



New Tech Network

## **Richfield Public School Academy: Project-Based Learning and Classroom Culture**

*New Tech Network (NTN) is a national nonprofit organization and a leading design partner for comprehensive K-12 school change. The New Tech model combines pervasive project-based learning, an engaging school-wide culture and the real-world use of technology tools and resources.*

*Richfield Public School Academy (PSA) teacher Diana Pochmara teaches math at the Flint, Michigan middle school and shares how her experience in a PBL (project-based learning) classroom has shifted her experience as a teacher.*

**On the future for students...** Pochmara shares that teaching in a PBL classroom has forced her to think about how the learning in the classroom will be applicable to life after school for her students. "We need to answer the question 'When will we ever use this?' each and every day."

**On why PBL is right for middle school students...** "When students experience PBL, they are forced to struggle productively. Too often we prepare students for a calculated school experience, asking them to memorize information and regurgitate it on an assessment. Teaching students to persevere and ask questions prepares them for success."

Pochmara cites their school-wide project (grades 6-8), *The Cold Cats and Hot Dogs Project*, as an example of successfully integrating PBL across grade levels and core subject areas. The project was adapted from an NTN project and asked students, "How can we design a structure that provides animals a safe place to rest during dangerous weather?"

Students created the blueprint, made a marketing presentation and jingle in English and Spanish, and built the structures. Project teams included a mix of grade levels and students built understanding in each of their core classes: math, science, humanities, music, and art.

"The project was the focal point in all classes," explains Pochmara. "This not only brought everyone together, but also showed the students that in order to meet our common goal, every facet of school was needed."

Ramyra Turner, 8th grade student, also discusses the benefits of learning in a PBL classroom and *The Cold Cats and Hot Dogs Project*.

"*The Cold Cats and Hot Dogs Project* was my favorite project because we were able to give back to our community. PBL projects give me the opportunity to continue learning how to work with others. I like to hear what other people would do in different situations. Just doing what you want to do isn't fair to your teammates. You have to hear them out and work as a family because maybe their idea is better or more successful," says Turner.

"I love the teachers here! They challenge and prepare us for the future," explains Turner. "They understand us, they take time out of their day to do the most amazing things for us. Even if it is a little thing, it's really big to me."