# Renfrew County District School Board

Professional Development that seeks to understand what *effective use* of technology is and is focused on providing *technology-enabled learning* in the Early Years classroom

The Renfrew County District School Board's mission speaks to cultivating an environment that values imagination and innovation. The EDU Apple Texas Tour visit along with CODE funding for technology-enabled learning has provided members of the RCDSB executive team and other system leaders opportunities to further strengthen and deepen the learning of our mission. CODE's insight into the importance of investing dollars into technology has also provided opportunities for leadership development in technology and innovation in our classrooms, schools and our district. RCDSB would like to thank CODE for the funds as it has and will continue to provide our leaders with opportunities to push our thinking, allow us to have an open mind to technology and continue our own learning as innovators - all for what is best for our students.

The visit to schools in Texas, our learning from EDU Apple and other discussions from educators and system coaches has allowed us to create a wonderful story, one which explores the purposeful use of Technology in seven Kindergarten classrooms and allow for the development of instructional leadership in classrooms. Our story is as follows:

The Early Years team partnered with the Information Technology Department to bring educators together to develop our understanding of how technology can be used in a meaningful way to support the learning of Kindergarten students. The organizing team focused our initial learning session on building a shared understanding of what the term "purposeful" means. Our work was grounded in the expectation outlined in the Kindergarten Program document that states: *"Early learning teams should be critical consumers of educational software to ensure that the software offers opportunities for higher level thinking. Programs that promote only rote repetition of facts and information should be avoided." (The Kindergarten Program: Draft Version, 2010, pg 42-43).*

The last part of the above noted statement from the Kindergarten Program ("Programs that promote only rote repetition of facts and information should be avoided") struck us as one to further explore with our educators. Understanding that as learners, teachers have different entry points with their understanding and knowledge of integrating technology in a meaningful way that supports student learning, we realized we needed to provide support for how to consider integrating technology. The group of educators identified a need to move beyond tools that focused on repetition and instead promote critical thinking of kindergarten students and/or collaboration with peers. In response to this learning, we looked at the SAMR and TPACK models to equip our educators with the knowledge to critically evaluate an App or program prior to introducing it to students. Our goal was to build the capacity of our educators to make informed decisions and consider how technology can be leveraged as a tool that promotes the skills and characteristics we wish to see in our students - character education, citizenship, communication, critical thinking & problem-solving, collaboration, creativity & imagination (Fullan's 6C's).

During our first meeting we presented the teams with various pieces/uses of technology (DoInk app, Sphero, digital storytelling and virtual field trips) and facilitated exploration and evaluation of these tools. We asked educators to think critically about these tools to decide how (and if) they would use them with their students. After this session, we supported Early Years teams in their classroom as requested, to continue to explore how

kindergarten students can use technology in meaningful ways. One example was using DoInk to share learning about an inquiry by exploring how to connect classrooms with experts through video conferencing.

During our second meeting, we aimed to expand educator thinking about what technology really is. Through our observations we noticed that the discussions seemed to centre around iPad Apps and Smart board functions. We introduced the teams to technologies such as Dash and Dot, Cublets, and WeGo Lego. As a next step, our organizing team is beginning to think about ways to offer makerspaces and tech bins to Early Years teams as a way of further supporting the expansion of our view/definition of technology in the classroom. We are seeking the input of eleven teams involved in regards to what tools to offers, what supports would need to come with them, and how to organize tech bins while at the same time incorporating the 6Cs.

Although passionate about building instructional leadership with technology-enabled learning, our story does not end there. RCDSB recognizes the importance of our students reaching their optimal learning state and to remain in that state. We know that if children are struggling to attend to the learning, are unable to focus on the task or are in a brain state of fight or flight their overall achievement and success will be diminished. It is our belief that through the purposeful and effective use of technology we can help students to engage with the learning and be able to meet the curriculum in a way that best suits the individual student. We need to use technology to enable their learning, and build their confidence as capable learners and to accomplish this outcome educators are beginning to recognize and be aware of the brain states of our students. We then can be better able to match each student with the strategies and tools (including, but not limited to, technology) that will help them be calm, alert and ready to learn.

We recognize that technology is an embedded part of our early learners' lives. These children are growing up surrounded by and immersed in digital media. What our project sought to understand was how we as educators can bring technology-enabled learning into the classroom, allowing students to build confidence as 21st Century learners. We are very proud of our work and will continue to monitor our learning and assess its impact on student achievement and well-being.

Superintendent Dennis Jenkins in conversation with students at Richard J. Lee Elementary School Dallas, Texas.

Two RCDSB students engaged in learning with their device.