

FUTURE READY CASE STUDY #5



Mundelein,
Illinois



Fremont
School District #79



2,193
Students



3
Schools



Rural

Facilitating Effective Technology Use Through Innovative Spaces

Fremont School District 79 is located in northeastern Illinois and spans seven municipalities. The district enrolls students in grades Prekindergarten through 8. The student population is predominantly White (70%), with approximately 13% Hispanic and 10% Asian or Pacific Islander. Approximately 8% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 10% of students are classified as English language learners.¹

Prior to its use of the [Future Ready Schools \(FRS\) resources](#), according to Superintendent Jill Gildea, the district had strategies in place to gradually enhance its technology infrastructure, and it had developed communication plans, financial resources, and community support to move toward a dynamic digital learning environment. The district added a focus on student-centered learning to its plan following its use of the FRS resources, employing strategies such as student-developed learning profiles and student-led conferences. A major undertaking in the move toward student-centered learning involved the effective use of technology in innovative spaces, including converting a basement to a “next-generation classroom,” transforming a library into an active media center, and creating a makerspace in a former professional development room, where students gather to collaborate on projects and share ideas. These innovative, active spaces, according to Superintendent Gildea, have increased student engagement and attendance and have inspired community members and practitioners visiting the schools.

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

The district's two-year transition plan to become an active learning ecosystem involved major infrastructure changes and creative redesigns of space. When Fremont Intermediate School was constructed in 2007, for example, the building included an unfinished basement level that was used for storage. With developer-donated funds that accompanied the construction of new subdivisions, the district decided to transform the basement into a next-generation classroom. The district added flexible furniture and installed whiteboard partitions, monitors, and projectors in the classroom. The basement level also contains a moveable stage and areas for groups to meet. Teachers and students can reserve space in the classroom on an as-needed basis, and the room is frequently used by the school community. Typical uses for students include project-based learning activities, such as making and preparing presentations, completing group assignments, and participating in study groups. Teachers use the space for partner- or team-based work.

The district also transformed the outdated library of Fremont Middle School, which was built in 1957. As it implemented a contemporary curricula involving authentic, problem-based learning and projects, the district recognized a need for specialized spaces for students to complete media-enhanced projects. The resulting "media center for tomorrow" enhanced students' opportunities to work with media and greatly increased their use of the library. Whereas few students used the library prior to the renovation, now more than 100 students stay in the media center after school every day, prompting Fremont Middle School to add late bus routes to accommodate these students.

The popularity of the media center led the school's seventh-grade teachers to develop project-based learning units to provide students with "some voice and choice in their learning environment." During one project, students collaboratively designed the ideal classroom. They researched different elements of building infrastructure, such as flooring and materials costs, and consulted with architects, the principal, Superintendent Gildea, and the surrounding community's mayor. The seventh-grade students ultimately created two classroom designs, developing prototypes and design improvements along the way.

In tandem with the development of the media center, the librarian at one of the district's elementary schools created a makerspace. Different lessons and stations can be used in the makerspace, which allows students to work on a wide range of projects, such as building towers and Lego walls, and encourages the growth of hands-on learning in the school. In fact, the makerspace has become so popular that the school started a before- and after-school maker club to facilitate students' use of the space.

Use of FRS Resources

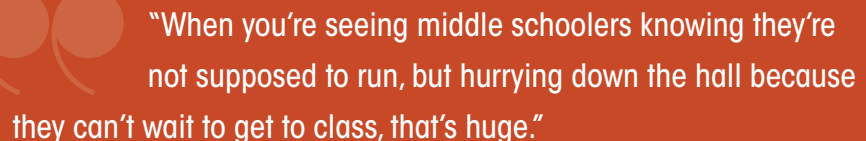
Superintendent Gildea noted that the FRS resources had a substantial influence on the district's work. For example, they provided a general framework for district technology integration. The district's commitment to the Future Ready Pledge led its leaders to think deeply about key components of a school of the future, such as the effective use of infrastructure, personalized learning, curriculum

development, and individualized professional learning for teachers. The pledge and the FRS suite of resources, in turn, provided the district with a common vocabulary that leaders could use to define each component.

The district's use of FRS resources, moreover, motivated it to implement more student-centered learning. As a result of the Future Ready Pledge and District Leadership Self-Assessment process, the district recognized that the Future Ready Framework places student learning at the center of the Framework, prompting the district to more sharply concentrate its efforts in this area. Superintendent Gildea reported that the District Leadership Self-Assessment and its accompanying dashboard report provided critical guidance regarding the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Gear that helped staff to maintain and strengthen its essential focus on learners through curriculum adjustments as well as assessment implementation.

Results

The district has generally experienced positive outcomes as a result of its Future Ready initiative. For example, suspensions have declined across Fremont's intermediate and middle grades. Superintendent Gildea attributes this outcome to increased student engagement and motivation to participate in project-based learning activities. For the first time in its history, in fact, Fremont's attendance rate placed it among the top 10 districts to be recognized during the annual Lake County, Illinois, attendance week event. In addition, parent and community support for the Future Ready work has grown. The district has engaged parents on social media to communicate its work. The district also holds "micro-events," during which visitors can see Future Ready work being completed in classrooms, and has hosted more than 150 visitors from across the United States, including district leaders, instructional teams, parents, and product vendors. Finally, the Fremont school board is interested in scaling the Future Ready initiative, and the district has developed a plan and an outline to promote personalized learning as a districtwide instructional model during the next three years. New changes include (a) adapting the middle school schedule to increase mathematics instructional time and provide students with more flexibility in their daily learning environments, and (b) implementing a three-year rollout of scheduled professional learning related to instructional strategies and methods to support personalized learning.



"When you're seeing middle schoolers knowing they're not supposed to run, but hurrying down the hall because they can't wait to get to class, that's huge."

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The FRS resources have been effectively used by Fremont School District as a central component of its strategy for providing a progressively more personalized student experience. For other districts using resources, Superintendent Gildea emphasizes that the Future Ready Framework and District Leadership Self-Assessment were valuable tools, and she recommends that districts commit adequate time to thoughtfully apply them. For districts considering creating more innovative learning spaces, she recommends a process of (a) understanding the realm of possibilities, such as visiting other schools and cutting-edge workplaces and reading about the effective use of learning space; (b) assessing the current state of learning environments; and (c) identifying ideal future learning environments for students. Superintendent Gildea also found the Future Ready Summits to be powerful and useful means of scaling the initiative and noted that they provided Fremont School District with exposure to other districts' perspectives, stories, and successes.

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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