

SESSION A

Panel: Are Your District Finances “Future Ready”?

Presenters

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Key Points

What is "Future Ready"? The idea is certain resources and plans can help you get your kids ready to work and live in a day and age where technology has penetrated every market. You have to match your finances and your curriculum together. Future Ready helps us to connect. It's really about learning to teach in the 21st century. Focusing on the technology side of engagement is key. We want to be sure that a teacher's limited experience or knowledge isn't a blocker for students getting that knowledge. Giving teachers flexibility and power to adjust their computers and software as they see fit. We focus on solving the "homework gap", a digital divide. We're working on a broadband agreement for our district to make sure they're wired to connect to the internet.

Strategies/Lessons Learned

- The "implementation phase" can be extended (for us 18 months). You have to build support from the community/stakeholders/staff. Make sure they're all on board for the vision and the goals. Make sure you have configured as many aspects of how this program can go as possible, right and wrong. Do it right up front.
- Prepare for the unknown possibilities, spend time on the front end before you get started otherwise the project could stall rather than taking off. Our specific plan was a 6 year plan. We're 3 years in, starting year 4. We've had to continue adapting our plan to account for changes, for instance doing it in K-7 per grade is great, but when you get to high school you've got to implement for the whole building at once. You have to adapt. The initiative is often student-led, and you have to pick the process that works for your student population. Above all, have a very intense planning phase. Originally we were site-based with our funds for technology, but we had vast differences in how that \$ was spent across the board. We found our principals and others didn't like being responsible for Technology. We rolled those funds up to the district level. This allows us to rely on sameness of technology availability and systems across our schools. We tested the technology on our students to figure out the best delivery mechanism for our technology. We wanted to be sure the students had the ability to grow into the device. We also let our teachers test the technology. Beware a petting zoo, sometimes you find younger kids want iPads, and older kids want laptops. We went with a combo-device, the "revolve". Be very careful not to lock your students down. You want to create innovative learning and freedom like they'll experience in the real world. Block explicit stuff, but let them explore. They'll get around whatever you put in place, don't fight them. Plan for maintenance, be aware you have to have non-digital resources available to accompany the digital ones, and getting dual products makes the life of those products more useful and efficient.

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- "Future Ready" has a dashboard/planning tool in order to allow you to prepare and account for the items you may not have at the forefront of their mind. When people use our tool they sometimes completely change their strategy for implementation. You have to look at the big picture level from the start. A caution about BYOD, those schools assume they're saving \$\$\$. They're not, they're making teachers tech support. They're introducing inequity, thousands of dollars of difference between the school and personal devices. It's very important to choose sustainable funding sources so that you don't find yourself in a situation where you need replacement devices but you have no funding source. Find a strategy for funding that isn't going to dry up and doesn't rely on programs that are temporary. The idea of digital citizenship puts you in a position to let students feel ownership over the device and their behavior while using it.
- You have to keep your front unified and on the same page about the plan. If you find cracks in your organization, you'll find a fractured implementation and you won't get a good level of adoption. You have to start with cabinet, but focus on the kids, and radiate out from there through your staff. If you start your decisions about spending money and effort with "Is it worth it for the kids?". When you start the transition with those questions it's much easier to get your staff on board. We've always maintained our strategic vision, but we mapped it with the digital transformation. We had a "petting zoo" by putting all possible device types in the library, and inviting our students and teachers to try them out and let us know what they could use the different devices for. We found everyone said "I need a laptop for my learning device" even though they were very interested in the other tablet devices too. We decided to go with tablets for K-2, in third grade you transition to a PC laptop. When you enter 6th grade you are issued a laptop, it's yours for a few years, kids don't trash them because we built in ownership. In High school you get a better/different laptop for your whole high school period. We heavily leverage erate.com for rebates so that we can reinvest those rebates into the infrastructure. When you feel the pressure of expenses if you put the pressure on vendors, they will flex, or you will find that you find a cheaper solution.