

Empowering Leader Analysis

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Empowering Leadership Introduction

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed five standards for educational leaders. The third standard, empowering leader, states “leaders create a culture where teachers and learners are empowered to use technology in innovative ways to enrich teaching and learning” (ISTE, 2020). As such, this standard in particular relates to the seven student standards and seven teacher standards also provided by ISTE, as it focuses on how technology leaders can promote best practices in students and teachers. ISTE provides five indicators for the empowering leaders standard including: empowering teachers to build their own goals and exercise leadership; build technological confidence in teachers so they can apply the ISTE standards to practice; create an environment of experimentation, innovation and risk-taking; promote technology use that can meet diverse learning needs, including for students’ social-emotional growth; and developing both assessments and personalized, real time feedback to help inform instruction (ISTE, 2020).

Collecting Information

The subject of this paper is Rock Hill High School in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The information for this analysis was collected using two main sources. One source is my own anecdotal evidence, gathered as a classroom teacher employed by Rock Hill High school for the past 7.5 years. The second source is an email interview conducted with Joanne Clark, one of the district’s educational specialists in the area of technology. Clark is designated by the district office to work closely with Rock Hill High School and provide school-site support and professional development (PD) sessions for teachers and administrators. Through use of these two methods of collection, I was able to find evidence for the five indicators of the empowering leader standard as it applies to Rock Hill High School.

Evidence Found of Indicators

The first indicator of the empowering leaders standard states leaders should “empower educators to exercise professional agency, build teacher leadership skills, and pursue personified professional learning” (ISTE, 2020). In my own experience, this indicator is fully evidenced at Rock Hill High School. Every year, choice PD sessions are offered by the technology specialist, ranging from topics like utilizing special features in our learning management systems to creating personalized portfolio projects. Just this year, over 10 such sessions were provided on-site, and several others were provided during the summer learning conference before school started. As “choice” sessions, they were not *all* required, but a teacher has the flexibility to choose one a month that they feel would be most useful. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in teacher leadership also, such as when I asked to co-present a PD session on a feature in our LMS and the technology specialist readily agreed and met with me to plan it. Later on, she approached me to co-present again concerning another technology program, AP Classroom, since she knew I was incorporating it in my instruction. I did find this empowering and confidence building, which also applies to indicator two of the empowering leaders standard.

The second indicator states leaders should “build the confidence and competency of educators to put the ISTE standards for students and educators into practice” (ISTE, 2020). As mentioned previously, working closely with our technology specialist did increase my confidence, and she is very open to hearing concerns and suggestions. I believe this is due to the district leadership deciding to assign specialists to certain “home schools” where they can build relationships with the teachers. While I feel the ISTE standards for teachers and students are implicitly promoted, I asked Joanne Clark, Rock Hill High’s assigned technology specialist, why there is not explicit instruction in the standards. According to her, all PD is “heavily informed

by the ISTE standards”, including district developed digital instruction for students, but the focus for the instructional team is on “process and outcomes” rather than the theoretical foundations – especially when PD is generally limited to 45 minutes of a teacher’s planning period (Clark, personal communication, 2020). I further inquired as to why teachers no longer attend the ISTE conferences (historically, a couple of teachers would be sent every year) and she said that “sadly, it has become cost-prohibitive to send teachers annually” (2020). However, she hopes in the future funds can be found to continue to send teachers to the conference.

According to the third indicator, empowering leaders “inspire a culture of innovation and collaboration that allows the time and space to explore and experiment with digital tools” (ISTE, 2020). In my personal experience, I have always been encouraged to experiment, and the technology specialist has readily met with me to explore digital tools. For instance, she once met with me for a couple of hours before school started one year to give me a one-on-one session on how I could use Microsoft OneNote Class Notebook software to accomplish what I wanted to for an upcoming class. While I may be considered an early-adopter and risk-taker when it comes to incorporating technology into my instruction, I still find this indicator to be true even with the more novice teacher population, as PD sessions are geared towards all levels and the specialist celebrates successes (by, for instance, posting celebratory messages on Twitter). The only part of the indicator I find problematic is the part about “allows the time”. In education, time is one of our most lacking resources. According to Clark, the specialists above all wish to “respect the time of our educators” and thus most PD are considered introductory “toe in the water” sessions, and then the specialist are on call for further support as needed (Clark, personal communication, 2020).

The fourth indicator says leaders should “support educators in using technology to advance learning that meets the diverse learning, cultural, and social-emotional needs of individual students” (ISTE, 2020). In my subject area of mathematics, I have not found our technology leaders to provide any ways technology can support these ideals. Most of these types of resources come from other sources, such as textbooks or websites, but none have been introduced or promoted by the technology leaders. According to Clark, there are a lot of emerging programs, particularly geared to social-emotional health for younger grades, the district is looking at and considering promoting, but for now it is up to classroom teachers (Clark, personal communication, 2020).

Developing “learning assessments that provide a personalized, actionable view of student progress in real time” is the fifth and final indicator for the empowering leaders standard (ISTE, 2020). In terms of learning assessments, in my experience the technology specialists have done a thorough job of promoting various assessment techniques using technology, not only limited to LMS quizzing strategies, but with e-portfolios, discussion boards, etc. The PD sessions provided do often focus on the best practice of providing student choice – and how that can be incorporated. Concerning the second aspect of the indicator, personalized and actionable feedback, this is less prevalent. Recently, a new program was purchased and is being phased in district-wide that is meant to focus on identifying a student’s personal strengths and weaknesses – each standard is coded red, yellow, or green based on student mastery - but the type of questioning is somewhat limited. Clark says they hope to incorporate the program throughout all grade levels so there will be a “one stop” destination for tracking personal student growth (Clark, personal communication, 2020). At present, this is still a work in progress.

Areas of Concern

I believe the first three indicators should all be assigned a low level of concern. Rock Hill High and its technology specialist, through various PD offered and one-on-one support, go above and beyond to help build competency (and thus confidence) with technology use for teachers. Additionally, teachers are encouraged and supported when trying out new technologies, and they feel comfortable seeking out help or sharing frustrations. I would assign a high level of concern to indicator four, as I have never in my experience been exposed to any way technology can help me more with my culturally diverse students or their social-emotional health needs. I have no doubt that the technology specialists support this, but no methods for using technology in this endeavor has ever been expressed. It seems to be understood this is more of a classroom curriculum or personal teacher issue than one for the technology specialists. However, I think any work forward in this area would be much appreciated by teachers and students. Finally, I would assign a moderate level of concern to the fifth indicator. The technology leaders make sure to instruct about various assessment methods that can be supported by technology, including the use of choice. However, the second part of the indicator, making sure teachers have real-time actionable feedback, has not yet been fully realized. With the adoption of the new program, it appears some steps have been taken in the right direction to start making sure all teachers have real-time access to their students' progress through the standards. Overall, I feel Rock Hill High School does an above average job with the empowering leaders standard, with the notable exception of indicator four concerning diverse learning. In an area serving a hugely diverse population of students this seems a failing at present, but hopefully in the future the technology leaders can rectify this issue. Ultimately, Rock Hill High School has mainly succeeded at creating an empowering culture where technology is used to improve teaching and learning.

References

Clark, J. (Instructional Technology Specialist for Rock Hill Schools), personal communication, June 15, 2020.

ISTE Standards for Administrators (2020), *ISTE International Society for Technology in Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.iste.org/standards/for-education-leaders>