

HISD: App Toolbox

SUPPORTING THE SELECTION OF QUALITY DIGITAL RESOURCES

OUR CHALLENGE

In 2017, the HISD Education Technology department was approached with an urgent dilemma to solve: teachers needed a tool to quickly decipher and select quality digital tools and resources for their students to use in the classroom, outside of the district-endorsed/adopted curriculum.

HISD needed a solution which improved access to quality learning resources, and provided greater convenience for teachers, parents and students. An additional element for the solution was to identify a process for evaluating digital tools to ensure student data privacy and the content was appropriate for academic purposes.

THE SOLUTION

The Education Technology team developed a plan to utilize a robust app vetting solution and searchable “toolbox” for teachers (as well as administrators, parents and students) to use to quickly determine which apps serve their instructional purpose, which are appropriate for multiple-age audiences, and which protect student privacy. The HISD App Toolbox is free and open to the public, and available at www.houstonisd.org/apptoolbox.

To further support technology integration, the department created a “Getting Started Guide” to enable users to immediately start using the app on their computer, tablet, or mobile device. The toolbox was designed with usability in mind, and is searchable with filtering capabilities for easy tool selection and navigation. Teachers are encouraged to check tool availability on the App Toolbox when considering adopting any new digital resource.

LEARNING IMPACT OUTCOMES

Utilizing the App Toolbox ensures that teachers and students are accessing mobile apps and resources that adhere to the district’s privacy, safety and security requirements and contain content that is appropriate for classroom use. Because the toolbox is available 24/7 to our community, there is a consistency in what is being utilized in the classroom and at home. The district is taking accountability for the information on the App

Toolbox by providing the vetted list of resources and tutorials to our community so they can be more informed about what teachers are using with students and also provides the district with an opportunity to empower our parent community so that they can utilize the App Toolbox to become knowledgeable about emerging technologies and to expand their personal abilities.

Through data analysis tools, the district is able to evaluate which tools are being utilized, which are ineffective and areas of need for future resources. Additionally, analytics of toolbox usage provides district leaders with targeted usage for curriculum design, topics for professional development and user information by grade level, campus and user type further providing evidence of the usage and effectiveness of the App Toolbox.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

HISD’s App Toolbox allows for the acquisition and use of hundreds of digital resources – including adopted instructional materials, resource collections, 3rd party-created materials, and freely available OER’s. In addition to providing cost savings and ubiquitous access for students, the App Toolbox has enabled user-friendly, flexible learning environments, utilizing differentiation, individualization, and personalization of instruction to students of all learning styles and needs. Moving to digital resources has reduced spending on traditional print resources and allowed the district to purchase supplementary digital resources to support literacy and English language instruction. Additionally, the increased collaboration and innovation has allowed students and teachers new opportunities to engage with others outside classroom walls and district boundaries.

The App Toolbox is the vehicle used to ensure that teachers and students have equal access and opportunities using approved apps and digital resources. The Houston Independent School District will continue to utilize and expand functionality of the App Toolbox to gain input from teachers about what instructional resources are made available for students but also as a means to ensure students across the district have access to quality instructional materials.