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The ALA/AASL School Librarian Competencies for Leadership

11 relevant competencies for school librarians as leaders.

Why Memes and Teaching Are Well Suited

Broad ideas about popular culture.

Improving What Is Taught and Learned About Africa

Proactive collaboration between teachers and school librarians can provide access to anti-bias materials.

The Power of Collaboration

Sharing an ideology of coteaching.



Ready-Access Digital Learning at Wilton Public Schools

Kevin Smith and Fran Kompar

Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything.—A. J. Juliani

ANYTIME—ANYWHERE—ALL WAYS LEARNING FOR EVERYONE

This year, Wilton Public Schools in Wilton, Connecticut, is implementing a program that provides digital tools and resources for when, how, and if they are needed to elevate, enhance, and empower learning. The program, dubbed Ready-Access Digital Learning by Superintendent Kevin Smith, intentionally flips the emphasis from technologies to learning. How is this different from the many programs implemented over the past decades? Perhaps not at all—at first glance. However, a deeper dive into the planning details show a paradigm shift from a strategy of 1:1 device implementation to a plan to explore, share, and embark on a journey for all members of the district community. The following is a summary of the elements that are part of a different way to look at a digital 1:1 districtwide program.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS OF THE RIGHT PEOPLE

For too long the district seemed to be mired in debates centered on the wrong questions. District administrators long debated the “what” of technology in education. Questions focused on which device and how the devices would be deployed: Are Chromebooks preferable to iPads? Is BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) a better solution to district-provided devices? Though one computer to one student (1:1) programs have been a high-interest topic in education for decades—predating social media, Google, and the Internet—a critical voice has often been neglected in the conversation: the student. Reframing the narrative from one that focused

on the devices and tools to one that privileged learning and access and inviting students to weigh in had immediate and profound effects. Students were not only called on for feedback but were also asked to be leaders in the implementation. What we learned was simple: The students were ready to take control of their own learning using their own chosen device by the time they reached high school. Employing a backward design approach, the superintendent brought in a variety of stakeholders to discuss what that might look like. The recommendation that emerged was to implement a program that provided a consistent instructional program in digital literacy, citizenship, leadership, and content-based problem-solving but personalized access by grade level, curriculum, and readiness.

DEVELOPING EXPERT LEARNERS THROUGH PERSONALIZED LEARNING: READY-ACCESS + FLEXIBLE ENVIRONMENTS = UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The Wilton Public Schools vision, proudly displayed on its website, was the driving force behind the planning for Ready-Access. We wanted to show a progression that went beyond student-centered to student-led learning. Moving past the debates typical during the planning of such initiatives of BYOD vs, district-provided or iPad vs. Chromebook, all Wilton schools are access-ready this year and outfitted with tools matching the student needs.

Guided by the Universal Design for Learning framework, based on neuroscience of learning that suggests that schools provide flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences, we emphasized providing access to the tools and resources appropriate for each grade level. Through curriculum implementation, we are also endeavoring to create “expert learners” in part by teaching that all students can identify and remove barriers that may prevent them from excelling.

One way Ready-Access works is by providing flexibility for teachers and students with periodic access to preK–2 students through Digital and Creation Centers, regular access to grade 3–8 students who receive their own device to take home, and a BYOD program for our high schoolers to fully take charge of their own learning. Ready-Access provides all students access to learning anywhere, anytime, and in all the ways to accommodate all the ways that students learn. For specifics on the entire plan, refer to the Wilton Public Schools Digital Learning website.

INVOLVE THE REAL EXPERTS: START WITH YOUR OWN STUDENT IT INNOVATORS

Preparing for 1:1 programs requires that school technology departments shore up the district infrastructure, including bandwidth, hardware, systems and technical support, and device deployment. Wilton Public Schools did that with the help of an outside organization that specializes in schools, networking, bandwidth, and systems deployment. Working side by side with the experts, a team of Wilton students was invaluable in providing the superintendent with feedback on what students needed, creating surveys and administering them to their peers, and participating in all related preparation, from planning meetings to parent presentations to deployment recommendations for the superintendent and directors of Digital Learning and Technology. Most impressively, the IT Innovators worked during the summer of 2017 to plan with the IT and Digital Learning staff on inventory allocation, preparing devices, provisioning apps, and setting up carts. Our student IT Innovators go far beyond basic troubleshooting—theirs is truly a leadership role that includes project management and systems networking.

One of Wilton Public Schools' IT Innovators, Endy Perry, currently a junior in college, had this to say about the program:

What started as an internship during my senior year at Wilton High School turned into several years of hands-on training and experience working behind the scenes for the Wilton Public Schools District Technology Department. I worked with other IT Innovators on a wide range of projects

that culminated in the launch of the Ready-Access program this fall. Working closely with school and district administrators, we created deployment plans and managed new devices, seeing that they got into the hands of our students. I also had the opportunity to work with the director of Instructional Technology and Digital Learning, Fran Kompar, on online resources and presentations for parents and teachers to answer questions, address concerns, and prepare everyone for this new program. In the end, I am so proud of the work that my fellow IT Innovators and District Technology staff were able to complete and know that it will benefit Wilton students for many years to come. Having gone through Wilton's K-12 program firsthand, I am confident that the Ready-Access program offers teachers and students the tools and skills that they need to advance 21st-century learning. I also know that the hands-on leadership, management, and technical skills that I have been able to develop through working as a member of the Wilton Public Schools team have been invaluable, and I only hope that the work that I have done is enough to show my thanks.

In the spirit of providing authentic, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences, one of the other IT Innovators, Sam Schmidt, spoke about going beyond the usual in order to provide students with experiences that translate into skills that will benefit them not only in college and career but also in life:

Working for District Technology as a student allowed me to learn about information technology in a setting that I would have otherwise not had access to. Most student-run technology positions deal solely with help desk positions. WPS District

Technology gave me the opportunity to develop real, enterprise scale projects and see them through to deployment. I gained valuable project management skills, technical skills, and business skills, such as talking to suppliers and giving presentations. I worked with technologies that are vital to real-world technology jobs and that most students don't have access to until they are in the workforce. The end result of the Ready-Access project was a rollout which fit our goals and enabled a new class of learning from the students.

“IF TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE ROAD, HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE BRIDGE, CAR, AND GUIDE . . .”

THE LIBRARY LEARNING COMMONS TAKES THE LEAD IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In tandem with the move to Ready-Access, Wilton Public Schools has been engaged in reimagining its school libraries as library learning commons (LLC) for the past 5 years. The LLC model, made popular by the writings of Professor David Loertscher, advocates for a flexible, user-friendly commons model that is integrative, participatory, supportive, and aligned to school priorities. In effect, the LLC model marks the origin of the Future-Ready Framework for Librarians. In addition, the learning commons staff's role has evolved to include expertise in digital literacies. Consequently, Wilton was well-positioned to provide support for Ready-Access through the LLC. The LLC staff provides instruction based on five curriculum strands: digital citizenship, technology operations, inquiry, innovation, and reading advocacy. In the

literal, figurative, and virtual hub of the school, the staff is uniquely positioned to support device deployment, direct collaborative instruction on the responsible and effective use of online resources, provide ongoing professional learning support for teachers, and oversee a student help desk.

In just the first two months of this school year, the LLC team at Wilton Public Schools delivered a Digital Citizenship Curriculum—dubbed the “bootcamp”—which provided students with instruction on such topics as digital identity, safety, responsible use, intellectual property, cyberbullying, and privacy. The LLC team delivered a scaffolded K–12 curriculum based on Common Sense Media resources and home-grown lessons to address needs in context. In addition, the team prepared devices for deployment using the Destiny Resource Manager/Asset Manager. Each student in grades 3–8 was provided a district-owned device checked out to them for the year. As the library team has been doing for several years now, they have found alignment and opportunities for instruction of inquiry, technology operations, and literature appreciation and have now found new opportunities to carry out these lessons with the Ready-Access program. Finally, within a few short months, the LLC team has led about 12 hours of professional learning for their school communities on topics related to using technology to assess, uncover, and make learning visible, as well as create. Important to understand in this transition is that digital does not supplant print or analog—it is available and can be used when it’s most appropriate. The traditional library is not replaced but has changed to fulfill the needs of their community.

CREATE A CULTURE OF TRUST AND RISK-TAKING

Relying on the UDL Implementation Framework to guide the effort, the superintendent and leadership of Wilton invited teachers to use the next 3 years to explore, learn, take risks, and share with one another. Often the pilot phase of a digital initiative happens on the IT side; that is, pilots test the infrastructure, deployment, and technical support. Wilton has turned that on its end by providing the time to teachers *after* the deployment. Much of the literature indicates that access to digital tools provides teachers with opportunities for facilitating global connections, collaborative projects, and frequent and faster feedback, as well as authentic problem-solving that’s driven by student questions. Providing teachers with the time and space to learn from one another also creates a school culture of trust that will lead to greater and better use of the digital tools provided.

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

In his 1993 book titled *The Children’s Machine: Rethinking Schools in the Age of the Computer*, visionary leader, researcher, and MIT professor Seymour Papert states, “The role of the teacher is to create the conditions for invention rather than provide ready-made knowledge.” It’s been almost 25 years since Papert echoed the constructivist philosophy of Piaget and Dewey. Since then, our world has been overwhelmed by online, always-on information, and the discussions about technology devices have given way to thinking about how, when, and if technology creates the right conditions for students to learn. In a January 2017 update to the National Educational Technology Plan, the

Office of Educational Technology puts learning at the center of the *Reimagined Role of Technology in Education*, which also emphasizes providing the environments and conditions for student learning. It’s an exciting year at Wilton Public Schools as the forward-thinking planning becomes reality, and the entire district community has a role in its success.

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