

FUTURE READY CASE STUDY #1



Bristol,
Rhode Island



Bristol Warren
School District



3,358
Students



6
Schools



Suburban

Defining and Refining a Vision for Digital Learning Classrooms

Bristol Warren Regional School District serves students from two suburban towns—Bristol and Warren—in Rhode Island. The district includes students in grades Prekindergarten through 12. The student population is predominantly White (88%), with about 5% Hispanic and 3% of two or more races. About 36% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 2% are classified as English language learners.¹

Superintendent Mario Andrade began serving the district as assistant superintendent when the district invested in several technology devices for classrooms, including laptop and desktop computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards. However, the district did not have a plan or vision for how technology could transform teaching and learning. Through the use of the [Future Ready Schools \(FRS\) resources](#), the district began conversations around the use of technology and a vision of how classrooms can support the transition to digital learning. With a focus on personalized learning for students and a digital learning team (DLT) that implemented research cycles to experiment with technology use, the district was able to refine its vision and facilitate the emphasis on digital learning in its classrooms.

FUTURE READY FOCUS AREA

- Collaborative Leadership
- Personalized Student Learning
- Robust Infrastructure
- Personalized Professional Learning

¹ Source of district statistics is the 2014–15 Common Core of Data, the most recent year available at time of publication.

Transition to Digital Learning

One of the first steps Bristol Warren took to support personalized student learning was establishing an operational definition for the district of what “personalization” means for its teachers and students. In the process of developing this definition, the district used multiple resources, including Future Ready materials and articles and blog posts from the Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools. In summer 2016, the district transitioned to G Suite for Education to support its vision of a Future Ready learning environment. To further this effort, the district built upon its prior work around defining assessment literacy using G Suite to provide students with descriptive feedback. The program is based on learning targets and models of strong and weak work. These technologies allow families to provide and review feedback on students. They also enable students to monitor their progress in class and make their thinking visible.

Furthermore, with the shift to more personalized student learning, the district modified how it conducted evaluations of impact through action research. It first altered the work of its DLT, which was established in 2015 and consisted of 33 teachers from six schools in the district. The teachers typically worked in smaller teams of three or four to develop an action research project focused on personalized learning within cycles that were four to six weeks long. As a result of Future Ready work, the district modified its templates for action research, asking teachers to identify a particular skill set or competency that they wanted the students to develop. Next, the teachers were asked to align that goal to a teaching strategy and appropriate technology tool. In September 2016, the DLT began to develop action research cycles focused on the impact of digital learning strategies on student learning.

Using the data from these action research cycles, Bristol Warren identified best practices for effectively using technology to amplify student voice and make thinking visible. Today, these practices drive the types of professional development opportunities offered across the district. Moreover, the district is using action research cycle data to inform software and hardware purchasing decisions. For example, action research cycle data led the district to move away from content databases toward technologies based on student creations, collaboration, and student voice. In addition, action research projects in Grades K–2 demonstrated that tablets were effective tools for the type of teaching and learning taking place in those grade levels. In turn, the district is now investing in tablets for K–2 students.

For the district to focus on Future Ready as a priority, Superintendent Andrade reinforced the Future Ready vision at several district, administration, and community meetings. The district references Future Ready work at community events and uses the Future Ready symbol on almost all communications to demonstrate that it has adopted a Future Ready mindset. The development of operational definitions aided Bristol Warren in focusing on Future Ready as a priority. Superintendent Andrade shared that resources from FRS and the Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools “help[ed] confirm or challenge [district] thinking.” According to Superintendent Andrade, as district staff developed operational definitions and discussed their perspectives, they “were empowered and had greater ownership and understanding of [their] vision.” The use of social media supported buy-in for the Future Ready work, as well. Teachers in the district use Twitter to demonstrate their work in the classroom and reference the specific Future Ready gears that are being developed.

Use of FRS Resources

The FRS resources provided a solid foundation for Bristol Warren's transition to digital learning. The district signed the Future Ready Pledge after learning about the initiative at the 2015 Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) Innovation Powered by Technology Conference, and it assembled a 20-member Future Ready leadership team that fall, bringing together teachers, principals, district-level administrators, school committee members, and parent representatives. The team collaboratively completed the District Leadership Self-Assessment for the Future Ready Framework early the following year. Throughout the next two months, Bristol Warren identified stakeholder groups, such as parent groups and community organizations, to collaborate in completing the assessment. Superintendent Andrade stated that taking the assessment helped him to think through the issues methodically and encouraged the district to take a systems approach to incorporating technology in its schools. Through this approach, Superintendent Andrade aimed for district staff to understand how each of the Future Ready Gears are connected to one another. Superintendent Andrade felt that, had the district addressed each Gear separately, its approach to digital learning transformation would have been fragmented and far less effective.

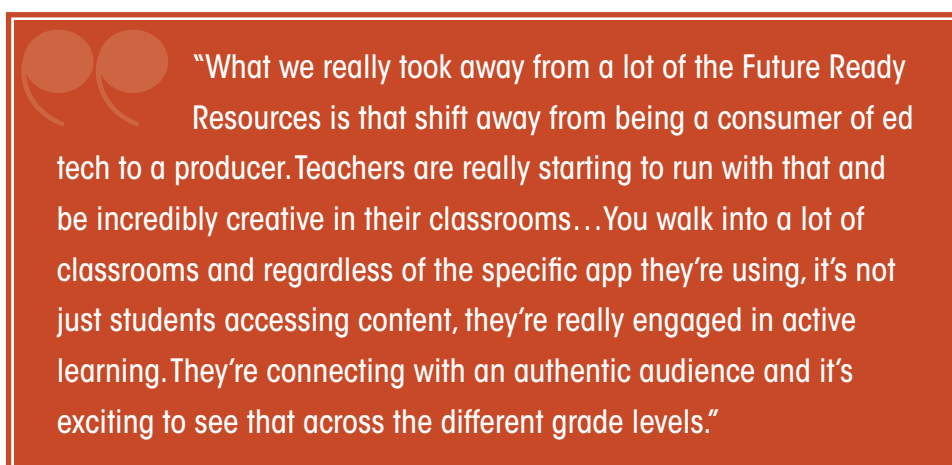
The district analyzed the gaps along each Gear using data from the assessments. The Future Ready leadership team also began developing a Future Ready plan consisting of four focus areas: personalized student learning, professional development, infrastructure, and community partnerships. Superintendent Andrade reported that district staff recognized that they could not fully address each Future Ready Gear. Therefore, they selected the four focus areas that most closely aligned with the district's strategic plan and would enable them to "incorporate and maximize the principles or concepts associated with all of the Future Ready Gears." The Future Ready plan was created as a "living document," with constant core beliefs and areas of flexibility that could take technical changes into account. For example, with rapid accelerations in technology, it might be difficult to know which tools the district may be using in five years. "However," shared Superintendent Andrade, "we can always articulate our expectations around great teaching and learning." The district developed SMART goals (i.e., goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound) for each of the action steps, with specific timelines for implementation and plans for progress monitoring throughout the process and adjusting as needed.

Results

Superintendent Andrade reported that as teachers who were involved in the Future Ready process experienced success in their work, the district leveraged social media to broadcast the work of innovative teachers and the DLT. Superintendent Andrade saw that this social media work helped create buy-in for Future Ready among more reluctant teachers. The district observed greater community and family buy-in due to social media posts about students' active engagement in classrooms. Consequently, Superintendent Andrade and his team of technology specialists, administrators, and teachers are posting research articles on effective instruction and assessment on social media. As a result of the Future Ready work, the district has observed a greater grassroots initiative for becoming involved in the district's assessment literacy work and increased use of the FRS resources.

Superintendent Andrade reported that social media enabled the district to expand its external networks, forming new connections to teachers in California and Washington. Educational technology companies such as Flipgrid and Seesaw have recognized Bristol Warren teachers as “teacher ambassadors” who use social media to share how they are applying the technologies or what professional learning opportunities they have found helpful. Superintendent Andrade also noted that the district’s Future Ready mindset and work have contributed to its acceptance into the Digital Promise League of Innovative Schools.

Finally, district leaders have seen increased student engagement as a result of the Future Ready initiative. Superintendent Andrade explained that “They’re [students] actively involved with choices in their classroom of what they are creating and how to demonstrate their knowledge and skills at their grade level. A quick win. Anytime you can walk into a classroom, you see kids smiling and teachers facilitating, . . . conversations are going on. I’ll never take away that kind of quick win.”



“What we really took away from a lot of the Future Ready Resources is that shift away from being a consumer of ed tech to a producer. Teachers are really starting to run with that and be incredibly creative in their classrooms. . . You walk into a lot of classrooms and regardless of the specific app they’re using, it’s not just students accessing content, they’re really engaged in active learning. They’re connecting with an authentic audience and it’s exciting to see that across the different grade levels.”

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Superintendent Andrade found that making the district’s Future Ready plan a living document and identifying focus areas that would have the most impact facilitated the plan’s implementation. For other districts using FRS resources and applying learning from those resources, Superintendent Andrade recommends adopting a systems approach to implementing a Future Ready plan. Superintendent Andrade shared that the district’s systems approach is connected to a collective understanding that the gears are dependent on and related to one another. This understanding, in turn, produces a cohesive digital learning transformation.

In terms of the implementation of a Future Ready plan, the district recommends that district staff identify the ways they can support principals and teachers in executing the plan’s action items. During the implementation of their plan, Bristol Warren’s staff arranged meetings with school leadership teams on how they can integrate Future Ready actions with some of their current plans and initiatives. Superintendent Andrade also recommends that district staff be clear on their expectations for teachers, principals, and students in moving the Future Ready vision forward, which can help achieve coherence in the implementation of Future Ready work.

About This Case Study

This is one of nine case studies that examine and document districts' uses, applications, and perceptions of the Future Ready Schools (FRS) professional learning resources in their efforts to become Future Ready. The resources of interest include the Future Ready District Pledge, the Future Ready Interactive Planning Dashboard (and District Leadership Self-Assessment), and the Future Ready Summits. The FRS resources are built on a Future Ready Framework with a set of seven Gears to support a comprehensive transition to digital learning. Visit <http://futureready.org/> for more information on Future Ready Schools and the resources discussed in the case studies.

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