



Leading the Way to Sustainable 1:1 eLearning



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– Dr. Manuel L. Isquierdo
Superintendent
Sunnyside Unified School District

THE PASSION TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

Project RED, a national research consortium, believes that technology-transformed schools—those with properly implemented, fully integrated technology programs—are successfully addressing some of the biggest challenges our nation faces. Sunnyside Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona, is turning the vision of Project RED and Intel's K-12 Computing Blueprint into a reality in remarkable ways, impacting every facet of its community—from teachers and students, to parents and state and local business. This is the story of a fully engaged transformation that demonstrates the positive impact of technology on teaching and learning, community engagement, and most of all, the power of passionate, strategic commitment and unwavering leadership to change young lives.

FIRST STEPS: PROJECT GRADUATION

In 2004, Johns Hopkins University labeled Sunnyside as a dropout factory. In 2007, newly appointed Superintendent Dr. Manuel L. Isquierdo faced the challenge head-on and Project Graduation: The Digital Advantage was born. The project motivated and rewarded students with laptop computers for achievement of the "four As": attendance, achievement, extracurricular activity, and attitude. In keeping with Isquierdo's strategic and inclusive approach to educational challenges, Project Graduation: The Digital Advantage is a multi-phased, research-based effort aimed at preventing high school dropouts and significantly increasing the graduation rate. It includes a site-based graduation plan, a

comprehensive attendance component, credit recovery, advisory, and a focus on seniors and freshmen, and assists eighth graders with the transition to high school. It also includes the ¿Dónde Estás? dropout recovery initiative—an innovative outreach program for those who did not complete their K-12 education—using community-wide marketing to inform eligible participants, welcoming dropouts back to school, and allowing them to complete graduation requirements through an online accreditation program.

The Digital Advantage resulted in a commitment of over \$1.1 million from community and corporate sponsors. Local business partners supply hotspots, providing free wireless access to students and families, and helping those who cannot afford home Internet access.

Project Graduation: The Digital Advantage served as a catalyst in moving the district from its image as a dropout factory to that of a full-scale, tech-savvy 1:1 school district.

STRATEGIC THINKING ABOUT STIMULUS

When the Obama administration made Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus dollars available for school districts, Sunnyside had a choice. They could—as many other districts did—use the funding to address existing shortages and budget gaps. Or, they could strategize ways that the stimulus funds could move their educational vision forward. Sunnyside saw the opportunity to move toward sustainable 1:1 eLearning and the choice was made.

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Superintendent, Sunnyside Unified School District



All aspects of implementation were considered and planned for. Staffing appropriately was critical to ensuring program success. Specialists in instructional technology were hired, and one teacher in each school stepped out of the classroom to receive special training on using technology effectively. These trained teachers then took on the role of coaching others. Internal resources were refocused to provide the necessary support. Teachers were dedicated to 1:1 classrooms in a pilot implementation, and time was spent to prepare them.

Care was taken to get a commitment throughout the organization and wider community—from the board to teachers to parents. The district also included a strong change management component in the 1:1 initiative, specifically targeting principals at all grade levels.

Though a strong foundation had been established within the community with the Digital Advantage program, taking the next step brought its own challenges. Isquierdo and his colleagues began by assessing the opportunity; examining research, such as the Project RED report; reviewing best practices in the Intel K-12 Computing Blueprint; preparing for new pedagogy with the help of Intel® Teach; and learning from the wider education community on the Internet.

This was not a scholarly exercise but a deeply pragmatic one—the district sought answers that would improve teaching and learning outcomes, while setting the schools on a path for sustainable technology integration. The district believed that technology could not only level the playing field for low-income districts, but also accelerate its goal to improve student achievement.

THE FUNDING CHALLENGE

The State of Arizona ranks near the bottom of the U.S. on funding for students. The district also faced serious local economic conditions with an 82% poverty level. Stimulus dollars were a valuable contribution, but the district knew that a sustainable program would require additional funding. Sunnyside had established partnerships with corporate sponsors who had supported the Digital Advantage program, and now had a vested interest in seeing Sunnyside students graduate. Additional funds were secured through Ed Jobs funds, and other local, state, or national grant opportunities. Part of Sunnyside’s success is its willingness to tackle hard issues, such as funding, with perseverance and creativity and, more importantly, a commitment to align the resources to the mission of 1:1 eLearning across the community.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A critical element for the successful 1:1 program at Sunnyside has been professional development. The district started by increasing support resources in IT, but soon realized that this in itself would not be sufficient to achieve its educational goals. It then focused on classroom pedagogy, using technology coaches and specially trained teacher facilitators. These designated coaches set up a framework for transforming classrooms from teacher-centric to student-centric environments.

Sunnyside drew on the resources of an Arizona State University NEXT/TAP grant and the Intel Teach program to improve coaching for classroom teachers integrating technology into instructional design. "With exceptional partnerships, such as that offered by Intel, we provided multiple levels of professional development to teachers throughout the summer, and recently kicked off our second year with the vigor of unparalleled positive teacher energy," says Mary Veres, Sunnyside's assistant director of Information Technologies.

CROSS-CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Sunnyside's 1:1 classrooms are encouraged to use technology across the curriculum. Technology plays a strong role in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction, as well as in interventions for struggling students. The district has invested in online courseware at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, for use with regular blended classes, as well as for targeted credit and mathematics skills recovery. Plans are being made to expand the online course offerings to include electives for upper level students, and to expand anywhere-anytime offerings with specific focus on targeted, technology-assisted interventions.

LEADING AN EMPOWERED COMMUNITY

Strong leadership has been a key factor in Sunnyside's success. This close-knit region responded to Isquierdo's passionate concern for the lives of their children and the future of the community. With the inclusion of teachers and parents in the process of change, the vision spread swiftly. Isquierdo credits the foresight and courage of a governing board that urged him to look closely at the community and its particular needs, and to take risk. "When everybody was cutting back and saying change can't be achieved in this economy, we determined to target 1:1 eLearning and to continue moving forward." This economically disadvantaged community saw the benefits and came together to support the district's educational plan and its vision that technology access would fundamentally change teaching and learning and give unprecedented opportunities to students.

While strategy is important, Isquierdo also stresses the importance of learning by doing. Improving student outcomes was not something that could wait for the perfect plan or perfect infrastructure; there was too much at stake. "We accelerated our expectation of what we could achieve in bridging the digital divide, along with the economic divide, achievement divide, and college divide." The schools engaged with 1:1 learning, assessed results, and redirected their course of action as necessary. He is well aware of the urgency of change management in urban education. "If a tire blows on a busy highway, are you going to talk about it, or pull over and change the tire?"

Achieving excellent results to date has only inspired Sunnyside District to go further. "We've only scratched the surface in the classroom," says Isquierdo, "We need to provide access to virtual learning anytime, anywhere, and to start looking at time—at the class day—and teaching differently."

K-12 COMPUTING BLUEPRINT

This site provides a valuable resource for schools and districts who want to deploy and sustain a 1:1 eLearning program. It features step-by-step guidance in the areas of policy, leadership, funding, digital content, infrastructure, and professional development, as well as news, blogs, articles, and in-depth resources.

www.k12blueprint.com

PROJECT RED

Project RED (Revolutionizing Education) conducts research across the U.S. on how technology is integrated into teaching and learning.

www.ProjectRED.org

FROM DROPOUT FACTORY TO TECH-SAVVY

The human impact for Sunnyside has been dramatic—showing an entire student body that 1:1 eLearning can change their lives, their families' lives, and the process of teaching and learning. The measurable outcomes have been equally vital for continued board support. Says Isquierdo, "In the end, it has to be about data, learning, and college outcomes; strategically measuring investment in learning and teaching; and especially, graduation." The district has gone from zero to 10,000 computers dedicated to 1:1 eLearning, the dropout rate is lower than it has ever been, and graduation numbers have increased steadily over the last four years.

There is no turning back for Sunnyside. The leadership team is committed to Isquierdo's vision in turning what was once labeled a dropout factory into a tech-savvy district. The district passed a bond in recent elections that includes \$27 million for school technology, ensuring that funding will be available to strengthen and grow its 1:1 initiatives. Veres sums up the commitment and community spirit behind Sunnyside's transformation, "Our leadership team is committed. Because everyone shares the same vision for the students at Sunnyside, we have been able to move with unusual speed to ramp up the 1:1 program."



GETTING STARTED

Every 1:1 eLearning plan will be unique to the district or school that implements it. Here are a few tips that may help you to move forward.

- 1. Learn from others:** There are many excellent resources and tools available, from research to planning guides on how to implement 1:1 initiatives.
- 2. Strategize and act:** Planning is critical, but there is a lot to be learned by doing. A pilot in a classroom or grade can get you started, and give you the opportunity to evaluate progress and adapt as needed.
- 3. Include all stakeholders:** Board members, parents, local business, community organizations, administrators, teachers, and students can all contribute to your success, and need to be prepared for the transformation that 1:1 eLearning and technology can bring to teaching, learning, and student outcomes.
- 4. Communicate:** Keeping all participants informed with strong, simple messages that support your vision and practice will help you to get buy-in, manage change, and sustain support.
- 5. Measure results:** You will need to demonstrate outcomes to sustain your program over time, and continue to secure funding, set measurable goals, and collect and assess data.
- 6. Think sustainable:** Stimulus funding and grants can jumpstart a 1:1 eLearning program, but training teachers, technology coaches, and parents; establishing partnerships with local businesses; and reallocating resources can help sustain it.

Learn more about the K-12 Computing Blueprint at: www.k12blueprint.com

Learn more about Project RED at: www.ProjectRED.org

Visit Sunnyside District's 1:1 computing site at: www.sunnysideud.k12.az.us/one-one-computing

Find out more about Intel® Teach at: www.intel.com/education/teach/us

