How Project Pals Helped Students Excel with PBL at Mack Middle School in Vegas

INTRODUCTION

Heather Castaneda-Ponce, a social studies teacher at Mack Middle School, approached Project Pals about a pilot program in 2018 after hearing about the platform from her administrator. Heather, who has a Master’s in Educational Technology, already practiced project-based learning (PBL) in her classroom and saw the potential of Project Pals as a management tool.

Following the successful pilot in Heather’s classroom, Mack Middle adopted Project Pals school-wide in 2021.

PBL CHALLENGES

A common criticism of group projects is a lack of accountability; it’s difficult to grade each student accurately without knowing their exact contributions.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for teachers, like keeping students engaged and preventing learning loss during distance learning.

OUR SOLUTIONS

Advanced Analytics Show Student Contributions
Detailed data of each individual student’s contributions can be seen in the project workspace or under statistics.

Synchronous Workspace Updates in Real-Time
Students can collaborate in the workspace from most devices, supporting remote, hybrid, and in-class learning.

Engaging Interface and Pedagogy
Research supports PBL as a level for student motivation and learning outcomes, and our users consistently report increased participation and engagement.

Mack Middle at a Glance
School Statistics:

- Located in Las Vegas, NV
- 1,255 Students
- 100% Free and Reduced Lunch (low-income)
- 23% English Language Learners (ELLs)
- 13% Special Education
- Part of Clark County School District, the 5th largest district in the US serving 327,000 students

“One of the things that’s made Project Pals essential is the analytics. Before, I could guess what happened during group work or who wasn’t holding up their side of a project. Usually, I was right on, but this allows me to quickly see evidence of what I’m assuming is happening. So from a teacher’s point of view, I absolutely love the real-time data.”

Heather Castaneda-Ponce
Social Studies Teacher
Adopted Project Pals in 2018
Mack Middle School-wide Statistics Since 2018:

- Teachers: 44
- Students: 1,703
- Projects: 6,839
- Actions: 617,319
- Collaborations: 262,561

**SAMPLE PROJECT**

**Personal Budget**

Heather’s students explore future colleges and careers, and balance a budget with living expenses like food, rent, and car payments.

“...The students are always amazed at how much it costs to be an adult. I have several kids go home and thank their parents for what they do for them.”

**SAMPLE PROJECT**

**Design the City of Your Dreams**

Students at Mack Middle imagine, research, plan, and design the city of their dreams.

Students create and share their city’s charter, governance structure, services outline, maps, transportation plan, and materials for promoting tourism and business development in a final proposal presentation.

**SAMPLE ANALYTICS**

**Design the City of Your Dreams**

Analytics in the Project Menu for the sample class-wide project Design the City of Your Dreams.

Students complete actions by creating or editing content and earn collaborations when working on elements added by others.

**CONCLUSION**

Students in Heather’s classroom—and later across Mack Middle School—have excelled with project-based learning on Project Pals. Their stellar projects and strong engagement numbers are a testament to the power of PBL for increasing student motivation and improving educational equity in low-income settings.

Project Pals helps schools succeed by removing common PBL challenges like organization & management.

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