



Cultivating Excellence: A Successful Model for Digital Transformation

How Tennessee's Greeneville City Schools Is Leveraging Technology to Effectively Personalize Its Learning Environments

Schools across the nation are in the process of transforming their classrooms into digital learning environments. Because technology is changing the education landscape at a rapid rate, schools are calling upon each other for guidance and coaching as they venture into this new digital space. Administrators at Tennessee's Greeneville City Schools (Greeneville) are leveraging their K–12 peer networks to assist them with their district's own digital transformation, but they are also empowering two very important groups with the task of leading their digital revolution—Greeneville's teachers and students.

Past, Present, and Future

Located in East Tennessee, Greeneville is one of the state's top-performing school districts. The district was named the number one public school district in Tennessee by both *Business Insider Magazine* and in Niche Ranking's 2016 survey. Also, the College Board included Greeneville on their 2015 Gaston Caperton Opportunity Honor Roll, which recognizes the top 130 school districts that excel at creating opportunities for traditionally underrepresented students. Proud of what they've achieved but seeking to accomplish more, the district has created a vision for where it wants to be in 2020—aptly named its 20/20 vision. Dr. Jeff Moorhouse, Greeneville's director of schools, is leading this ambitious initiative. "The telescopic perspective drives the visualization of where we want to be in five years and beyond," says Dr. Moorhouse. "We want our students to have the skills that will allow them to compete in the workplace for jobs that have not yet been created."



Crafting a Shared Vision

Technology plays a critical role in helping Greeneville's students master the 21st century skills relevant to both present and future success. In December 2015, all students in grades three through eight were given their own laptops to use in the classroom. Although one-to-one (1:1) deployments like Greeneville's are becoming more common, the district's overall approach to technology integration is unique. "We want our technology initiative to be all about the instruction instead of the devices," says Beverly Miller, Greeneville's assistant director of schools and chief technology officer. "We want it to be about the transformation of learning throughout the district."

As such, Greeneville's technology department works very closely with the district's curriculum and instruction department. Often, technology and instruction operate in their own silos, but Greeneville has seamlessly blended the two together, enabling them to employ a pragmatic approach to their technology adoption and integration strategies. "Our planning process really makes us unique because we work very hard to make sure our technology goals are simply an extension of our teaching goals," says Miller. "We begin with the end in mind and consider our key objectives as far as the teaching and learning."

Having come from the private sector, Miller and her team have adopted a customer-centric approach to

technology integration. “We believe that our team exists to serve others and that, by providing exemplary IT support and customer-focused service, we can help facilitate a digital transformation in our school district,” says Miller. “We always want to make sure we aren’t doing technology for the sake of technology. We are here to help our teachers and students reach their goals.”

Larry Jones, Greeneville’s IT network administrator, believes the technology team’s strong customer focus has enabled them to cultivate a thriving digital learning environment for Greeneville’s students. “We have chosen to view our students, administrators, and teachers as customers,” says Jones. “It’s our job to keep them happy.” Part of sustaining that happiness involves providing Greeneville’s users with access to a rock solid network. “If I don’t do my job, nobody else does either,” says Jones. “If the technology failed tomorrow, we would still be a great district because our teachers are awesome. But the technology enables our teachers to differentiate their instruction in a way that makes sense to each student.”



Suzanne Bryant, Dr. Jeff Moorhouse, and Beverly Miller



Any Device, Anywhere, Anytime

Greeneville’s technology team works diligently to ensure that technology is never a barrier to learning. The group’s motto—“any device, anywhere, anytime”—has enabled them to create and sustain a comprehensive device-agnostic environment for their students. With so many new devices entering the market, the Greeneville team acknowledges that it can be difficult to keep up. “Everything is changing all the time,” says Chuck Broyles, Greeneville’s IT operations administrator. “We must have reliable and fast networking connections so that teachers and students can access their digital learning applications.

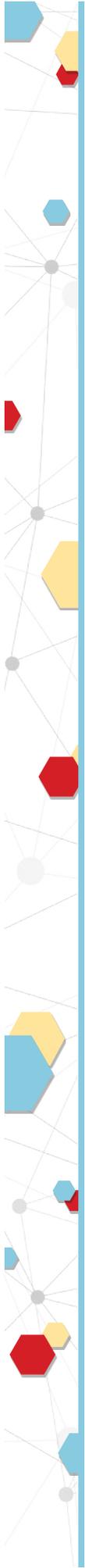
Having a robust infrastructure in place is critical. If you are in the process of creating and reviewing your future technology strategies and you are only looking five or six years down the road—double it. Plan to future-proof and don’t skimp on the front end.”

Student Technology Team

Because Greeneville’s technology staff is so small they created a student technology team to assist them with their efforts. This is a paid position, and student tech team members receive a parking space in the teacher’s circle at the high school as an added perk. They assist with device repairs, software issues, and networking problems. The students have the opportunity to gain valuable customer service experience as they are called upon to assist educators, students, and visiting guests with their technology issues. Former tech team members who are now in college have the opportunity to resume their duties during their holiday and summer breaks.

Greeneville also has a student video technology team. These students are tasked with telling the district’s story to the outside world. They create in-house video productions and live stream important district events.

Brandon Waddell is a junior at Greeneville City Schools, and he is one of the two student members on the video technology team. Through this position, he has received substantial hands-on experience with editing programs like Final Cut Pro, but he’s also had the opportunity to grow in other ways. “I interact with our



administrators and teachers, so I've learned how to present myself in a more professional manner," says Waddell. "My first work email was pretty stressful because I wanted to make sure it was worded correctly. I think these types of professional experiences are the best part about this job." Waddell is thankful for the skills he's acquired as a student tech team member. "Most of my friends are working fast food jobs," says Waddell. "They think it's pretty cool that I have this opportunity. Through this position, I've learned how to ask for help and how to collaborate within a team more effectively. It's a lot of understanding that it's not just your idea that matters. There are many ways to approach a problem, and you need to be receptive to other people's ideas in the workplace. I will definitely use these skills in my future career."

Adopting a Teacher-Driven Approach

Innovative learning opportunities like the student technology teams set Greeneville apart and make it a model for effective 21st century instructional practices. As the district undergoes its digital transformation, its students remain the primary focus. "We have created a culture where it is okay for teachers and students to make mistakes," says Suzanne Bryant, Greeneville's assistant director of schools. "We are unique in that we always focus on our students with any new initiative. We really trust our teachers because they are the professionals, and they know what is best. It is critical that we empower our teachers and let them drive what happens."

Greeneville's professional development model aligns with the district's instructional approach. "We aren't a top-down organization," says Bryant. "We don't mandate professional development. Our technology professional development motto is 'just enough, just in time.' We don't want to overwhelm our teachers. Instead, our training is very personalized, and we let our teachers drive the pace." Through events like the district's professional development Tech Blitz conference and fun programs like "PD in Your PJs," wherein teachers use videoconferencing to participate in live trainings at night, Greeneville's teachers create their own personalized learning pathways.

IT Teacher Academy

Last year, Greeneville created an IT Teacher Academy for its teachers who were interested in learning about new instructional technologies. The group meets on select Saturday mornings for four hours. "We initially had twenty people sign up for the academy," says Beverly Miller. "I promised them that I would not waste their time, and that I would make it meaningful for them. At the end of the program, all of the members asked to stay in the program for another year because they wanted to achieve more. We accepted ten new additional members this year, so now we are thirty people strong."

Jana Wills, a Greeneville Middle School teacher, has been a member of the IT Teacher Academy for two years. Technology plays a big role in Wills' instruction. "I use technology in my classroom every single day with my students," says Wills. "Not a day goes by where we aren't doing something on our laptops, tablets, or phones. Even though I've been teaching for twenty years, I rely heavily on technology now. It's something that is almost second nature to me."

Happy Teachers + Happy Students = Tremendous Outcomes

Jana Wills sees the transformative impacts the laptops and devices are having upon her students. "Technology is positively changing the way my students interact with me and how they interact with each other," says Wills. "When my kids are absent from class, they will ask me to record my lessons so they can watch them later that night. They don't want to fall behind. They will use the recordings to review a lesson or prepare for a quiz. Technology enables students to take ownership of their learning. I'm the facilitator and giving them information, but they are using technology to enhance the lessons."

Wills' quieter students have embraced the new communication pathways that the technology fosters. "The laptops have been an amazing tool for my shyer students. I'm having much more interaction with them now because they will email me or send me a digital message. They much prefer that mode of communication

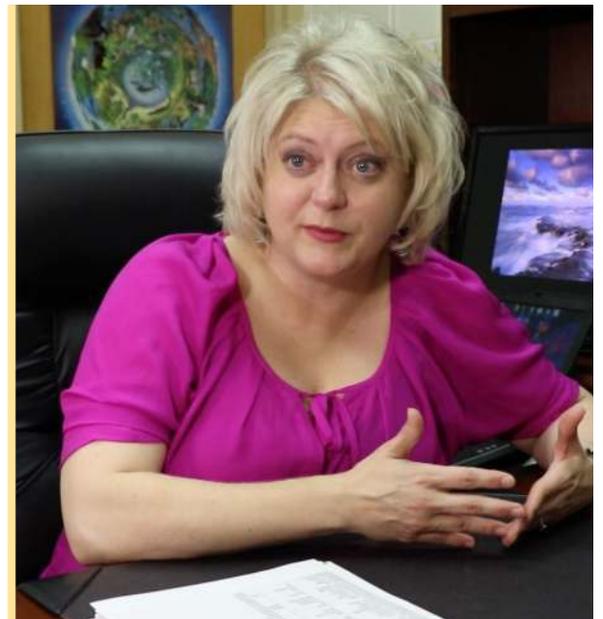
over speaking in class. It's been wonderful because I'm able to respond to them privately. It's almost like one-on-one instruction."



Wills' students love using their new devices to enhance their learning—and reduce their back pain! "I love having a laptop because I can personalize everything," says Ellie Beth, a sixth grader at Greeneville Middle School. "I can have my dashboard set up and create my own wallpaper. When we had a laptop cart, we had to login every time and set everything up." Fellow sixth grader James is thrilled with all of the new laptop's bells and whistles, but he particularly loves its size. "It's so much easier to carry around than all of my books. They were very heavy. This has really lightened my load!"

Programs like Canvas, Microsoft Office365, and Microsoft OneNote are popular among Greeneville's students. "I like Office365 because I can color-code my notes," says James. Sixth grader Anna also enjoys using these resources to organize her materials. "I've made a color-coded folder for each standard, and I put notes for that standard in its assigned folder," says Anna. "It's a great way to keep everything organized, and I can track where I'm at with each standard."

The fact that Greeneville's sixth grade students are able to speak to the standards in such a way is indicative of the culture of excellence that has been cultivated within the district. Principals Heather Boegemann and Janet Ricker, along with Greeneville's leadership team, want to enhance that level of excellence for their students. "We always want to differentiate learning in the classroom, but we are examining how to do that and make it meaningful with just one adult in the learning space," says Ricker. "Technology is enabling us to overcome that hurdle and personalize the learning for every student. For example, we have Response to Intervention (RTI) and Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) time in the morning. During this block, students can explore their interests using a variety of technologies and digital resources. The technology is really creating authentic learning experiences for our children."



Janet Ricker

One student in particular has been greatly impacted by the integration of technology in his music class. "We have one student who was a 'frequent flyer' to my office for disciplinary problems," says Ricker. "In music class, they are writing music on the computer, and they get to hear it played back to them immediately. This program has turned everything around for that little boy. He is so engaged in what he is learning. Before, he would frequently get in trouble in music class, but now he loves it. It's changing his classmates' perception of him because he's so engaged in learning to write music."

"Our teachers and students lead the vision at Greeneville," says Boegemann. "They've been chomping at the bit to get their own devices. Our district is so strong because we have a combined vision of where we are going."



Fostering Collaboration With LEGO

Teacher-driven initiatives like Greenville's First LEGO League are what make Greenville such an innovative and successful school district. The district's LEGO program began in the spring of 2015 at Hal Henard Elementary School. In the fall of 2015, the team decided to compete at the regional LEGO competition. Despite it being their first year, the Greenville team was one of eight teams that scored high enough to progress to the state competition, and Greenville's student team was awarded the state's Gracious Professionalism Award.

Nancy Philbeck is a Greenville teacher and one of the team's coaches. "We were very excited to win the Gracious

Professionalism Award," says Philbeck. "Our students competed like crazy, but they also wanted everyone else to be successful. We shared our plans, findings, and strategies with teams around the state." This collaborative philosophy has been ingrained within every single team member. "In the beginning, our students had to learn to communicate and work as a team," says Philbeck. "We have several student leaders with strong personalities. They had to learn to listen and incorporate their teammates in a positive and valued manner. It's been a great learning opportunity for all of our students."

A Supportive Community

Greenville's leadership team is grateful to have a strong and engaged community supporting all of their digital efforts. "A group of local businesses took it upon themselves to support and lead an initiative introduced by the Greenville City Schools Education Foundation called 'Reach for IT,'" says Beverly Miller. "In less than one year, the foundation raised \$750,000, enabling us to purchase our student devices. We are so thankful for our community and all of our stakeholders. We are honored and privileged to teach in this great community."

Together, the Greenville education community has effectively transformed the district into a model for effective 21st century learning practices. "When we talk about digital transformation, there is the connotation that things are going to be dramatically different," says Dr. Jeff Moorhouse. "But technology doesn't need to be utilized eight hours a day. At Greenville, we give our teachers the freedom to choose their own path. We communicate that we want to be innovative and try new ideas, but everything doesn't have to be driven by technology. There is a time and place for it. Ultimately, our goal is to provide our students with personalized learning opportunities. Technology helps us accomplish that goal."

As demonstrated by the district's significant academic achievements, Greenville's holistic approach to technology integration is working. As the district's managed Internet service and VoIP provider, ENA has the honor of working with these inspirational and motivational leaders, and we see the successful outcomes their diligent efforts are producing. Greenville is a true leader in the K-12 community and a model for the effective cultivation and sustainment of impactful, transformative digital learning strategies.

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