing this project, past opportunities in Pierce County never offered a District-wide chance to increase knowledge of technology or showcase technology skills in any manner. Not only did the technology fair allow students to gain knowledge and showcase their skills, it also allowed students to compete in a friendly competition at school, District, Region, and State-wide levels. The process, at times, was invigorating, enlightening, and downright exhausting; however, the results were positive and empowering for many students in Southeast Georgia.

Kim Spivey, the media specialist at Midway Elementary, and Sheri Bashlor, the gifted teacher at Midway, joined forces to implement this large project in the fiscal year of 2014-2015. They began with a year of observation only, where they visited a District tech fair to witness the processes and procedures used as well as judged at the State level to gain understanding and familiarity. They learned the competition was open to 3rd through 12th grade students, with the option of entering one or two of 15 categories.

During that same year, they also proposed the execution of a tech fair in Pierce County and being the Regional hub to the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent and then to the team of principals in the county. They reached out to the press at the local newspaper to get their support in spreading the word as well as the local 4H for resources and partnership. In preparation for the following year, they also formed a Pierce County STEAM Team and conducted a technology camp during the summer. The STEAM Team consisted of teachers and media specialists from each school in Pierce County, the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, Jim Farmer from Okefenokee RESA, and the county’s 4H director.

For the Capstone project, the preparation year was important as it gave the collaborative pair, Kim and Sheri, time to think, plan, and budget. During the year of implementation (2015-2016), Sheri and Kim delved into a world where they found themselves amazed. They decided to team up with Okefenokee RESA’s Jim Farmer, in order to reach out to the other counties in the District; along with him, they were all three on the State Tech Fair Committee. They also decided for Sheri to lead the District tech fair solely and for the three to work alongside one another for the Region division. Because they learned in order to continue being in the State competition, once a Region has started, that growth had to be shown, the team decided to begin with 11 categories (instead of 15). Those categories included: 3-D Modeling, Animation, Device Modification, Digital Photo Production, Game Design, Graphic Design, Internet Applications, Multimedia Applications, Non-multimedia Applications, Robotics, and Video Production. They felt Pierce County, as well as the rest of the schools in the Region, had a good grip on what those categories would be like and could develop a deeper understanding without overwhelming students and parents.

Throughout the year, the Pierce County STEAM Team met to make decisions regarding the District and Region tech fairs. They decided the date of the tech fairs, scheduling of events, entertainment, raffle, recruiting of judges, venue, food, and overall logistics. Certificates, badges, pamphlets, t-shirt sales, and many other details were included in the planning process of both fairs. The team reached out to get donations and created social media pages for advertisements and announcements. There were many details that went into the event, so long-term and short-term planning was essential throughout the entire process for both fairs. They had to have a birds-eye view of the fairs themselves, in addition to a zoomed-in view of specifics.

The Pierce County Technology Fair was a success. Everything went according to plan, but some changes in logistics were noted to be changed. This included the way things were set up on the hallways. After the first tech fair, the decision was made to have hallway captains and to have a place to house technology (which was later called the Technology Parking Garage).

After the Pierce County Technology Fair, a STEAM Team Steering Committee was also developed in order to create a hierarchy for the execution of the Regional fair. The committee members each had a specific area in which to focus and people from each school to work under them. This committee gave direction and gained leadership skills through this process. Kimberley Spivey was in charge of the technology literacy challenge, writing receipts, awards, judge recruitment, and judge orientation. Sheri Bashlor was in charge of parent and teacher communication to all of the Districts as well as the creation of paper materials for the fair (badges, t-shirt orders, breakfast orders, certificates, pamphlets, etc.). Ericka McIntosh, from Pierce County High School, was in charge of the food. Brandi Metts, from Pierce County Middle School, was in charge of scheduling. Jared Crapps, the Pierce County 4-H Director, was in charge of entertainment and the raffle. The changes made after the District tech fair were minor but allowed the hallways to run more smoothly at the next tech fair.

Most everything went according to plan at the Regional fair, with the exception of the weather. Fortunately, a weather plan was created prior to the event and followed through the day of the fair. After the Regional tech fair, the Steering Committee met and decided that the next fair we had should be at a larger venue. The tech fair was at Midway Elementary School, and the Regional fair was majorly adjusted in scheduling due to the size of the school being smaller. Everything went smoothly, but the awards ceremony was packed with people standing up and flowing out of the multi-purpose room where it was held.

According to the results of the survey given to teachers and parents at the culmination of the project, success can definitely be determined through the answers given. Parents were pleased with the process and results of their children being able to be a part of the technology fairs. The only suggestion the committee had was to have the event at a larger facility, which didn’t surprise anyone on the committee. Although there was plenty of room, the technology fair is supposed to support growth and have more participants each year; because of that, we knew we would have to consider moving the tech fair for the next school year. For Pierce County, having the technology fair officially became an annual event after the success of the ones implemented during the 2015-2016 school year.

**PART II**

During the process of the fair, leadership was developed across Pierce County and specifically, within Sheri Bashlor. It was learned that communication is essential to create a shared vision among a group of people, professional practice should be modeled and expected of others, mistakes should be conveyed as a part of the learning process, and constructive criticism should be considered for purposeful change. Many of the ISTE Standards for Coaches were displayed during the process. There was a shared vision, and Kim and Sheri showed their visionary leadership through the process. They took in ideas of other team members to validate their opinions and encourage their involvement. The collaborative pair also researched while learning and taught the team members the process of each of the categories in the tech fair. They had to be familiar with digital-age learning environments, professional development, and program evaluation as well as model digital citizenship. They are both now looked at leaders who contain or are willing to contain content knowledge and promote professional growth among their school, District, and Region.

When conducting and executing a technology fair, one must have the knowledge and skills of how to develop a technology initiative, work with others to develop it, seek out feedback and evaluation from others, coach others on learning how to effectively use new technology tools, troubleshoot basic software, and promote cultural awareness during the process. Dispositions they needed as leaders were consistency across the project, the ability to make management decisions, high expectations of others, understanding of others, the ability to collaborate, prompt and consistent attendance at meetings and functions, an encouraging attitude, commitment, the ability to continuously evaluate in a positive manner, organizational skills, and the ability to demonstrate a positive and strong work ethic. In *Digital leadership,* Sheninger (2014) states, “Leaders must be knowledgeable of the characteristics and dynamics that embody innovative learning spaces and environments” (p. 24). All of these characteristics of leaders are pieces to the large puzzle of leadership; one must learn as he or she goes along as well.

When conducting a technology fair, one has to know who to reach out to and have on the team involved in making it happen. There needs different people who have unique skillsets and excel at them. For example, there needs to be someone who can lead, someone who can schedule, someone who can reach out to others, someone who can promote and who is good at marketing, etc. People can excel at multiple things; however, each person needs a focus in order not to get overwhelmed with too many tasks or expectations.

References

ISTE (2016). *ISTE Standards for Coaches.* International Society for Technology in Education. Retrieved from <http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/20-14_ISTE_Standards-C_PDF.pdf>.

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