

Remote Learning Readiness:

5 Takeaways from a Thriving District Tech Department

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If there's one thing we've learned from the 2019-2020 school year, it's that we all have adaptability within us. Here we are, navigating fully-remote learning—and just a few short weeks ago we thought “zoom” was a verb. As we've witnessed innate creativity and problem solving surface in so many ways during these unprecedented times, it's helpful to take a look at the best practices that have allowed some school districts to pivot a little more quickly and smoothly than others.

David Termunde is the Chief Technology Officer for Arbor Park School District 145 in the greater Chicago area. He leads the Information

Technology Department, or what's better known as PandaTech, handling everything software, app and hardware related for their four schools and fleet of school busses. As the district's first-ever CTO, David was hired three years ago to not only bring Arbor Park up to speed technologically, but also to future proof their tech plans.

While no one could have predicted the future for which they were “proofing”, David and his team felt well positioned when the sudden shift to remote learning struck. Here are the top five takeaways that they believe set them up for success.

1. Jump In

In the past two years, Arbor Park made a complete shift from labs with traditional desktop computers and shared mobile devices to a 1:1 program for grades 1-8. After rigorous research and setting up a forward-thinking infrastructure, they were able to move quickly, which has helped to acclimate students and staff at an even pace with little pushback. According to David, “the extensive teacher training and professional development on new devices and platforms has certainly paid off during COVID-19.”

2. Charging is Key

While 1:1 take-home programs can help foster a sense of responsibility in students, lost and uncharged devices can be a prevalent interruption. To combat uncharged devices, Arbor Park offers a charging station in the lunchroom of the middle school. Their media center houses a LocknCharge FUYL Tower, which features an Intelligent Asset Management System and 15 individually-lockable compartments. Each compartment is equipped with a power outlet and USB port, putting the tech team in total control of any device they secure – whether that's the Microsoft Surface Go laptops used by 3rd-8th graders, the staff's Surface Pros, the younger students' iPads or virtually any other mobile device.

3. No More Behind-the-Scenes IT

Part of the big picture plan for the district was to give

the tech team its own mascot and brand. They're not a stale, impersonal “help desk.” They're the Pandas. Although their desks are housed in PandaLand, you're more likely to see them out and about in one classroom or another – fixing issues or looking for problems to solve proactively.

Equipment like the FUYL Tower plays a part in the Panda brand. It doesn't look like a relic of the past. It's exciting, sleek and modern, and it piques the interest of students. The team has successfully made themselves more visible and more approachable – an invaluable aspect to their 21st century IT Department. As students, teachers, staff, and parents rely more heavily on technology for learning, they also rely on their Pandas for support.

4. Technology as a Teammate

PandaTech is made up of five full-time employees. While that's a bigger team than they've had in years past, they're also managing more technology than ever before. In a district of 1,350 students, and especially during these remote learning circumstances, finding ways to let technology work harder for your team is crucial.

Typically, their FUYL Tower is used for securing charged and ready-to-go loaner devices. When students have forgotten or lost their device, they are able to independently check out what they need from a Tower.

Due to COVID-19 school closures, the Pandas have

tweaked their FUYL Tower workflow to enable a no-contact pickup location for warranty replacement devices and accessory purchases. Here's how it works. Just like an Amazon locker, the FUYL Tower was relocated to a publicly-accessible location within the school. Parents are able to place tech orders from the district's ecommerce site, and Pandas fulfill the order by placing it in a FUYL Tower compartment. Parents follow simple email instructions to unlock and pick up their order from their assigned FUYL Tower locker number the following day.

Pandas are able to view the Tower's activity log, change pin codes, open up compartment doors and more – all remotely through the web-based management portal. David compared the FUYL Tower to “a part-time Panda” that's always there helping the team provide the same high level of service, even when they're not on site. Best of all, it allows them to be available and focused on e-learning support, rather than curbside pickups.

5. Keep Innovating

Arbor Park was fortunate to have a level of preparedness for remote learning that many districts did not. It's not by chance, but instead a top-down, district-wide commitment to technology, improvement and innovation. LocknCharge is a company built on that same spirit. Just like Arbor Park School District 145, we're always looking for solutions to tomorrow's problems so that we can continue to make life easier for our customers.

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