



FUTURE READY CASE STUDY #6



Stephenville,
Texas



Stephenville Independent
School District



3,614
Students



6
Schools



Rural

Increasing a District's Comfort With Technology Through a Pragmatic Framework and Professional Learning

Stephenville Independent School District serves a rural township in central Texas between Fort Worth and Abilene. The district enrolls students in grades Prekindergarten through 12. The student population is predominantly White (68%), with about 26% Hispanic. Nearly half (46%) of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 8% are classified as English language learners.¹

When Matt Underwood came to Stephenville to serve as Superintendent, his personal focus on Future Ready practices aligned well with the interests of the school board and with the district's strategic direction. Teachers were eager for the new technology, as demonstrated by their responses to focus groups and surveys. However, teacher survey data also demonstrated to district staff that a gap existed between the greater district level of readiness to use technology and the emerging readiness levels of school staff. Therefore, Superintendent Underwood and his district leaders initiated a concerted effort to improve technology infrastructure and professional learning to increase staff technological comfort and knowledge across Stephenville's individual schools. Superintendent Underwood adopted a pragmatic approach to technology implementation that used the [Future Ready Schools \(FRS\) resources](#) as a foundation for the initiative while implementing strategic tools and resources to bridge the gap between where the district was in its technology integration and where it would need to go in order to fulfill a Future Ready vision.

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

As an initial step in its technology transition, the district began with basic changes, such as adopting Gmail and Google Drive as e-mail and file-sharing platforms for all teachers, staff, and students. Once district and school staff realized the convenience of using those technology tools, the district began using a Google Classroom environment to store resources, data, tools, and planning materials, and allocated time for self-reflection, team collaboration, and conversations around data use through the program. According to Superintendent Underwood, Stephenville teachers working with the district's upgraded digital resources found the new tools easy to learn and useful, and teachers' ongoing use increased their comfort with technology in general. Underwood noted that these early and gradual interactions with upgraded digital platforms helped the district continue Future Ready work by creating a foundation of technology use upon which to build.

The district has strengthened this foundation through ongoing professional development. For example, Stephenville is in the early stages of implementing the use of microcredentials. The district began an internal badging program for teachers to develop experience with tools such as G Suite for Education and Apple Teacher. District staff are currently finalizing a plan with Digital Promise to implement a year-long pilot for using microcredentials at Stephenville High School. The pilot provides personalized professional learning for teachers, who identify and employ pedagogical best practices that align with their professional goals. The teachers also collect evidence of their mastery of those practices through photos, videos, and written reflections. This dual exposure to personalized learning and to alternative assessment of learning (rather than seat-time or memorization) will also "help teachers understand alternative assessments and increase confidence" as the district shifts toward greater personalized student learning.

Stephenville also recognized a need for learning across districts and perceived its rural location as an opportunity to interact with similarly rural neighboring school districts. Willing to take the lead, Stephenville created and held the iChampion Summit, a two-day event intended to provide teachers with practical examples of how technology can be implemented in everyday classrooms. The conference was well attended, and Stephenville is taking steps to increase attendance at future conferences. For example, the district added a third day to its 2017 summit and facilitated opportunities for attending teachers to earn technology certifications such as Certified Google Educator. In addition, Stephenville partnered with a local university, Tarleton State University, for a grant, which they employed to expand attendance, and featured keynote speakers. The district sees considerable promise in the iChampion Summit as a means of promoting professional learning in the region.

Use of FRS Resources

The district leadership team began Stephenville's Future Ready implementation by working with the Digital Promise Leadership Coaching program, which connected the district to Digital Promise staff and to superintendents, technology directors, and instructional technology staff who have successfully used technology in schools.

The district's Digital Promise coaches referred Stephenville to the FRS resources and recommended that the district send a leadership team to attend a Future Ready Summit. Prior to attending the Summit, the district's leadership team completed the District Leadership Self-Assessment.

The FRS resources and, specifically, the Future Ready Framework, served as a foundation for the district's approach to Future Ready implementation. Coming into the district, Superintendent Underwood knew there would be a focus on Future Ready, but he wanted to ensure that the approach was grounded in research and sound practice. The Framework provided that strong base for the transition to digital learning in the district. Other district leadership noted that the use of the FRS resources increased the intentionality of implementation of digital learning efforts, such as teachers' use of digital platforms, ensuring that the work was focused and purposeful. The District Leadership Self-Assessment required leaders to examine the implementation of each gear within the Framework individually and then to consider how individual gears within the Framework work together. This also brought teams together within the district to collaborate on technology integration. For example, the technology department, teachers, and campuses are now actively working together to make long-term decisions on funding sources for technology integration. They vet and evaluate integration platforms (i.e., software programs and applications) through targeted pilots to assess the extent to which the products can meet district needs from leadership down to the student level. One leader explained that "looking at it through these collaborative lenses allows us to be smarter with funding sources" and ensures that funding is being used for the most useful purposes.

Results

Increases in teachers' comfort in and use of technology has resulted in many changes in instructional approaches. Superintendent Underwood has observed technologically innovative work from teachers, especially those in science classes, as well as more traditional teachers support and implement technologically innovative work. For example, fifth-grade science teachers promoted their students' transition from using traditional, paper-based notebooks for notetaking to using e-books on iPads to create electronic publications with their own videos, images, and screencasts. In high school physics classes, students create digital reports (with student-captured photos and videos of laboratory experiments) for teachers to provide feedback and grading. Finally, middle school band directors have students submit videos of individual practice through G Suite for Education, followed by specific feedback that is written or recorded (e.g., band directors play the musical piece).

Teachers' communication with parents has also changed through the use of social media and programs such as Seesaw, an online student portfolio platform that allows parents to see how their children are learning. These have enabled near-daily connections between classroom and home with visual examples of student learning. District leadership explained that the new communications

media have resulted in the “reframing [of] the classic conversation of ‘what did you do today at school’ with specific photos and videos of student work...[that] allow for students, teachers, and parents to see overall growth and demonstration of mastery in a tangible way.” Through Seesaw alone, more than 45,000 examples of student work have been shared by 1,810 students across 274 classes, and nearly 750 parents have visited the site 24,558 times and have left 7,476 comments on student work.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Superintendent Underwood emphasized the need for districts to work on becoming Future Ready at their own pace. He noted that, at Stephenville, a measured, incremental, and pragmatic approach was essential to build district-wide comfort and buy-in. Other districts’ Future Ready approaches should be carefully aligned with their individual contexts.

When implementing Future Ready work in Stephenville, a comprehensive view that examines every gear in the Future Ready Framework has been essential. An example is the Future Ready element of one-to-one initiatives. Districts sometimes focus on the model’s equipment component but neglect its “people aspect” (e.g., comfort level), pace of implementation, and district communications regarding the initiative and its vision. Establishing structures and processes to facilitate that communication and promoting conversations among people in the district is essential. Superintendent Underwood notes, “The easy part is the management, but the hard part is the leadership. Sometimes, you have to work to get to that, and it’s sometimes messy. It’s not always easy.”

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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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