

Rural District Case Study: Millard County School District



Challenge

Millard County School District, a rural district with approximately 3,000 students including the towns of Delta and Fillmore in Utah, was preparing to begin a multi-year 1:1 initiative. The goal of the project was to ensure that their students were not disadvantaged by the rural location and were prepared for college, life and career readiness. They also had many concerns, such as the best approach to gain teacher engagement, achieve better student outcomes, and communicate with the community. Dave Styler, Superintendent of MCSD, was nominated as Superintendent of the year for the state of Utah.

Solution

In July of 2017, 12 participants from VMware, 2 consultants from CoSN, and organizers from Team4Tech went to Millard County School District in Utah for a Rural District Engagement. While they were there, they supported the school district in 4 areas.

- **TECHNOLOGY:** The team re-architected and virtualized the core network servers to be robust and enable a 1:1 initiative and digital learning.
- **TEACHER PD:** The team offered training sessions to the teachers in using Google Education solutions that would be widely used in the new Chromebooks deployment.
- **COMMUNICATION:** The team worked with district leadership to develop a communications strategy that will tell the “why” of this effort to their community and created a communication council to oversee the ongoing effort.
- **LEADERSHIP:** The team engaged district leadership, including the superintendent and senior cabinet, as well as principals, to develop a vision and goals for the initiative and a formal improvement process with the teachers.

This engagement, enthusiasm and knowledge of the external trainers had an energizing effect on the teachers of Millard. Some teachers were already teaching with technology, but now even those teachers who were reluctant started to see the value of technology in their classrooms. Teachers in the the first wave of technology implementation gained increased confidence and incorporated technology in their instruction, including connecting students through video conferencing with mentors from the local power plant - the largest employer in the community. Teachers who had never used digital delivery systems started to post frequently new lessons on such platforms for their students.

With the more robust bandwidth available to the district, the Internet is faster and more reliable than ever. Access has been extended to new parts of the schools including lunch rooms, auditoriums, and football fields.

The district aspired to level the playing field for their students with that of the more affluent zip codes. They began the journey in several ways

- School buses have been fitted with WiFi so that students can now do homework on the 4-5 hour trips to sports and other events/activities.
- Online classes are now available from a local University with the district supporting concurrent enrollment for about 100 Millard students who want to start taking college courses while in high school.
- They also work with Brigham Young University Independent Study which allows students access to courses that the district could never afford to hire teachers for locally.

During the engagement the Millard Communications Council was established. It has started to work on communications with the community, including writing several articles for the local newspaper. The district also developed a strategy to use existing tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as a well used electronic messaging system to faculty and parents, to reinforce the purpose and success of the overall initiative. By identifying a plan, creating new management oversight, and dividing responsibilities for implementation, the district is now communicating the “why” of the effort even though there is no designated district communications position.

The leadership of the district collaborated with principals and teachers to develop a vision of why the district was implementing a 1:1 initiative along with setting goals for student outcomes. The vision included preparing students to be life, college, and career ready; enhancing student intrinsic motivation, facilitating learning and academic success; fostering lifelong learning and success the way students define it; and instilling ethics for a digital world.

District leaders report that in the first few months of their implementation, they are much further along than they could possibly have been without this engagement and are on track for an exciting and valuable digital leap. Teachers remain excited and have gained additional professional development support from the Southwest Educational Development Center.

Take-Aways

Some key takeaways from the Millard experience include:

- Start with the “why.” Having a shared vision of where the district is going supports both long term strategy and day-to-day decision making.
- Strive for equity. Be creative in using resources to give students the best possible access to broadband and courses.
- Kick off the program with enthusiasm. Get teachers engaged from the beginning by having enthusiastic trainers.
- Share your story. Involve the community by sharing your “why” and your progress with them.

CoSN will be checking back with the Millard team over the coming months and years and will be updating this case study so that other rural districts can see the lessons learned from this rural district taking a digital leap. And, CoSN will be using the lessons from Millard to inform a new ongoing effort to create tools and resources for other rural school district leaders interested in using technology to transform learning. Join us on this journey.



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