

Vision for Innovation

Union County's Strategy for Digital Curriculum Implementation

Formulating the Initial Strategy

The discussions for a digital implementation strategy began back in 2009. They quickly moved to the importance of a central vision, the end result for the whole strategy. In order to formulate this vision, Dr. Jones gathered cabinet staff, board members, principals, and teachers together to form a planning committee.

By focusing on the end result, their strategy stayed flexible, which is a key part of their program's success. For example, those early discussions held devices as ancillary tools, with the primary material coming from textbooks. Over the course of the program, this has evolved. Today, devices paired with digital curriculum are the primary tools, yet the strategy stays true to the original vision of education.

The Importance of Planning

From the beginning, Dr. Jones built his strategy around digital implementation being a complete change, not just a passing fad. Even when they were

just in the planning phase, he made sure to put in the time and effort to lay out a good strategy.

"If we're not careful, we become a profession of new starts," he said. "All along, we have been concerned that it would be looked at as just another new start—here's Union County trying something new. We took our time and made sure that we had priorities established."

A valuable tool for Dr. Jones in laying out this strategy was surveys. Union County has been using surveys as a valuable tool for years, sending them to parents, teachers, principals, and students. This data helped them gauge community support for the new developments.

"The survey process has been a part of our school system for several years," Dr. Jones said. "So we were able to use standing surveys. We also looked at some other voltage checks, such as conversations with parents."

Shifting the Strategy's Focus

Once the vision and goals were in place, it was time to lay out a detailed strategy for implementation, but they ran into a snag—no one in their state had done it before. Not one other school or school district had made enough advances enough to provide a clear methodology for implementation. So they looked outside the state to other counties and school programs

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to gather information. And they weren't afraid to let the data they found change their strategy.

Learning from Implementation

An important takeaway from the Union County program is the patience and attention to detail they took during planning and implementation. They were

Union County's Digital Implementation Strategy

- 1. Form a Planning Committee:**
Isolate the vision for the program
- 2. Consult with the Community:**
Review local surveys and engage the community in open conversation.
- 3. Gather Strategic Data:**
Review successful actions of other districts and don't be afraid to go far afield.
- 4. Refine Plan & Vision:**
Using what was learned, adjust the vision and approach.
- 5. Pilot Program:**
Try out the plan in carefully selected situations to obtain real results.
- 6. Selected Rollout:**
Begin implementing digital strategy on a grade-by-grade basis.
- 7. Rethink, Reskill, and Reorganize:**
Always be ready to change the strategy, plan, or system to keep the program in line with the vision.

willing to invest years into testing and slowly rolling out the program to make sure that they got it right.

Their first step was a pilot program. They narrowed down their program to one class in a single middle school, and two classes (math and social studies) at a high school. To make sure that all students could be reached with their program, each of the schools they chose was from opposite ends of the economic spectrum.

After that successful pilot, they rolled out the program to all 6th grade classes, then 7th grade, then 8th grade. After that, they rolled out the program into high school, and today, after seven years, it's successfully implemented across the district from 6th grade through 12th grade.

A vital part of the strategy was learning and

adjusting throughout the pilot process. For example, the 6th-8th grade rollouts used netbooks as the devices, while the high school students were given Chrome devices.

Throughout the whole process, Dr. Jones has followed the "Three R's"— Rethink, Reskill, and Reorganize. He plans to integrate those same principles into his strategy as they roll out the elementary program in the coming years.

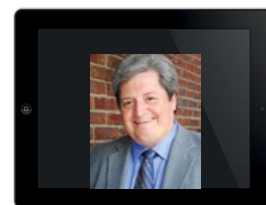
Advice for Other Superintendents

Dr. Jones's advice for other superintendents? Remember your central vision. "It goes back again to what is your vision? What is your purpose? What is the end result, and what is it that we want our students to be able to do as a result?"

Dr. Jones particularly stresses finding the balance between taking risks and being too conservative. During his strategic planning, he knew that the changes they were making might cause problems or require drastic reorganization. To counter that, he always made sure they had safety nets, such as open discussion, careful review, action plans, and a systemic method of collecting data.

It's been a journey of seven years to implement a digital curriculum to the middle schools and high schools of the Union County school district, and there are more challenges ahead as they implement an elementary program. From Dr. Jones's experience, it's worth the effort and the careful planning. Today, teachers regularly tell him they can't imagine life without the curriculum, and many think that it might be the key to restoring the school system.

Dr. John Jones has spent over twenty-five years serving the school districts of Union County, North Carolina. He has held a variety of positions, including the Director of Middle School Education and a principal of five schools. He is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Programs for Union County.



For the complete interview with John Jones, visit learningcounsel.com