

## Executive Summary

### **In Search of Connectivity: How Authentic Learning with Technology Engages Middle Grade Students**

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**What happens when students become leaders in a movement to make technology usage more ubiquitous and user-friendly for a school community?**

My question asked what social dynamics and academic behaviors would be displayed as the students undertook a research study that might benefit their fellow learners. I further wanted to know what evidence will there be of student growth as learners and investigators as a result of participating in this project and what negative consequences may occur as the result of these efforts?

#### **Tools**

- ✓ Emails
- ✓ Observation checklists
- ✓ Online surveys
- ✓ Attendance collection
- ✓ Progress reports and report cards
- ✓ Journaling

#### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Students grew in the type, quality, and quantity of their writings in their email messages. Female students were more likely to be engaged in activities in class that were educational in nature, while males were more engaged in game playing. They expressed great satisfaction in their participation in this enrichment program and had higher attendance rates than their peers both in other extended day programs and during the school year. Their grades were better on the whole and their Iowa test scores in reading and mathematics were better than those of the school at large. The group averaged a 5.8 percentile gain in reading and 3 percentile points gained in mathematics over their previous year's scores, while the school's overall scores were down in both measures. They completed their task and met with key legislators in the state capitol at a statewide technology exhibit. The brochures, newsletters, and the level of sophistication of their presentation were remarked on by everyone who met with them, as evidenced by the comments in the guest book.

## **Barriers and Limitations**

Extended day programs are in great jeopardy of being eliminated. There is no money in the projected budget for programs such as the one in this study. Adults, both local and statewide, are skeptical about the ability of middle school students to effectively participate in authentic learning activities as outlined in this study. Programs like this need adult leadership that is committed to allowing students to lead and help direct authentic learning activities.

## **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

- ✓ Students in the middle grades can effectively participate in engaged learning activities that impact their school community. Programs that provide students with these opportunities should be encouraged and funded.
- ✓ Teachers need to be encouraged to guide students in engaged learning activities since the research indicates that students demonstrate improved academic achievement when engaged in activities that are meaningful to them.
- ✓ Educators should be assisted in developing authentic learning opportunities since this type of learning activity can improve the students' sense of self-worth and social responsibility.
- ✓ Students need to be provided with enrichment opportunities since research indicates they have demonstrated exceptional attendance records.
- ✓ Students have demonstrated that they are capable of being effective lobbyists for causes that concern them and these opportunities should be provided.
- ✓ Policy makes need to recognize that there is a demonstrable digital divide between Hispanics and other ethnic groups, and those gaps should be addressed in this technologically intensive society.

## **Next Steps**

The students have decided to tackle the Chicago Public Library system next year. Their findings indicated that students heavily use the library when they do not have Internet connectivity at home, yet the library is closed when the students are available to use its facilities. The library is closed on Sunday, in the evenings, and on school holidays. The students intend to share their findings with the library board and the local politicians to see if they can impact local library policies to benefit the students of Chicago.