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Penn Hills School District Increases Efficiencies with a Technology Makeover

Business Environment Challenges

Penn Hills School District is a mid-sized, K-12 public school district located in Pittsburgh, serving the community of Penn Hills. The school had seen a major decline in enrollment over the past 10 years mostly due to socioeconomic factors and a shifting demographic. Students were choosing to go to one of many Charter schools in the area rather than stay within the Penn Hills School district. This was costing the school upwards of three million dollars annually.

When the pandemic hit and schools went virtual, the school realized they had to come up with a technology solution that created a hybrid learning environment so that both the students and teachers would be able to feel that they were all together, whether they are in the classroom or learning at home. Teachers were frustrated because of outdated technology such as antiquated projectors and laptops. They wanted to just go into the classroom and teach, not spend all of their time setting up equipment.

Organization
Penn Hills School District

Dealer
The Wilson Group

Technology Integrator
Xycom Technology Group

Industry
Education

Challenges
- Needed a solution that created a hybrid learning environment where both teachers and students felt as though they were together
- Outdated technology
- Teachers did not want to feel like IT managers. They wanted a simple solution.

Solutions
- (60) 70" (69.5" diagonal) AQUOS BOARD interactive displays
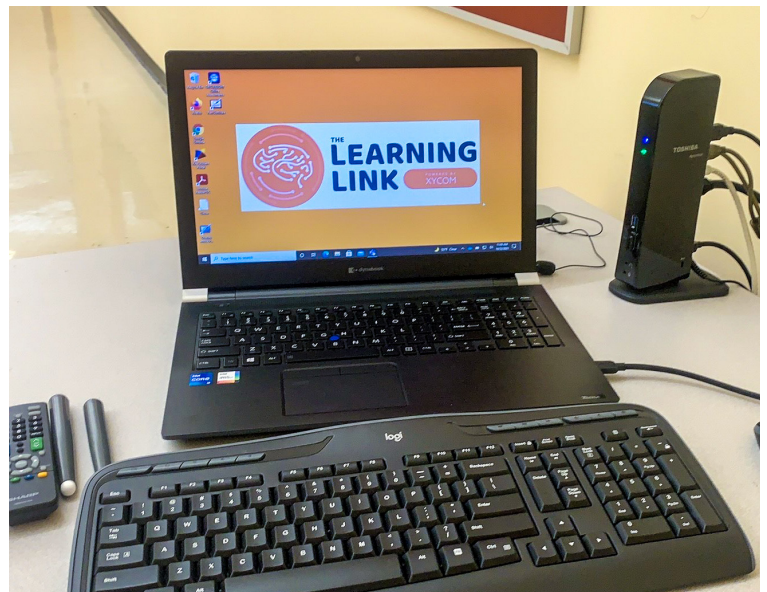- (30) 15" Dynabook laptops with docking station
- Microsoft Teams

Results
- Collaborative environment where all students, regardless of location, learn simultaneously
- Upgraded technology
- Teachers are able to plug in with one cord and begin their lessons immediately

Technology Solutions

The Director of Curriculum at Penn Hills reached out to Xycom Technology Group, a technology integrator, for help designing a solution to fit their needs. Xycom Technology Group in turn engaged Sharp dealer, The Wilson Group, to outfit the school with updated equipment. Due to a grant from the CARES Act, Penn Hills was able to equip their classrooms with up-to-date technology. The district wanted to start with a pilot program for 30 of their 220 classrooms. A substantial number of students have opted to remain virtual for at least half of the year, the school needed a collaborative learning environment to make the students at home feel as engaged as the students in the classroom.

Xycom Technology Group created a collaborative learning environment for the teachers and students that included two 70" AQUOS BOARD® interactive displays and one 15" Dynabook laptop with docking station per classroom. The school district also leveraged Microsoft Teams to help create an environment where the teacher could see all the students logged in using the gallery feature.

There was one display installed in front of the classroom mounted with a camera on the ceiling that allowed the students at home to see two-thirds of the classroom. Another display was installed in the back of the classroom on an adjustable mount. Dynabook laptops were distributed to each teacher and it worked as the hub to tie everything together. The teacher only needed to plug in one cable and everything else is configured and mounted on the teacher's desk.

Proven Results

The 30 room pilot was a huge success and teachers were very happy. The new collaborative learning environment has made a big difference in the way that students learn both in-person and remotely. They went from a very outdated setup of projectors that were 15 years old and bulky and difficult to configure laptops that disrupted lesson plans, to plugging in one cord and having their information shared immediately. The teachers feel connected and believe it creates a tremendously collaborative classroom experience.

The school will continue to outfit the remainder of the classrooms with the interactive displays and Dynabook laptops throughout the school year. Although it is too early to see an impact on enrollment, they are clearly on the right technology path to entice students to come back to the district.