



FUTURE READY CASE STUDY #3



St. George,
Utah



Washington County
School District



28,154
Students



48
Schools



Urban

Supporting Teachers' Effective Use of Technology Through Coaching

Washington County School District is located in the southwest corner of Utah. The district serves students in grades Prekindergarten through 12 across 45 schools. The student population is predominantly White (80%), with about 13% of students of Hispanic descent. About 44% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and 6% are classified as English language learners.¹

While becoming Future Ready, the district has faced challenges relative to the professional development resources and funding available in Utah. To address these challenges, the district allocated a large portion of its Essential Elements grant from the state toward professional development. The purpose of the Essential Elements grant is to give districts the autonomy to leverage lessons learned and to integrate technology into teaching and learning. However, board members, teachers, and parents were committed to ensuring that electronic devices purchased through the grant would be used in the ways they were intended. Further, district leaders published a resolution and policy outlining appropriate use of electronic devices at school to constitute balanced and appropriate use of such devices for students, knowing they were already using them at home. Shifting the mindset to understand how the use of electronic devices in school is beneficial remains an ongoing process as cultural change takes time. To facilitate high levels of learning for every student, Washington County prioritized a significant amount of work through organizational structures and leveraged the [Future Ready Schools \(FRS\)](#) resources in multiple ways.

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 has experienced organic growth in the area of technology. Before the use of FRS resources, Washington County schools were moving in many different directions and exploring different technology tools. One district leader said, “We were learning to use technology instead of using technology to learn.” Teachers were not prepared to integrate technology into their instruction.

Now, the district is providing additional technology support by expanding the role of school-level coaches to include aspects of technology. Coaches were already in place at the schools, but they were more focused on providing pedagogy and content expertise. By evaluating measures in a teaching observation tool (e.g., 21st century skills, personalized learning, cognitive rigor), the district identified ways to connect pedagogy and technology. The coaches have attended training on digital best practices this summer, and they will have an additional period of coaching in next year’s schedule to focus on technology. District leaders’ intent was to avoid adding something completely new, so they chose to supplement the coaching structure that was already established. The district noted that funding for these coaches was already in place.

Use of FRS Resources

Washington County used the FRS resources in various ways to support its efforts. For the District Leadership Self-Assessment, the district involved approximately 30 staff members from its central office. All self-assessment questions were placed into a shared Google document, and participants were asked to provide input. After reviewing the responses, leaders discussed the district’s status in the context of the Future Ready Framework. Because this was the first time they had collectively considered the gear concepts in such detail, district leaders had different opinions concerning many of the gears. After talking through the self-assessment data, the Future Ready Framework, and the district’s philosophy, as well as attending a Future Ready Summit, leaders came to a strong consensus. First, the district realized the importance of its digital learning coordinator and sought to establish a similar position at each district school by expanding the role of the learning coach in order to provide onsite support for digital learning. Second, district leaders realized that they had to provide teachers with job-embedded professional development on the use of technology in their instruction and then be able to monitor teachers’ instruction to ensure fidelity.

The resulting technology endorsement program consists of a minimum of 18 credit hours in a blended online format focused on educational theory and pedagogy related to the integration of technology into the classroom and curriculum. The intent was to create school administrator buy-in by having principals complete the program with their teachers. For a few schools, the district further involved school leaders by requiring them to work through the Future Ready Framework with their respective buildings’ teachers as they developed their school plans.

Results

The district used FRS resources and the Essential Elements grant to align its strategic plan to the Future Ready Framework and to concepts specific to Utah schools. As a result, the strategic plan is now more comprehensive and actionable.

The district also noted that seeing the Gears in the Future Ready Framework provided leaders with understanding and experience that helped them to effectively complete the Essential Elements grant application. The grant application specifically mentioned the Future Ready Dashboard and the District Leadership Self-Assessment as methods for districts to determine their digital readiness. Of 60 school districts that submitted applications, Washington County School District's submission was chosen as one of six exemplary applications and was used as a model for other districts' applications.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

By using the FRS resources, district leaders learned that the Framework was very helpful for their central office. District leaders adapted the Framework to work in a smaller setting. This would allow Washington County schools to be more thorough with their planning, take a closer look at what was happening at the individual school level, and select initiatives that would best suit their needs.

One recommendation the district had for others using the FRS resources was to avoid rushing through the process and to understand that it takes time to complete effectively. Washington County leaders concluded that one to two years may be required to establish a strategic plan; the investment of time needed to create a methodical, purposeful plan, however, greatly increases its chances of success. Another recommendation from the district is to involve all internal stakeholders when addressing questions about the Future Ready Gears. This ensures stakeholder buy-in and shared understanding. Also, having multiple perspectives concerning the gears produces an accurate picture of the district's work. Recently, Washington County has developed a communication plan and is beginning to seek parent and student input that will help shape its implementation processes.



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Washington County also approached its Future Ready work as an effort to leverage existing strengths to improve instruction and student outcomes, and it communicated to staff its intention of implementing Future Ready in a way that supports teachers' good work rather than adds burdens. District leadership explained, "We want our teachers and administrators to know how to infuse technology into their instructional practice to help them more efficiently and effectively support learning. Training should and will be job-embedded and supportive of digital learning practices that enhance and complement the PLC process. This kind of learning improves a collaborative team's ability to positively influence high levels of learning for every child. We are here to support our team in these efforts. We're here to help our learners make meaningful, authentic connections that will prepare them for their future. We know we can accomplish this by engaging in the right work, and this is the right work."

Finally, the district emphasized the importance of remembering that students are at the center of every initiative. It is easy to focus on the process or on specific elements of the initiative, such as infrastructure, tools, resources, and professional development. However, all those pieces should help address students' learning needs and prepare them for college, career, and life.

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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September 2017

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