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Recommended Citation

College of Education, Georgia Southern University, "College of Education News" (2020). *Education, College of - News*. 245.

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Providing for a school's needs during a time of change: the story of an instructional technology specialist

April 13, 2020



Robin Thompson, M.Ed. Instructional Technology

Georgia Southern University alumna Robin Thompson ('13) is a media specialist and technology integrator at Richmond Hill High School (RHHS), although she likes to refer to herself as a “technology instigator.”

“I try to push people out of their comfort zone with technology and have them try new things,” said Thompson.

Previously an English teacher, Thompson attended Georgia Southern to earn a [master's in instructional technology](#) to challenge herself in new ways for her students. So when a media specialist position opened at RHHS in 2013, Thompson jumped at the chance to transition into a new role. From there she worked with the information technology specialist to create a learning commons called LiNK, which offers “less books and more technology” than a typical school media center, said Thompson.

“It provides a physical space for students to come together to practice and learn with technology that may not be available to students one-on-one,” she explained.

Since the creation and opening of LiNK, Thompson said the job has brought her an immense amount of joy.

“I get to create what I do every day,” she said.

Coronavirus pandemic hits

Leading up to the announcement of the closing of Georgia public schools, Thompson knew her expertise would be needed. She and the school's instructional lead teachers Sara Goldrick and Erin Turner formed an ed tech team.

"We started refreshing people on the current technology that we have available, as we are a one-on-one school that offers Chromebooks to each student," Thompson explained. "We started trying to think ahead and opened Google Hangouts to students, as well as Zoom."

On Monday, March 16, RHHS hosted a work day for teachers to come in and have their technology concerns answered with the ed tech team as they were preparing to move their course content to fully online platforms.

Having Thompson on staff with her expertise and experience in instructional technology helped the school to anticipate needs of the teachers and students.

"We wrote down issues that we saw as potential hurdles or roadblocks and advocated for solutions for our students and teachers before the closures were made official," she said.

Now almost a month into online courses, Thompson said things are calming down some as teachers and students are settling in to the new normal.

"One of the most important things we remind our teachers is to keep it simple," said Thompson. "You can't take the bait on all the new, exciting software that is suddenly being offered for free. Now isn't the time to learn something completely new. Instead, keep it simple and do it well. Before doing something, ask yourself, 'will this benefit the student?'"

Students at RHHS complete digital coursework Monday through Thursday each week, and on Fridays, they are encouraged to complete physical activities. Teachers at the school utilize Fridays for professional learning and to receive any assistance needed with the distance-learning platforms.

"We are learning as we go," said Thompson. "Thanks to my education from Georgia Southern and my long-lasting partnership with my instructional technology professors such as Dr. Charles Hodges, I was prepared. I know it made a difference for me and my school to have the critical thinking skills and knowledge provided to me by GSU."

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