

Connected Learner Analysis

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### **Connected Learner Introduction**

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) provides five standards for educational leaders. The fifth and final standard is called connected learner. According to ISTE, the connected learner standard states “leaders model and promote continuous professional learning for themselves and others” (ISTE, 2020). To determine if educational leaders are meeting the standard, ISTE provides four indicators including: setting goals to remain abreast of technological advances; participate and collaborate in online professional learning networks (PLN); regularly reflect on practices to promote professional growth; and developing leadership skills towards continuous improvement in using technology for learning improvement (ISTE, 2020).

### **Collecting Information**

This subject of this paper is the Rock Hill School District in Rock Hill, SC. As a teacher at Rock Hill High School for 7.5 years, I can offer my own anecdotal evidence towards the implementation of the indicators. However, because this standard seems to weigh heavily on the personal practices of technology leaders, I also interviewed Joanne Clark, an educational specialist in the area of technology employed by the district office. Clark’s position has her as Rock Hill High School’s personal technology instructional specialist along with a few other schools, while also working at the district level as part of the instructional staff. The instructional staff has her working in a team of five specialists focused on the area of instructional technology. Through both my classroom teacher experiences and Clark’s instructional specialist experiences, I was able to acquire evidence concerning each indicator for ISTE’s connected leader standard.

### **Evidence Found of Indicators**

The first indicator for connected learner says educational leaders need to “set goals to remain current on emerging technologies for learning, innovations in pedagogy, and advancements in the learning sciences” (ISTE, 2020). From my perspective, the district does appear to do its best to stay abreast of emerging technologies as our technology specialists offer constant book studies, generally regarding blended learning, and professional development (PD) sessions that focus not just on technology programs but also on how to best support classroom learning with technology. I personally attended a graduate level course one of the district specialists offered and it was very focused on how students learn, and how technology can be used to help build and improve upon that learning – pedagogy and theory beyond just technology being shoe-horned into an existing curriculum. I asked Joanne Clark specifically how the specialists at the district level make sure they are keeping current with new technologies, and she informed me that “the district has invested funds to send us to various conferences and trainings” and those serve not only as exposure to new technology but also opportunities for networking with other professionals who in turn can also be sources for new information (Clark, personal communication, 2020). Clark mentioned they are also encouraged to work towards various professional certifications, such as her “Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert” title that ensure growth (personal communication, 2020).

In many ways, Clark’s experiences with networking flows naturally into the second indicator for the connected learner, which states leaders “participate regularly in online professional networks to collaboratively learn with and mentor other professionals” (2020). Clark says her “go-to groups” include the Northwest Council for Computer Education (NCEE), MicrosoftEdu, and CaitlynTucker.com communities (personal communication, 2020). She said she sources much information from these groups that in turn inform her decisions for PD

sessions for us teachers (personal communication, 2020). As a teacher, I have personally witnessed the choice involved in technology PD sessions explode in the past couple of years as the technology specialists have been exposed to and trained in more resources.

According to ISTE indicator three for the connected learner standard, leaders “use technology to regularly engage in reflective practices that support personal and professional growth” (ISTE, 2020). As the majority of this indicator would be difficult for me as a classroom teacher to observe, I defer to the words of our technology specialist instead:

Like most planning, we start with the outcomes we want and then go back to see what steps we need to take to achieve them. A huge consideration is our learners – how much do they already know, how much do they need to know to move to the next level, and how motivated are they to learn? What works for one teacher will not work for all. Also, what is the true motivation behind this training? Will this result in higher achievement for the students? It is important to not get too attached to any product or idea, so we don’t push too hard for changes others aren’t ready to make or create a battle for all the wrong reasons (Clark, personal communication, 2020).

The only aspect of the indicator I can speak to as a teacher is the idea of a shared decision-making model. I do think the instructional team makes an effort to reach out to teachers and students, asking what sorts of resources we need or training we want. This sort of outreach was especially important during the unexpected switch to remote learning during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The final indicator states that connected learners “develop the skills needed to lead and navigate change, advance systems and promote a mindset of continuous improvement for how technology can improve learning” (ISTE, 2020). Again, as a classroom teacher I feel this

applied more to the purview of the educational specialist Joanne Clark. She told me that at the district level they truly do abide by the Rock Hill School District saying ‘One Team, One Mission, One Rock Hill’ so that all departments do work together (no silo-ing) to achieve the overall vision statement for the district (Clark, personal communication, 2020). When I asked about how the district helps to advance systems, Clark was somewhat less clear, stating meeting occur to discuss priority projects, but could not speak to how that changed based on opportunities within the system itself (2020).

### **Areas of Concern**

When examining the indicators, I feel confident assigning a low level of concern to indicator one, as through my experiences with all the district technology specialists (I have worked with or attended training with all five) it is apparent to me that they all take their positions seriously as educators concerned with learning and pedagogy, not just technology itself. By the district investing money for them to attend conferences, it also shows that the district understands the need to remain current on emerging technology.

The next three indicators, to me, are dependent much more on the personality and skills of the individual technology specialist. Because my school works closely with Joanne Clark, I interviewed her and can assess levels of concern based on her, but I do not feel as confident extending these levels across the entire district. I would assign low levels of concerns to both indicators two and three based on my experiences working with and talking to Clark as a representative of Rock Hill Schools. I know her PLN extends across several different online platforms and she is constantly participating in professional growth opportunities like book studies and certificate programs. While I do not work as closely with the other specialists, I feel that at the district level Clark can be considered to represent the professional expectations and

climate. Thus, assuming her colleagues are equally as involved, I feel I can tentatively assign a low level of concern over the entire district for these indicators.

The final indicator appears to be the least successful, and as such I would assign a moderate level of concern. While I have no doubt that Clark herself has adopted a mindset of continuous improvement, I cannot speak to the district as a whole because there has not been any sort of published or spoken of plan or mission statement focused on these qualities. Also, Clark was unclear on how decision making occurred within the system with regards to prioritizing and sequencing changes. As such, it appears more work is needed to formalize and vocalize the procedures for helping to advance systems. However, if taking *all* indicators into account and assigning a level of concern, I feel that overall Rock Hill School District should be a low level of concern. Every indicator is addressed in some fashion, and many are completely satisfied. On the whole, Rock Hill School District has just minor work to do on fulfilling the connected learner standard.

## References

Clark, J. (Educational Specialist in Instructional Technology for Rock Hill School District),  
personal communication, June 22, 2020.

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