

CASE REPORTS

Designing Thriving Schools

Any process is only as good as its application, and so it is with Designing Thriving Schools – **success is measured by *results***.

This case reports describe the **far-reaching and lasting changes** that have been **facilitated through this powerful strategic thinking and planning process**. They summarize information collected through interviews of participants at least one year following the workshop, and describe:

- significant accomplishments,
- shifts in thinking,
- positive community engagement,
- and communication breakthroughs

that the interviewees believe would not have taken place without the help of Designing Thriving Schools.

Sometimes, the shift came in the **speed of the technological change**.

Sometimes, it occurred within a **cultural mindset**.

Sometimes, the shift was manifested in the **growth of organizational humanness** that resulted from reflection on identified strategies.

These reports **represent a variety of educational organizations**, districts, schools, and state agencies, in different demographic and geographic areas, each **with different goals and objectives**. All are examples of “hands on” work that produced real, actionable results by giving confirmation, clarity, resolve, and direction to **improving educational outcomes**.

Case Report #1

Howell Public Schools

Goal: To provide impetus for a district-wide bond referendum.

Howell, a fast-growing public school district of nearly 9,000 students located in southeast Michigan, was in the process of mobilizing an important district and community ad-hoc committee as the district prepared to ask their community to approve a \$97.6 million bond referendum that included construction of a new high school, renovations of several existing buildings, and approximately \$15 million for new technology. The committee had also been charged with developing a philosophy of learning and creating an innovative design for the effective delivery of instruction in the proposed new high school.

“The process put participants in a box ‘outside’ their comfort zone and front-loaded information on technology and strategy to spark a different mind set,” said superintendent Chuck Breiner, who scheduled a Designing Thriving Schools workshop to unify this diverse group and give them all a stake in the future of Howell Schools.

Outcome: Seventy-five percent of the workshop participants remained active in the bond referendum campaign. They were able to fully articulate to the broader community the powerful new Philosophy of Learning they created for Howell Public Schools and the essential role that technology would play in improving student achievement. As a result, the community approved the entire bond mileage (the largest ever in Livingston County) and continues to be engaged in the success of their schools at all levels.

Case Report #2

Pender County Schools

Goal: To improve technology integration at the classroom level.

Pender County Schools is a rural, growing district in North Carolina, who was on the third phase of their district planning initiative at the time of the Designing Thriving Schools workshop. The first wave, was the development of a District-wide Strategic Plan, with technology integration identified as a key goal. The second phase was to build the district technology infrastructure. The Designing Thriving Schools process was chosen to facilitate the third phase of planning, which was to address the need for a comprehensive plan of technology integration at the classroom level.

Dr. Audrey Toney, Assistant Superintendent, remarked, *“It helped the dream of successful technology integration go on. The process also gave us the ability to see further into our future and recognize sign posts along the way, when a vast majority had not even seen the hilltop.”*

Outcome: During the DTS process, administrators and lead teachers formed a critical mass of knowledgeable staff to lead change within the broader school community. Through the thoughtful in-depth dialogue between technology and instructional experts, the process gave confirmation of vision, clarity of purpose, and most importantly, strategic direction for the purposeful integration of technology in every classroom. In the months that followed these “integration pioneers” were honoring requests of the *now* eager staff members for technology training, and ideas for maximizing instructional time with their new technologies.

Case Report #3

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) South Wisconsin District Principals

Goal: To learn new and effective strategies for strategic planning and technology integration

The LCMS South Wisconsin District, consisting of 58 elementary schools, six high schools and one

university, hold an annual two-day Leadership Conference for Secondary and Elementary principals. With most of the district's newly purchased technology in place, the majority of the building principals were *not* fully utilizing the tools. Even though district schools were experiencing a high level of success, it was important to broaden the view of the leadership so that they could recognize the academic, communication and organizational value in new and emerging technology tools and develop creative ways to strategically plan for the future.

Scott Bell, school principal, conference organizer, and technology expert, looked to the Designing Thriving Schools process as the structure for the event. Mr. Bell shared *"My colleagues and I agree the positive changes in technology integration we have produced are the direct result of the learning, dialogue and focused commitment made during those two days"*.

Outcome: The DTS process helped demystify the complexity of modern technologies, and motivated participants to design a three-year initiative for technology integration. They created a concise list of strategies and enabling technologies that would focus their efforts to produce successful change. New Communication technologies and a "new mindset" were critical components to enable administrators, from this large geographic area, to come together and design their future.

Case Report #4

Kansas State Department of Education

Goal: To evoke new ideas for applying existing and emerging technologies to improve teaching, learning, and organizational systems at the state and local level.

The setting was a Pre-Conference Leadership Workshop in conjunction with the Kansas Technology Leadership Conference. Public and private school leadership teams from around the state, as well as a leadership team from the Kansas Department of Educational Technology, attended the Designing Thriving Schools daylong event. The district teams were comprised of superintendents, technology directors, curriculum coordinators, building principals, finance directors, and lead teachers.

Jana Craig, former Technology Coordinator for the Department of Education Technology and conference coordinator, offered insights on the positive impact that Designing Thriving Schools had on technology planning and integration throughout the state of Kansas. *"It opened up a different kind of dialog...we were able to move the conversation from 'technology and its use' to 'the integration of technology to accelerate learning'."*

Outcome: Having the opportunity to listen first-hand to the issues and hopeful visions of local district leadership during the workshop, participants from the Kansas Department of Educational Technology became focused in their efforts to help local districts integrate technology by supporting long term e-rate planning, facilitating administrative decision making, offering teacher training on technology integration, and helping districts link their local computing devices to Kan Ed's Web-based education portals.

Case Report #5

Wayne-Westland Community Schools

Goal: To develop a district-wide instructional leadership initiative.

Wayne-Westland Community Schools is located in the Greater Detroit metropolitan area and serves a total of twenty-five schools, including seventeen elementary schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools and a career technical high school. The district leaders were designing a new district-wide instructional leadership initiative, and Designing Thriving Schools was the process chosen to launch and lead this two-year project.

The technology tools and educational strategies that the teams identified during the opening day card game served as a focus for new initiatives during the project and beyond. Cynthia Swift, Director of Curriculum for the district, believes, *“Wayne-Westland Community Schools’ renewed ability to ‘live the changes that come from creating an entire community focused on learning’ I attribute to the DTS process and its ability to launch this initiative”*.

Outcome: In the three years following the Designing Thriving Schools kick-off of their school improvement project, all twenty-five of the Wayne-Westland Community Schools received North Central Accreditation. In addition, two of the elementary schools have been honored as Blue Ribbon Schools for their academic improvement, and district staff continues to discover new ways to improve their leadership skills with the goal of improving student achievement.

Case Report #6

Leon County Schools

Goal: To clarify a district-wide vision for technology integration.

The Leon County School District in Tallahassee, FL offers a full instructional program to over 34,000 students at forty-eight school and program sites. Leon County Schools is known nationally as an academic leader, with four high schools being named to Newsweek’s “America’s Best High Schools” list in 2006.

Eighteen months after the event, Mr. Jorge Ortega, Director of School Improvement, who organized the event for sixty principals and central office administrators, stated, *“Several ground-breaking events made it evident that our goals to clarify our vision for technology integration, and produce clear action steps to ensure classroom teacher engagement, had been achieved through the impetus of the Designing Thriving Schools process”*.

Outcome:

Within one month, the district approved the appointment of a new Instructional Technology Coordinator and created positions for four technology integration specialists. Staff development became a primary focus of the new district Technology Plan, with technology purchases centered around the integration of instructional goals and organizational strategies.

Case Report #7

Oakland Schools Career Focused Education

Goal: To create a unified vision of countywide Career Focused Education, integrating academic learning and work place skills.

Four technical campuses operate to deliver the Career Focused Education Curriculum to high school students of the county's twenty-eight school districts. The central office administration of Oakland Schools (ISD) has direct responsibility for operations, aligning instruction and curriculum, and coordinating career development initiatives. Oakland Schools looked to the Designing Thriving School Process for the structure of the two day Summer Institute wherein faculty from all campuses came together to clarify a countywide vision for career focused education.

Dr. Dan Austin, Deputy Superintendent describes how Designing Thriving Schools met their expectations: "The ability of the game to produce deep dialogue between teachers, building administrators and central office is brilliant. The "right on" strategies and technology tools described on the cards laid a strong foundation that reinforced our efforts to create productive 21st Century workers *and* learners."

Outcome: Participants opened their minds to new standards and pedagogies to help integrate academic content with workplace technology. Over the following school year, staff used Michigan Curriculum Framework Benchmarks, National Teaching Standards for Career and Technical Education, National Technology Integration Standards and their own ISO 9001 Quality Certification standards as guidelines to create an extensive repertoire of methods, strategies and resources for their classrooms. The Oakland Technical Campuses serve as a model for high skill, high tech programs throughout the state.