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District Administration magazine, HP, and Intel honor High School North as a 2017 School of TechXcellence

School site of NJDOE-supported innovateNJ Title I summer makercamp

Toms River, New Jersey (June 1, 2017) — District Administration magazine is honoring 19 schools and districts nationally for math and makerspace initiatives as part of the inaugural round of its new “Schools of TechXcellence” program.

The Toms River Regional School District, and High School North in particular, are being recognized in part for a “MakerCamp” held last summer. The 6-week program invited 75 middle school students to address real world challenges using diverse technologies, materials, methods, and maker tools including tablets, hobby saws, green screen video, robots, glue guns, and a drone. They even brainstormed how to survive the zombie apocalypse.

TechXcellence was created by District Administration magazine, in conjunction with HP and Intel, to recognize schools that have implemented novel technology-supported programs that contribute meaningfully to positive student or operational outcomes. The June 2017 honorees were selected by the program’s judges from numerous nominations, and reflect programs that demonstrate effective and replicable success.

“What these stories tell us is that innovation may be powered by the latest devices and applications, but it is fueled by the creativity, vision, and drive of teachers, principals, and district leaders,” says JD Solomon, editorial director at District Administration magazine. “We hope our readers are inspired by the integration of technology demonstrated by these honorees to launch similar initiatives in their own schools.”

The 19 schools and districts from 14 states honored in this round of TechXcellence have launched math instruction and makerspace programs that incorporate technology powered by Intel, including laptops, tablets, and 3D printers.

The makercamp curriculum was developed by Dr. Marc Natanagara, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, using a problem-based model with themes that connected to student lives. The district was hit hard by Superstorm Sandy; in week four, students designed and tested model emergency shelters. “Students become truly engaged when they define the problem themselves and the challenge is personally meaningful,” says Natanagara.

Makercamp promoted innovation and creativity by diverging from a traditional classroom environment. High School North science teacher Matt Jasaitis was one of six program developers and camp teachers. “Each day of the 2016 Maker Camp was structured around sharing experiences with students and helping them realize their vision for a task, as opposed to telling them what to know about a given topic,” says Jasaitis.

During the camp’s Foods Week, teachers established a pop-up makerspace. Makerspaces represent one of several tech-based initiatives begun in the district over the past five years, and all eighteen schools have at least one form of them, nearly all financed by grants and donations.

According to Superintendent David Healy, “Because of talented staff, and unwavering Board and community support, we have been able to provide new resources and opportunities for students that inspire them to think across the curriculum.”

Schools of TechXcellence underscores the importance of using technology to prepare students for lives in the 21st century. High School North is creating several new spaces that incorporate technology, promote creativity, and provide student choice. It is developing a Steelcase-funded “literacy makerspace” and will be the site of a new School of Digital Arts beginning in September 2017. Says Board President Giovine, “In a district of our size, we rely on a spirit of research and experimentation to move our programs forward. It helps us determine what is effective and what isn’t worth investing in.”

To view a full list of honorees and to learn how to apply for future rounds of TechXcellence, visit www.districtadministration.com/techx.

About District Administration

District Administration provides K-12 leaders with critical news and information for school district management through its monthly magazine, website, e-newsletters and District Administration Leadership Institute Superintendent Summits. For more information, visit www.districtadministration.com.

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Toms River Regional Schools Makercamp teachers operate pop-up supply store for students building scale emergency shelters.