

Individualized Technology Goals and Differentiated Staff Development Plans

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Author Note

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study was conducted as a district initiative to create staff development that was goal-oriented, differentiated for teacher needs, and focused on improving integration of already readily available technology tools, not just knowledge of how the tools worked. As part of a questionnaire created by GPISD, named the Individualized Technology Goals Survey (ITG), teachers selected two technology goals for themselves from a compiled list of available technology tools and self-assessed their level of integration experience with these given tools using the Florida Technology Integration Matrix (TIM). Then Campus Technology Instructional Specialists (TIS) created campus and teacher specific staff development plans based on the results of the questionnaires. These plans included embedded staff development actions such as workshops, modeling in classrooms, coteaching, conferencing, and helping to create materials. The results showed positive feedback from the teachers and TIS, but changes are being made to the plan for the following school year such as selecting one goal on which to focus and creating more accountability for teachers to work continuously on this goal.

Keywords: differentiated staff development, technology, technology coaching

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Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project was to create staff development that was goal-oriented, differentiated for teacher needs, and focused on improving integration of readily available technology tools, not just knowledge of how the tools worked. To do so, at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year we created a questionnaire, named the Individualized Technology Goals Survey (ITG), on which teachers selected two technology goals for themselves from a compiled list of available technology tools and self-assessed their level of integration experience with these given tools using the Florida Technology Integration Matrix (TIM). Then Campus Technology Instructional Specialists (TIS) created campus and teacher specific staff development plans based on the results of the questionnaires and followed through with these plans throughout the year.

The guiding questions throughout this exploratory study were: What staff development practices are most effective in increasing the amount and quality of technology integration with teachers of differing levels of technology proficiency? Also, what practices of the technology specialist did the teachers find most useful in this endeavor? What were the obstacles that the technology specialist had to overcome to offer this level of assistance? Finally, is this plan successful and worthwhile, and if so, what are the recommendations for the following school year to improve the district's new staff development plan?

Perspective and Theoretical Framework

This research is developed in concordance with Zygotsky's instructional theory of the Zone of Proximal Development including the idea of scaffolding instruction, ISTE standards for

coaches and teachers, and literature review of suggested best practices of staff development in regards to delivery, relevancy, and differentiation.

Zone of Proximal Development. The basic foundation of instruction in this research is based on Vygotsky 's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory explains that for genuine learning to occur, teachers must reach learners with materials and instruction that are at the learners' level of understanding and not below or above (Mooney, 2000). To bring the learner to higher levels, the teacher must employ Vygotsky's strategy of scaffolding to the learners' Zone of Proximal Development, in which, the teacher provides support for the learner and then to help the learner gain independence with the subject matter, slowly pulling back the levels of support throughout the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky was also a proponent for socialization while learning and believed conversation was an important learning tool (Mooney, 2000). Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding as a differentiation instructional strategy and his suggestion of socialization are not just key components of teaching in the K-12 classroom but are now part of a plethora of recent studies which apply his theories to adult learners and staff development (Borthick, Jones, & Wakai, 2003; Harland, 2003; Padhan, & Singh, 2010; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010; Yongcheng, & Zhiting, 2007).

ISTE standards. Another precept taken into consideration for the basis of this study are the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Coaching (NETS-c) and Teaching (NETS-t) standards. The NETS-c include: Visionary Leadership, Teaching, Learning and Assessments, Digital Age Learning Environments, Professional Development and Program Evaluation, Digital Citizenship, and Content Knowledge and Professional Growth (ISTE, 2011). The TIS should also be familiar with and incorporate the NETS-t into practice because they support the teachers, address the essential conditions, and ensure that the TIS is able to assist

teachers in meeting their standards. These teachers' standards include: Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity, Design and Develop Digital-Age Learning Experiences and Assessments, Model Digital-Age Work and Learning, Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility, and Engage in Professional Growth and Leadership (NETS-T, ISTE, 2011).

Staff development delivery. Timely and relevant professional development can help implement new curricula and effective teaching practices (like using technology) that rely on the practice and ongoing inclusion of activities which enable students and teachers alike to reach educational goals with more depth. Delamarter (2006), Holmes (2009), and Miners (2009) have all noted the importance of scheduling, creating, and planning of professional development trainings that ensure the effectiveness and benefits of the technology integration. The successful models of staff development described by researchers like Delacruz (2004) suggest a mentor-based approach (more in-depth discussion in a subsequent section) and Weaver (2006) declares a need for supportive, knowledgeable, responsive, flexible, and communicative technology staff that are well-informed of student and teacher technology usage and need that cannot be provided by outside presenters. Weaver recommends that the technology integration staff needs to be a significant part of and involved in the school environment as an active stakeholder themselves. Additionally, other strategies for TISs would include creating staff development that is problem oriented rather than content oriented since this also draws in learners' specific needs and interests. Having more self-directed staff development with guidance from the TIS when needed supports this learner-centered professional development delivery method as well; including teacher involvement in self-evaluation of their own learning (Bowgren & Sever, 2010).

Staff development relevancy. Lieberman and Mace (2008) declared that although staff development is well intentioned to improve teacher practices, the teachers perceive most staff

development as “fragmented, disjointed, and irrelevant to the real problems of classroom practice” (p. 226). Gess-Newsome, Blocher, Clark, Menasco, and Willis (2003) stated that learning motivation is highest when professional development is closely related to the context of a teacher’s classroom. They also found that motivation is higher and professional development more successful when teachers are able to take charge of their own professional growth like the professionals that they are. Teachers are more impacted by ideas that they have had a part in developing and with those in which they have chosen to participate (Bowgren & Sever, 2010). The best way to motivate adult learners is to increase their reasons and relevancy for participating in the professional development. Cole, Simkins, and Penuel (2002) found that when the staff development is convenient and the teachers can see the true benefit to their practice and student achievement, they are more likely to participate fully with the staff development and follow through with the implementation. The goal of staff development should be to show teachers that the technology integration is not just fun but engages students that may have not been engaged before. Tolutiene and Domarkiene (2010) recommend that the motivation to learn is increased with adult learners (like teachers) when the learners feel there is a chance to put this new knowledge into practice. Therefore, the content of the staff development events need to be relevant to the teacher: in their own classroom, with their own students.

Staff development differentiation. Research has found that teachers who participate in staff development have varying levels of technology skill and experience which is rarely taken into account with the presenter (Delacruz, 2004; Liu & Huang, 2005). From her research, Delacruz (2004) concluded that technology staff development must include ways to help teachers navigate the technology in their own classrooms and teaching conditions. These conditions directly affect the quality and amount of technology teachers integrate. While assisting

technology integration in their own settings, Delacruz observed teaching conditions that varied so greatly she could only conclude that it is not possible to create a program that will work across all educational settings (2004).

Chen (2008) postulated that those in control of improving teacher preparedness and training need to take into account teacher beliefs and motivation since this greatly impacts transfer of staff development learning into teaching practices. For example, when starting an initiative like online classes, Weaver (2006) called for the need for further personalized ongoing support beyond the initial how-to training of technology projects. In a practitioner piece, Compton (2010) surveyed teachers from different stages in their careers; the results showed that the teachers' needs were based on their individual levels of expertise and commitment. To compensate for the differences, Compton recommends adapting the experiences, degree of structure, sequence, and pace. Condie and Livingston (2007) also noted that no singular method of support is likely to meet the needs of all teachers. However, they do point out that in every case the specialist will need to assure teachers that the move out of their instructional comfort zone will be well worth it. They recommend a scaffolding approach to technology staff development where the specialist models the activity and the learner observes. Then the specialist guides the learner through the process of replicating this activity into their own teaching practice while slowly tapering off the assistance as the learner acquires skills. This can be done with a mixture of face-to-face and online contact between the two parties (Donnelly, 2008). In a practitioner article, Besnoy (2007) delineated a plan where teachers of GT students created personal technology improvement plans. In this way, he suggests that teachers have to take matters into their own hands when it comes to their own professional development since the lack of continuous staff development and technological support holds them back.

In Bowgren and Sever's theory (2010) of differentiated staff development, this concept persists with the fact that one of their main recommendations is to increase teacher motivation and reduce learning barriers. They advise achieving this goal by offering the following suggestions:

1. Give teachers opportunities to design the content of the learning based on personal needs and student data.
2. Appreciate teachers' diversity and experiences.
3. Give teachers purpose and value for their learning.
4. Assure teachers of flexibility in grouping and pacing.
5. Offer differentiation to address individual/team needs.
6. Offer choice of methods to demonstrate learning.
7. Offer follow-up activities based on understanding and ability.
8. Offer opportunities to engage in reflection and collaboration with fellow learners.
9. Challenge teachers to meet high but attainable expectations.
10. Offer opportunities for self-evaluation (Bowgren & Sever, 2010, p. 40).

Staff development conclusions. When developing the staff development plan for the 2012-2013 school year, the Galena Park ISD Instructional Technology Director and district technology specialists developed five core staff development principles we would use as guiding objectives based on the previous research.

1. Our staff development would be focused on integration and not just the device itself.

2. Our staff development would reach the learner at their current level of technology understanding and integration and help them to improve.
3. Our staff development would be relevant to the teacher's current assignment and classroom style.
4. Our TIS would serve more as instructional coaches rather than presenters of technology information or technicians.
5. Staff development and integration practices can always be improved.

Using these core principles as our goals for our staff development goal, we created the following plan.

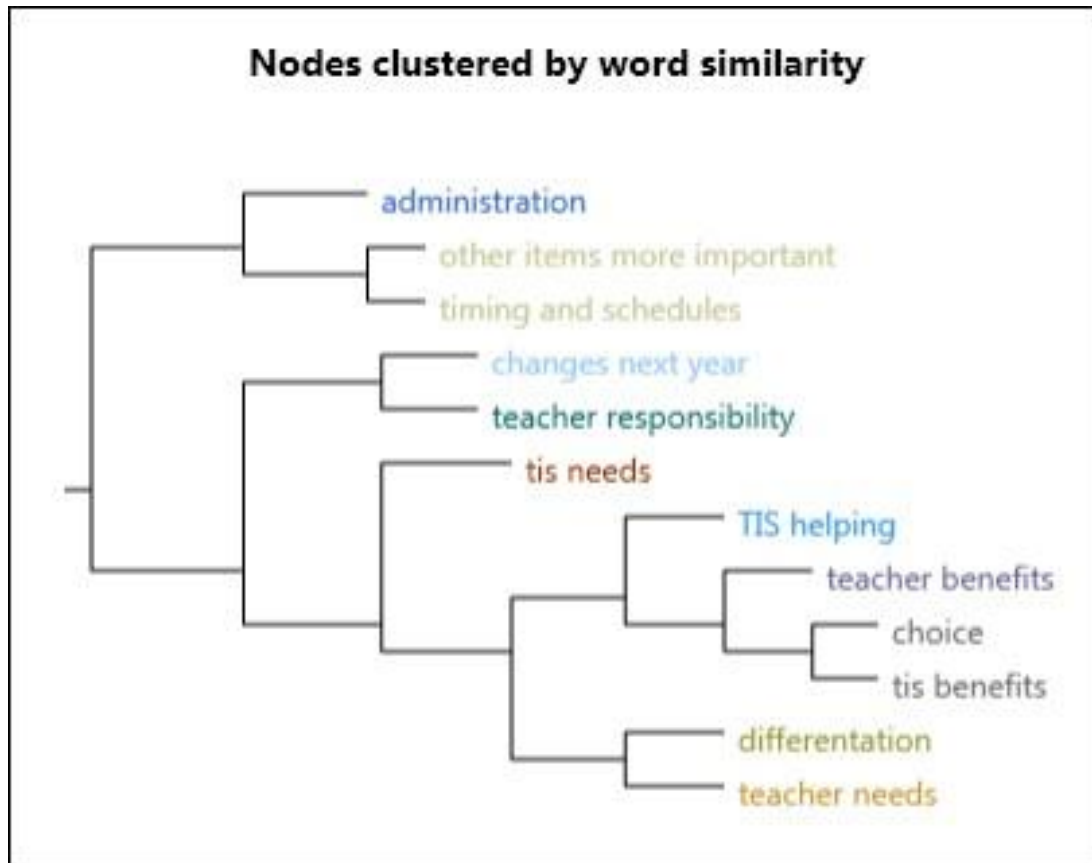
Research Methods

As part of an overarching qualitative study, (Samaras, 2011) on teacher self-efficacy and technology staff development needs, this study aimed to explore the aspect of teacher self-selected goals as a springboard for their staff-development. To do so, we created a questionnaire named the Individualized Technology Goals Survey (ITG)(see appendix A), in which teachers selected two technology goals for themselves from a compiled list of available technology tools and self-assessed their level of integration experience with these given tools using the Florida Technology Integration Matrix (TIM) (FCIT, 2011). The questionnaire results were given to the campus TIS in a blank staff development plan format (see appendix B). The TIS met with the district TIS to discuss how to assist the teachers at each level of integration for different tools and staff development activities for that campus were planned. Throughout the year, the campus TIS documented the staff development opportunities they offered to the teachers. The district TIS then met again individually with the campus TIS to discuss the progress of staff

development and offer assistance and suggestions to meet teacher needs. At the midyear point, the campus TIS posted answers to discussion board questions regarding their opinions and suggestions for this differentiation initiative (see appendix C). At the end of the year, the teachers completed another questionnaire (see appendix D). The results of the TIS discussion questions were coded using Grounded Theory for identifying themes in the data (Samaras, 2011). After the responses were coded, the N-Vivo program was used to create a word similarity correlation chart between nodes (Charmaz, 2006). The percentages of teacher responses on the end of the year survey were analyzed as well. The resulting correlations of nodes from the discussion board comments, percentages of teacher responses from the end of the year survey, and the antidotal observations from the district administration staff were studied to determine the quality of the program and improvements needed to better incorporate the core principles of staff development.

Results

The discussion board questions were used as a focus group study to determine the TIS opinions about this implementation. Based on the individual conferences, the district TIS made a list of questions to ask the TIS on the discussion board. Then the district TIS listed concerns and subjects the campus TIS had mentioned in their conferences to create a list of nodes that would be used to code and sort responses on the discussion boards. Their responses were coded with the following nodes: administration, changes next year, choice, differentiation, other items more important, teacher benefits, teacher needs, teacher responsibility, timing and schedules, TIS benefits, and TIS helping. By using N-Vivo to create a cluster analysis chart of word similarities across nodes with the Pearson coefficients (see figure 1), we could see similarities in responses across TIS.

Figure 1

This generalized data chart (along with the list of Pearson correlation coefficients) demonstrated the correlation of the nodes according to word similarity. Some interesting finds were the correlations between the administration of the campuses and the barriers listed of timing and schedules, and other items becoming more important. Another correlation that should be noted was the link between changes for next year and more teacher responsibility. It should be noted that the teacher responsibility node was not created as part of a question but was created organically from the prevalence of TIS responses in this node. The final correlation showed that the TIS needs correlated as a main heading of teacher needs and differentiation which are closely related and the TIS helping and gaining benefits from teacher choice. In short, the TIS confirmed that their needs were met when the teacher needs were met and this was related to teacher choice

and differentiation. Most TIS comments resembled the following about the differentiation : “I think it has helped the teachers a lot. They now have time to concentrate on something that they really need in their classroom. It has been considerably harder for me to manage 60 plus people on different campuses. That said it is getting easier as time goes on and all of us become more familiar with each other and the programs.” This showed a general optimism but stress that the workload was more overwhelming than just presenting workshops as before. This TIS shares similar concerns and optimism, “I think it has helped the teachers focus on what is important to them however, it has been quite a challenge to keep up with approx. 75 teachers and their individual needs. Keeping my chin up. If we continue with this I hope to be more organized.” A new TIS had no background experience to compare to but he said, “I think this plan serves the teachers where they are at. They do not feel that they are being forced to do something that they are not ready for, and their greatest needs are being met first.” These quotes are just a sampling of comments that express the plan is sound and beneficial in theory for teachers and then in turn TIS who are charged with helping them. However, their worries show that the logistics of creating individualized plans with two goals each for so many teachers can be overwhelming and therefore not effective. These results showed that as far as the TIS were concerned, our core principles were advantageous for our goal of improved staff development, but we did not have a practical method of implementation yet.

The teacher end of the year survey showed that approximately 35% of the teachers rated the help from their technology staff as excellent and no teachers that responded thought the help the technology staff gave them could be rated as below fair. About 20% of the teachers thought that they significantly improved in their goal, 61% said they somewhat improved and about 19% said they slightly improved. The number one reason why teachers thought that they did not

improve more with their technology goal was time constraints. One teacher added the comment, “Time restraints are a big problem. I am still putting together things in my mind, but have so many other demands from my job that I'm over whelmed and cannot find the time to truly put together technology based lessons.” Others stated similar problems of time because their campus did not meet AYP and this created many more meetings. In other comments from teachers about ten stated that having two goals was too much to handle such as this teacher who stated, “The goals were so many I could not get the time to get good at any- too many goals!” However, it must be noted that although all kinds of staff development opportunities were suggested to TIS to use with teachers such as modeling in the teachers’ classrooms instead of group trainings, the teachers overwhelmingly stated that group trainings were the most popular mode of instruction used by the TIS. Since these are usually done after school or during teacher conference periods, the time constraints causing teacher barriers would make sense. Another side note from teacher responses that must be considered is the fact that teachers complained about the equipment not being available. Many comments about computers being too slow or too old were noted.

In a conference with the two district TIS and the director, antidotal evidence was shared that the TIS and teachers saw the staff development more as a checklist than a continuous improvement plan. The TIS would help a teacher one time, a teacher would try a new technology once, and then continue with regular instruction techniques. Also, the beginning survey was too complicated and campus TIS felt the teachers did not self-assess correctly since the form was too long.

These results were all considered in the planning meeting for the next year. The decision was made not to abandon the fledgling differentiated staff development plan but to make necessary improvements. These improvements were then presented to the campus TIS at their

end of the year meeting. Further corrections were made from their suggestions and the plan was prepared for the 2013-2014 school year because of the core principle that integration and staff development can always improve.

Conclusion and Improvements

First, the beginning of the year teacher questionnaire (see appendix E) will be simplified. The TIM will not be used but teachers would select categories to rate their technology integration based on categories from the School Technology and Readiness (StaR) Chart (TEA, 2011) to which the teachers are already familiar. Another change will be that the TIS would not be able to email the link to the survey, but at their first of the year grade level meetings the TIS would have the teachers take the survey in the lab with the TIS so they could answer questions. Teachers will be encouraged to select just one technology goal instead of two and that goal could overlap with their department goals. For example, if the district Math department bought iPods for the teachers those teachers would be encouraged to select the iPod/iPad goal. The technology tool list to choose from will be shortened so that the TIS can adequately learn the software and implementation techniques to help teachers. Also, two separate forms will be distributed: one for each school level (elementary and secondary) to simplify the technology tool list even further. (see appendix E). In choosing one goal, the teachers will have to add dates to an intranet school calendar or their online lesson plans showing when the technology tool is being used. In this way TIS and campus administrators can see how often the teachers are working on their goal. This should continue all year instead of stopping as if finishing a task.

The changes affecting the TIS will require more training and coaching from the district TIS to the campus TIS. Technology business meetings will be changed to training and collaboration meetings with the business items being emailed more. Individual conferences will

be held at the beginning of the year with the campus TIS, district TIS, and Program Director instead of the campus staff development plans being developed together during a group meeting. The two district TIS will now be separated into two levels; elementary and secondary, to better assist the campus TIS and to be able to focus on certain campus TIS who were struggling with the implementation of the ITGs. Also, midyear individual conferences will be moved to December to prepare for the new semester instead of being done in January and February. In addition, the staff development plan forms will be simplified and placed on Google Drive so that the files do not need to be emailed to the district admin at the end of the year but progress can be constantly observed by the administration staff. The director will discuss these new changes with the principals and share the Google documents with them as well. Abiding by our core principles for quality differentiation, staff development practices and continuing to listen to the teachers and the TIS about improvements will be the way our department meets the needs of our teachers so they can be more successful in motivating and educating our students.

Educational Importance

The educational importance of this study is to create a quality differentiated technology staff development plan that helps our TIS meet the varying needs of our teachers so they will integrate technology more often and in better ways with our students. By sharing our research, we aim to help other districts and schools discover a better understanding of our plan and use our format or results to create their own plans that will be more beneficial to their teachers.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A

ITG Questionnaire

Individualized Technology Goals (ITG) Survey



Teacher Name:

(First and Last)



Please choose the grade level that best describes your current assignment.

Grades																			



Choose the subject that best describes your current assignment.

Subjects							



Select the characteristic of learning environment that best describes your classroom.

- Active
- Collaborative
- Constructive
- Authentic
- Goal-Directed



Goal 1: Select one technology tool that you will further develop and integrate more effectively into your classroom/curriculum this school year.

(All of these tools may not be available for your current assignment. Please check with your TIS for verification)

- Document Camera
- iPod/iPad (class or center sets)
- CPS Software (Clickers)
- CPS for Powerpoint

- Dance Mats
- Interactive Boards
- Interactive Tablets
- Easiteach
- Video Production Software
- Presentation Software
- Spreadsheet Software
- Word Processing Software
- Moodle



Goal 1: Select your current level of integration of this tool into your curriculum.

(These categories are explained on the Technology Integration Matrix)

- Entry
- Adoption
- Adaptation
- Infusion
- Transformation



Goal 1: Do you have any ideas about how you would like to improve your integration of this technology tool? If so, please describe these ideas for your TIS.



Goal 2: Select one technology tool that you will further develop and integrate more effectively into your classroom/curriculum this school year.

(All of these tools may not be available for your current assignment. Please check with your TIS for verification)

- Document Camera
- IPod/iPad (class or center sets)
- CPS Software (Clickers)
- CPS for Powerpoint
- Dance Mats
- Interactive Boards

- Interactive Tablets
- Easiteach
- Video Production Software
- Presentation Software
- Spreadsheet Software
- Word Processing Software
- Moodle



Goal 2: Select your current level of integration of this tool into your curriculum.

(These categories are explained on the Technology Integration Matrix)

- Entry
- Adoption
- Adaptation
- Infusion
- Transformation



Goal 2: Do you have any ideas about how you would like to improve your integration of this technology tool? If so, please describe these ideas for your TIS.



Would you like to request a conference with your TIS to further discuss your technology goals or more explanation of your plan?

- Yes, I need assistance. Please schedule a time to meet with me.
- No, I do not require assistance at this time. I have a plan for improvement of my technology goals and I understand the TIS will be helping me to improve integration in my classroom.



Final Comments: Please describe any technology experience or special help you require that may be beneficial for your TIS to know when assisting you with your goals.

APPENDIX B

Campus Staff Development Plan Template and Documentation

Doc Cameras

School: TIS Responsible:

Column1	Entry	Adoption	Adaptation	Infusion	Transformation
Active	TEACHER NAMES GO HERE				
Collaborative					
Constructive					
Authentic					
Goal Directed					

Coaching Actions

<i>Trainings</i>	<i>TIM, Conferences</i>	<i>Modeling</i>	<i>Coteaching</i>	<i>Prep and Planning</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>RECORD Staff DEV ACTIONS HERE</i>					

APPENDIX C

Midyear Discussion Board Focus Group Questions for TIS

1. What differences have you seen in quantity or quality of the assistance you have offered under this plan?
2. Have you benefitted by this implementation? If so, How? If not, Why do you think there have been no benefits?
3. What was the hardest obstacle to overcome during this implementation?
4. How has the implementation of the ITG instead of previous plans affect your coaching?
5. How has the district staff been the most helpful in this implementation? What other help would benefit you?
6. Have your teachers benefitted from this implementation? If so, How? If not, why do you think there have not been benefits?
7. What are some changes that you would like to see for next year?
8. Please post any questions or concerns you would like others to respond and assist you with. Also, please answer other posts if you can help.

APPENDIX D

End of Year Teacher Survey

Individual Technology Goals End of Year Follow-Up



1. How well were your technology staff development needs met this year?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Fair



2. In what method were the staff development opportunities for your Individualized Technology Goals (ITG) delivered?

Choose all that apply.

group trainings	<input type="checkbox"/>
modeling for you in class or lab	<input type="checkbox"/>
coteaching (working together in class or lab)	<input type="checkbox"/>
planning conference	<input type="checkbox"/>
helping to create technology integrated materials for your plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
other	<input type="checkbox"/>



If you chose other, please describe.



3. To what degree do you feel you improved on your individualized technology goals (ITG)?

- extremely improved
- somewhat improved
- slightly improved



4. What barriers hindered your improvement with your technology goals?

Choose all that apply.

other priorities for self	<input type="radio"/>
lack of self motivation	<input type="radio"/>
classroom responsibilities overwhelming	<input type="radio"/>
time restraints	<input type="radio"/>
lack of administrative support or focus on integrating technology	<input type="radio"/>
lack of support from technology staff	<input type="radio"/>
lack of proper equipment	<input type="radio"/>
other	<input type="radio"/>



If you chose other, please describe.



5. Final Comments: Please write any other compliments, concerns, or comments you have for the GPISD Instructional Technology Department.

APPENDIX E

Elementary ITG Survey for 2013-2014 School Year

Teacher Last Name: *

Teacher First Name: *

School: *

Schools listed here

Grades Taught: *(choose the grade level that best describes your current assignment)

- Early Childhood-PK
- K
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th

Choose the subjects that you teach. *Please check all that apply.

- Math
- Science
- Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Other

Select your current level of progress with technology integration in your classroom. *(This will help gauge your improvement at the end of the year)

- Early Technology- I occasionally use technology to supplement instruction, streamline management functions, and present teacher-centered lectures My students use software for skill reinforcement
- Developing Technology- direct instruction, improve productivity, model technology skills, and direct students in the use of applications for technology integration My students use technology to communicate and present information

- Advanced Technology-I use technology in teacher-led as well as some student-centered learning experiences to develop higher order thinking skills and provide opportunities for collaboration with content experts, peers, parents, and community My students evaluate information, analyze data and content
- Target Technology- My classroom is a student-centered learning environment where technology is seamlessly integrated to solve real world problems in collaboration with business, industry, and higher education Learning is transformed as my students propose, assess, and implement solutions to problems

Select one technology tool that you will further develop and integrate more effectively into your classroom instruction this school year. *(some of the tools may not be available for your current assignment. Please check with your campus TIS for assistance)

- Google apps
- Moodle
- iPod/iPad integration
- interactive board/tablet
- cps/cps ppt
- Easiteach
- Dancemat
- document camera (only video/slideshow options/capture images or annotation with Easiteach or Ladibug software)

If given a choice, which staff development action would you prefer for your technology integration learning?*

- group training
- planning meeting
- coteaching (TIS facilitates)
- modeling (TIS models)
- no preference

Do you have any ideas about how you would like to improve your integration of this technology tool? If so, please describe these ideas for your TIS.(examples:"I want to use Easiteach with my math lessons" or "I want to use ipods as a center.")

Final Comments: Do you have anything you would like to tell your TIS so they can better assist you?