



How Whitehall Middle School Transitioned to a Vibrant E-Learning Solution That Inspires Students to Explore Future Pathways

Transitioning from Career Cruising to Xello was a breeze for a busy middle school counselor as students embraced intuitive new interface and features.

When it comes to measuring the success of EdTech programs, it helps to go straight to the people who have the most to gain from it: Students.

That's exactly what Lori Hartman did. As the sole middle school counselor at Whitehall Middle School in Whitehall, Mich., she was curious about how Xello was working out for students after they'd been using it for a couple of months. She asked 84 8th grade students to rate their agreement with a few survey questions on a scale of 1-5 (lowest to highest). The results were encouraging.

In response to the statement, "Xello helped me decide which three careers to save," 37% chose four; 34.5% chose five.

For "Xello helped me see how my interests match my career choices," 46% picked four; 36% went with five.

In response to the statement, "Xello helped me to see how skills are related to my career choice(s)," 36% opted for four; 38% five.

Finally, for "Xello gave me ideas about how to transition to high school," 20% of students chose three, 31% chose four and 19% chose five.

"By and large I found [the survey results] very positive. It seemed like the kids were pretty positive about how it helped them. In my one-on-one conversations with them, many of them shared that Xello was a good resource for them," said Hartman.

This is a relief for the busy middle school counselor who is responsible for 480 students from 6th to 8th grade. After 27 years in the role, she says she's become adept at setting priorities to provide college and career readiness to the group in a comprehensive way. It

helps that student needs vary by grade. She typically begins exploration with 7th graders, “We talk about what’s out there, what are their interests and how do these things match up,” she said.

“For the 8th grade, we’re a little bit more purposeful in our approach. We go through the Xello program and use Matchmaker and interests, talk about their skills and the students look into those careers a little longer and spend more time on it. I find 8th graders are really responsive to discussing careers and are interested in learning about what they need at the high school level to set them up for success.”

Whitehall Middle School has been using Xello since September 2019. Before that, they were happy with Career Cruising. “We had probably been using that program for about 15 years. There were times when not every school in the county used it because the State of Michigan was using different programs for careers. But we chose in our district to stay with it because it was worth the money,” said Hartman.

When the decision was made to switch to Xello, she admits she wasn’t excited about learning a new technology. “Adults are typically a little slower to change than kids are. I kind of wished we could stick with the same old thing as we did before.”

But watching the students’ reaction to Xello’s more vibrant, intuitive and interactive interface, she knew any transitional hiccups were worth it. “They were immediately like, ‘Oh wow, this is new!’”

And they took to it right away. I certainly think the way it looks is much more in line with what they’re using on a daily basis.

Hartman uses Xello much the same way she incorporated Career Cruising, including taking a guest spot in a regular class to talk about future planning. The teacher is often engaged in the discussion as well, offering students an additional perspective. They’re then usually given time to do lessons and activities in Xello on their own.

“As they’re doing one of the independent lessons, I meet one-on-one with them outside the classroom and we have a career conversation.”

She encourages students to talk about accomplishments they’re proud of as well as things they struggle with and the steps they take to resolve challenges. This is a natural transition to discussing careers and the kind of training and education they might need to pursue. The meeting wraps up with questions about which resources the student might use to learn more about the careers they’re interested in. Xello is one of the most popular, and it helps that the personalized profile allows them to explore new possibilities that arise as they grow.

“The conversation and time on Xello can’t be a one and done because kids evolve, and interests evolve, and what they know about the world evolves. They need to have a resource that grows with them,” said Hartman.

With 24/7 access to Xello, students can log in from anywhere, including at home. This

gives students space to reshape their interests, look deeper into other careers, update pathways and even plan school courses. It also helps them review their interests and plans with their families.

The more that they own this process the better it is for everyone. They can take charge of [their profile] and look at it when they want. It's an independent thing, not something tied to a project or grade.

Transitioning to Xello from Career Cruising

Hartman says the behind-the-scenes transition wasn't the technological headache she expected. In fact, the capability to use a single sign on has made the administrative side of using Xello much easier. "In the past, passwords were a challenge, but it wasn't that way this year. Students use their power school login to gain access."

While teachers aren't yet using Xello lessons in classrooms, Hartman expects they'll look into being more advanced users as their experience with the program deepens. "There's a bit of a learning curve of figuring out how to make the most of the new features. It's definitely something I'm interested in doing over time."

She's encouraged that the profile will follow kids as they grow into more senior grades. "It makes sense to have a package that allows students to build a scope and sequence with respect to career guidance. It's a huge time saver for those of us with large caseloads."

As much as Hartman is embracing EdTech, she has every intention of maintaining a direct connection with her students. "Xello is a great resource and stepping off place but it takes direct conversations with educators and the people in their life to make sure students are making good, responsible decisions."

When the right technology meets the right counselors, anything is possible for students.



ABOUT HEATHER

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