MASTERING DIGITAL SKILLS: How St. Gabriel Catholic School Prepared Students for a Tech-Driven World

Taito Learning's TypeTastic and Digital Citizenship programs empowered two K-5 educators to provide all students with effective keyboarding and digital citizenship instruction in a way that engaged students, improved skills, and fit their budget.
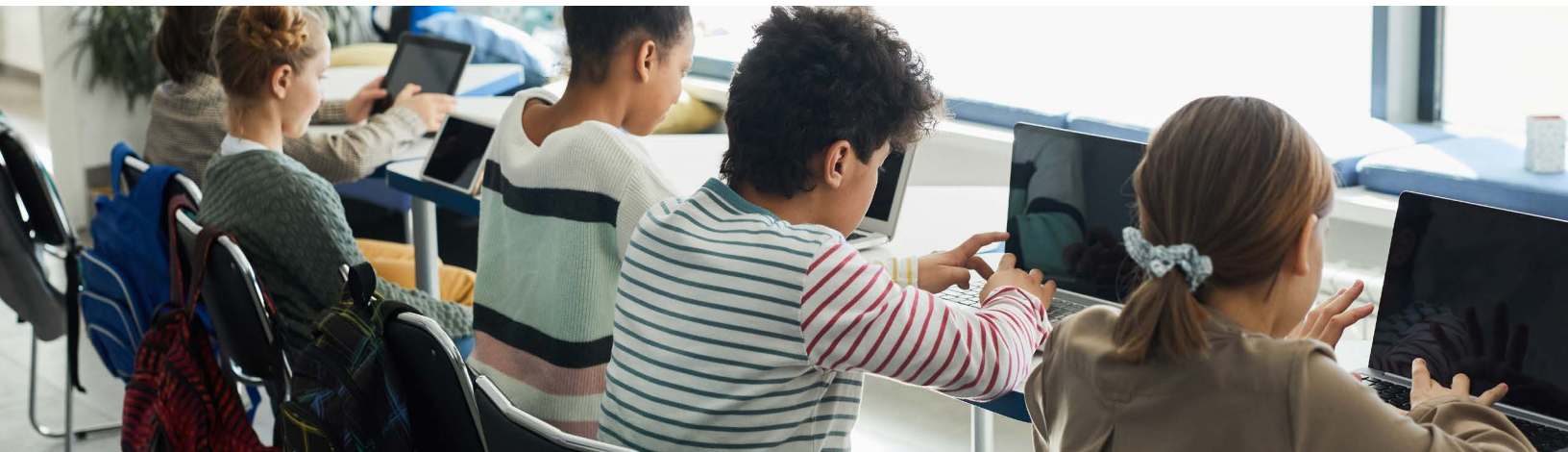
CHALLENGE

Before finding Taito Learning, St. Gabriel Technology Teacher, Mary Kay Connery, and Media Specialist, Jean Mulligan, experimented with and trialed numerous keyboarding and digital citizenship programs to find one that met the needs of their school and students. They, like so many educators, wanted to ensure students developed foundational keyboarding skills while fostering responsible digital habits in order to thrive in an increasingly tech-driven world. However, they struggled to find comprehensive, age-appropriate resources that address both skill areas. Key challenges included:

1. **Inconsistent Skill Development:** Students frequently enter classrooms with varying levels of keyboarding proficiency, making it difficult to establish a baseline for instruction.

2. **Persisting Skill Gaps:** Students lacked foundational knowledge of the internet and critical vocabulary. Despite instruction, students at the school shared passwords, used hunt-and-peck typing, and often failed to put their digital skills into practice in real contexts.

3. **Limited Instructional Time:** Teachers balance tight schedules, leaving little room for integrating keyboarding and digital citizenship into core subjects. These time constraints are particularly real for specials teachers, like Connery and Mulligan, who only see classes once a week.

4. **Alignment with Standards:** Schools need programs that meet state and national standards while being engaging and adaptable for diverse learning environments.

DEMOGRAPHICS

St. Gabriel Catholic School, Charlotte, NC

- About 630 students

- 75% White, 15% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 1% Black

- One of 20 Diocese of Charlotte Catholic Schools

- 23 classroom teachers, 22 teaching assistants, 4 interventionists, and 7 specials teachers

- 70% of educators hold Masters Degrees

- STEAM curriculum K-5

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

A range of studies continue to highlight the importance of digital skills, keyboarding, and digital citizenship instruction. This data underscores the importance of integrated keyboarding and digital citizenship programs like Taito Learning's, equipping students with essential 21st-century skills while meeting educators' needs.

DIGITAL SKILLS STATISTICS:

- Ninety-two percent of employers say digital skills are now a baseline requirement for most jobs. Yet, fewer than 25% of educators report confidence in their students' preparedness to meet these demands (New Skills Coalition).
- One in three Americans are on track to be left behind in the 21st century economy due to digital illiteracy (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- Workers that qualify for jobs that require even one digital skill can earn an average of 23 percent more than in a job requiring no digital skills. Moving from a job requiring no digital skills to one requiring at least three can increase pay by an average of 45 percent (New Skills Coalition).

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP STATISTICS:

- Fifty-nine percent of teens have been approached by strangers online, making privacy management crucial to student safety (Pew Research Center).
- Cyberbullying affects one in three teens, and schools with anti-cyberbullying education see a 20% reduction in incidents (CDC).
- Eighty-six percent of digital citizens admit to having fallen victim to fake news (Ipsos).
- Research from Stanford University found that 80% of middle school students were unable to distinguish between sponsored content and factual news stories, highlighting the need for digital literacy education (Stanford University).
- Over half of younger children aged 8-12 who saw or experienced something online that bothered them told a parent or trusted adult, but 1 in 3 chose to keep it to themselves (CyberSafeKids).

TARGET OUTCOMES

1. Adoption of age-appropriate keyboarding and digital citizenship curricula that meets the needs of K-5 students.

2. Increased teacher confidence in addressing digital citizenship topics with K-5 students.

3. Increased student understanding and awareness of the importance of correct keyboarding skills and healthy digital habits.

4. Increased student engagement in the development of keyboarding and digital citizenship skills.

IMPLEMENTATION

The partnership between St. Gabriel and Taito Learning began in 2018. Mary Kay Connery and Jean Mulligan were looking for a program that could equip students with essential keyboarding skills and digital citizenship habits while fitting into the school's tight budget. Having trialed numerous programs, Connery and Mulligan continued their search for a top-quality curriculum to streamline instruction and allow for a comprehensive scope of learning that progressively builds across grade levels. Without a strong keyboarding curriculum, they knew challenges would persist.

> "We were fighting an uphill battle with the kids beyond school doors because of touch screens and typing with their fingers on a screen. You will only be able to type so fast if you type on a screen."
>
> – Mary Kay Connery, Technology Teacher

Further, the specialists knew that their digital instruction had far-reaching implications for young students.

> "Almost everything has gone to a digital platform – textbooks, writing programs – so it's essential that the kids know how to use the keyboard starting in Kindergarten through fifth grade."
>
> – Jean Mulligan, Media Specialist

After finding TypeTastic, Connery and Mulligan quickly knew it was the keyboarding program for them.

> "When I got here we used [other programs], but they seemed very expensive for what you were getting. We weren't getting our value. I just happened to stumble across the free version of TypeTastic and fell in love with it right there. Budget is always a concern, and the value is there with TypeTastic."
>
> – Mary Kay Connery, Technology Teacher

As Connery and Mulligan oriented themselves and their students to TypeTastic and the Taito Learning team, they were impressed by the program's seamless adoption and the brand's top-quality customer service. They were pleased with the program's integration with Clever, calling implementation "super smooth." Connery shared, "Taito customer service is always super helpful. They take specialized requests, are always responsive, it's very easy to get in touch with them, and there is always a human representative on the phone."

> "There's rarely anything we really need to call about, but when we do, we get the support we need when we need it."
>
> – Mary Kay Connery, Technology Teacher

Once onboarded, students dove in and their skill development wasn't far behind.

> "TypeTastic spirals and moves through the grades. There's more meat to the lessons, and it's customizable so kids can continue to practice. This isn't just a two-minute home-row lesson—it's comprehensive and built for long-term growth."
>
> – Mary Kay Connery, Technology Teacher

The two were particularly excited about the program's impact on their youngest students. In the past, students in grades that are just learning their letters and how to spell would struggle significantly at the keyboard. Connery shared, "The big thing I have seen with TypeTastic specifically is with the youngest students using the Keyboard Builder part of the program. They're just learning the alphabet and they want the letters to be in alphabetical order on their keyboard, but they're not! And then, wait a second, it doesn't even have lowercase letters. The [Keyboard Builder] game with the chunking on the keyboard is so helpful and I can see a huge difference when they're learning to type." Mulligan noted, "I can see their eyes looking at the chunks to ensure they know where to find the keys."

Connery remembered witnessing primary students demonstrating keyboarding proficiency, but also noticed impacts in other academic areas.

> "When they got that proficiency and can get that thought out quicker than it takes to speak it or write it, it's monumental. By second grade, they can type sentences with more accuracy than if they were handwriting them. That really helps with efficiency, speed, and continuity, which is critical for them when they have to express a thought."
>
> – Jean Mulligan, Media Specialist

After experiencing success with TypeTastic, the two were thrilled when the Taito Learning team reached out to see if they wanted to try the K-5 Digital Citizenship curriculum.

> "We were doing a conga line when we found out [Taito Learning] does Digital Citizenship! We were so excited and anxious to see it and learn it."
>
> – Jean Mulligan, Media Specialist

For over ten years, Connery and Mulligan taught digital citizenship lessons to their students, creating materials in-house and pulling what they could find from external sources. Ultimately though, they wanted a digital citizenship curriculum that would build cohesively over grade levels and meet each student where they were. Connery reflected, "The resources we had were more discussion-based, and then students would try to one-up each other with stories about what has happened in various [digital] situations. This would zap a lot of time from our lessons. Now, they're going through [Taito Learning's Digital Citizenship] at their own pace. I like the automatic feedback that meets each student where they are – if they make a mistake, it moves them back to keep working on it and if they get it right, they move on."

RESULTS

Since implementing TypeTastic and the Digital Citizenship curriculum, St. Gabriel has seen impactful benefits and the programs have earned high praise from both the school's educators and students.

1. **Improved Keyboarding Proficiency:** Students demonstrated a marked increase in average typing speed and accuracy. Teachers noted that these gains translated to better performance in online assessments and day-to-day digital tasks.

2. **Increased Digital Awareness:** Students developed a stronger understanding of online safety, ethical behavior, and managing their digital footprints. They began demonstrating digital citizenship habits outside of the classroom setting and carried into other subjects and personal tech time.

3. **Enhanced Student Engagement:** The interactive and gamified format of Taito's programs is designed to resonate with students and keep them motivated. Interactive keyboarding exercises and relatable digital citizenship scenarios keep learners engaged and on track. The differentiated experience designed to target the unique needs and intrigues of emergent learners in grades K–2 as well as the more mature students in grades 3–5 heightened interest for all grade levels. Educators reported a significant uptick in participation and enthusiasm during lessons.

4. **Curriculum Alignment:** The programs aligned with school and common standards, making them a natural complement to existing educational materials. Educators seamlessly tie lessons in keyboarding and digital citizenship to broader academic and social-emotional learning objectives.

The success of Taito Learning's programs at St. Gabriel went beyond skill improvement. Connery and Mulligan observed a shift in students' overall attitudes toward typing and technology use.

Connery noted that with TypeTastic, "We don't get negative feedback, pushback, or anxiety from kids about this program. When we shift gears and move away from TypeTastic to tools like Google Docs or Book Creator, where they'll actually be using typing skills, we don't see any stress with the kids. They're just like, 'Oh, okay, we're doing this now.' They're ready and capable."

The digital citizenship curriculum has also made a lasting impression. Teachers outside of technology and media instruction are beginning to see the value of integrating digital citizenship into their classrooms.

> "Digital citizenship is a requirement for every teacher, but often their awareness of the subject is almost non-existent. With Taito's curriculum, we're seeing how easily it can benefit not just tech teachers and media specialists but also classroom teachers who want to embed these lessons into their own teaching."
> – Jean Mulligan, Media Specialist

When asked what advice they might give to someone considering Taito Learning's solutions, Connery simply said, "Look at what you're getting for your money!" The partnership between the St. Gabriel and Taito Learning teams remains in full-swing. By fostering engagement, improving skill mastery, and reducing anxiety around digital tasks, Taito Learning's programs have laid a strong foundation for students to succeed in a digital-first world.

ABOUT TAITO LEARNING

Taito Learning is committed to equipping students with the essential digital skills they need to thrive in the 21st century. Through programs like TypeTastic and the K–5 Digital Citizenship curriculum, Taito Learning provides schools with comprehensive, engaging, and standards-aligned resources that empower students and support educators. Known for their exceptional customer service and seamless integration, Taito Learning partners with schools to deliver impactful solutions that prepare learners for a tech-driven future. Visit www.taitolearning.com to learn more.

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