

Case Study

Howard Middle School

A 21st century education success story

The Howard Middle School of Mathematics and Science (MS)², which is located on the campus of Howard University in Washington D.C, is an educational anomaly. Situated in a school district fraught with a plethora of challenges, the school has become an academic powerhouse since opening its doors in 2005. Last year it was nominated for the President's Blue Ribbon Award for Education Excellence, while faculty member Kimberly Worthy was named the 2009 D.C Teacher of the Year. The school continues to produce outstanding academic results and high graduation rates. So how does an institution in a troubled system become one of the best schools in the nation's capital?

Since 2005, the Howard Middle School has been using the Studywiz Spark, a web-based program developed by the Etech Group which, in simple terms, facilitates learning through the use of the Internet. The Studywiz Spark technology allows for all classes to be posted online, and for the students who use the system to access assignments, download homework, take tests and quizzes, and participate in discussions and chat forums. Students can also store all their work in the Studywiz eLocker storage space, which is an online hard drive. Living in a media-rich world dominated by Facebook, blogs, and Twitter, it seems only logical that the learning sector take the next step.

"This is what our kids know, this is what they breathe" says Sue White, who has been the Principal of Howard Middle School since 2007. "Kids know technology, better than most adults. If we don't use the technology to educate, then we are missing the boat."

The results seen at the Howard Middle School truly speak for themselves. Through Studywiz Spark, the students are more engaged, energetic and enthusiastic about learning. What makes Studywiz Spark an effective learning tool, aside from its portability and easy access, is its personalization- the capability to provide each student with his or her own unique academic plan that suits their own performance level, as well as caters to their specific interests. And it is this differentiation which is absolutely vital in allowing students to flourish both academically and developmentally.

"It is very time-consuming for a teacher to individualize instructions" says White. "Studywiz Spark really is a tool that assists teachers in doing that from so many aspects- from the testing, to targeting kids who may be performing below and above grade level. Effective planning takes hours, but with Studywiz Spark a teacher can upload a variety of videos, pull historical speeches, borrow images, and readily access resources from around the world. It just means any level student sitting in your classroom is served well, and that's got to make a teacher feel wonderful. It's just a beautiful, very effective supplement, or a partner if you will."

So far, Howard Middle School is the first school in the D.C area to use Studywiz Spark. And while the technology has proven vitally beneficial to both students and teachers of the school, it is the parents who are also reaping the rewards. At the start of every school year, parents are invited to come into the school and be trained to use the Studywiz Spark technology. And with Howard Middle School being a 2:1 laptop facility- two laptops for every one student (one laptop for class, one laptop for home), this has allowed the parents to become interactive, and share the class experience at home with their kids. "They are absolutely blown away by the notion that they can check their kids assignments every day, so it's no more of 'I didn't know this...'" says White. "It really brings the school and the parents together, it really helps us to bond."

When it's all said and done, it is about the kids. And Ms. White has seen first hand the difference Studywiz Spark can make in the development of an individual student. "A student came in as a beginning reader. He was a very angry child, often in altercations" recalls White. "And then we began to use the tools (Studywiz Spark), and he is now, after a year and a half, reading at a fifth grade level. While he's still behind, he is a new child- he is happy, he is excited to attend school now, he is participating in extra-curricular activities, he's one of our star students. As a result of his new confidence, he has recently been a runner-up in one of our local technical competitions. So he's a child who has turned around because of the appropriate use of the technology."

For further information on Howard Middle School visit: <http://www.howard.edu/ms2/>
 Contact: Fiona Martin, Marketing Communications, Etech Group fiona@etechgroup.com.au

For further information on Studywiz visit www.studywiz.com