Future Ready Schools—NJ Collective Impact Success Story

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This paper comments on the development of Future Ready Schools   New Jersey a state-sponsored, voluntary, school-level program and its shift to digital schools. Through collective impact and the NSF collaboration framework, the program engaged hundreds of educational stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive system around educational technology and future readiness towards personalized learning for all students in the state. James Lipuma as principal investigator of this program utilized Interdisciplinary Participatory Strategic Planning to build the network and community of practice necessary to create the elements of the certification program. This paper presents the resulting certification program indicator rubrics built upon the National Future Ready Framework. The resulting system includes commitments from   district and school leaders, collaborative teams charged with gathering and assessing evidence, and peer-reviewed by experts in three themes: Leadership, Education/Classroom Practice, and Technology Support and Services. The indicators are both best practices and rubrics for self-assessment and planning by superintendents, technology coordinators, and educators. The common elements identified across all this work were a clear shared vision with details in planning documents, a collection of indicators that outlined the goals and metrics, as well as

coordinate the team of partners involved in the process. The work needed to recruit and build a community of practice to attain the goal of the school-level program. The members of the community of educational professionals led by district superintendents would be the ones to identify and clarify the elements of future readiness appropriate for the state in conjunction with the many stakeholders engaged with school systems including students, parents, teachers, media specialists, IT supervisors, school and district administrators, government officials, and corporate and private foundation representative.

As the organizer, NJIT served as the backbone organization in the collective impact efforts making Lipuma's team responsible for the management of the stakeholders and administrators and other governmental representatives recruited to complete the work. New Jersey groups including the Association of School Administrators (NJASA), Education Association (NJEA), Principal and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA), Association of School Business Officials (NJASBO) and Association of School Librarians (NJASL) joined the coalition of educational organizations led by the NJDOE and NJSBA.

The design and development work led to an initial rollout in 2017. This was followed by 3-years of pilot testing and refinement by the over 500 stakeholders as part of the committees led by school administrators and other educational professionals. At this same time, the national FRs program was developing additional tools and materials for school leers to be used across America. The work in NJ promoted the development of a more robust national district leader program.

eaders also collaborate with the community they serve and maintain a laser-like focus on long-term financial, pedagogical, and political sustainability. Ultimately, FRS District Leaders systematically plan and work to enact policies that ensure instructional practices maximize student learning (FRS, 2021).

By the end of the 3-year pilot program, FRS-NJ had been shown to be an effective program that had wide interest. Nearly 500 schools in 150 districts had participated in some way in the programs with over 400 earning some type of certification at the varying levels. At that time, NJ faced the shift to online schooling that accompanied the spread of the coronavirus. Since the pilot had

groups as FRS-NJ. In this way, the work of the program could continue and even reach more people with their actions. Moreover, this transition served as a case for other districts who may want to use the core principles of future readiness but adjust and integrate them into local or regional programs that already exist.

FRS-NJ Pilot Project

Lipuma was funded to manage the design and development pilot for the FRS-NJ project. The major obstacle was to transform the diverse collection of nearly 200 indicators that existed in the national framework into ones that made sense at the school level in NJ. The national FRS framework was built upon research-based best practices and provided a collection of areas for superintendents to consider when planning with their executive teams. The framework aimed to help districts prepare for personalized student learning through areas of study termed gears. The NJDOE sought to attain technology readiness in all school districts by providing them with the necessary

well as satisfaction with the results of the process. Those schools that simply assigned the process to a single person to fill out did not attain certification.

The District Commitment Phase ensures that school districts are dedicated to supporting their school's efforts and that these efforts are collaborative. Once a district is committed, schools in the district can declare their participation and apply for certification.

should be inclusive and collaborative, and consist of members including at least one board member, the superintendent, the technology director or other IT personnel, a librarian/media specialist, a student representative, and other dedicated leaders and educators.

The district then conducts a self-assessment to establish an understanding of where they stand concerning the Future Ready Framework and submits a pre-application to FRS-NJ to declare their commitment. District commitment can be declared at any time on a rolling basis.

The School Participation Phase features the establishment of the school-level Future Ready team and the official declaration of a school's participation in the certification program. The *School Certification* Phase enables individual schools to apply for certification by taking actions that lead to success through the Future Ready Schools - New Jersey Indicators of Future Readiness

(AEE, 2021). Each indicator is designed by a task force of NJ educators, leaders, and stakeholders to provide a framework for schools' efforts to best prepare their students for success in college, career, and citizenship, connects educators with potential resources to do so, and provides the recognition due for success through certification.

There were two unexpected and significant results for the pilot program related to the description of the phases. The first was

Figure 1

Numbers of Relevant Participation Per Year

Year	Committed Districts	Participating Schools	Volunteers
2017	32	68	100
2018	94	265	250
2019	137	443	500

**Technology Support and
Services Theme Indicators**

Access Point Signal Saturation
Data Governance
Data Security and Privacy
Intranet/Internet Network Availability
Operational Best Practices
Adequate Support and Services for Digital Learning
Data-Informed Decision-Making Process
Inventory Management Solution
Process for Adequate and Responsive Technical Support
Proper Decommissioning
Servers
Staff Awareness
Lifespan and Refresh Cycle Planning
Process for Effectively and Efficiently Vetting New Infrastructure
Technology
Process for Effectively and Efficiently Vetting New Instructional
Technology
Equitable Access

These priority indicators serve as both a guide for what the research shows as best practices as well as a starting point for each district to customize their work to their community needs. Several superintendents have reported the benefits of the indicator framework for initiating and focusing discussions during planning. Beyond these level one indicators, the program also had items as level two and three priorities to help distinguish their significance.

In addition, having the indicators vetted by NJSBA and NJDOE allowed the school and district administrators and the members of their team to have better support when asking for improvements or developing technology plans. Additionally, districts reported that the common planning time for education led to positive attitudes and more effective curricular

districts as they moved forward with the process of developing their future-ready school.

Benefits of interdisciplinary participatory planning

Many district administration teams were essential to our success by providing insights, championing the value of the program, and helping us avoid problems or potential conflicts and obstacles.

One example of this is the district administrative team from Morris Plains school system who was an early adopter and speaker at many events. They shared their process and helped other districts by answering questions and providing support.

> initiative to now, the program has really strengthened our organization, increased awareness within our community and bridged a network of resources that we can tap into that will only benefit us
> (Jenkins, 2018).

Establishing and building a partnership

was facilitated with three interconnected steps: connection, engagement, and collaboration (Lipuma, 2019). At the largest scale, the connection phase starts by bringing awareness of our program and leads to interactions either actively or passively with the community.

As interaction increases, awareness moves to recognition and eventually to a connection. Building on the connection phase, the next stage is engagement, which begins with initiating a dialog. Then you establish a

common ground.

Finally, they will determine an

(Lipuma & Leon, 2019) to develop a match for their level of engagement. Depending on the degree of engagement you can have simple partnerships and common events or move towards true collaboration.

The first step to effective collaboration is for the actors to clarify their roles both as individuals and leaders of an organization, identifying common action, purpose, and vision. As your degree of interaction increases the type and level of collaborative work becomes clear. Whether you are acting as an individual or the leader of an organization your mutually reinforcing activities yielded by your engagement with your collaborative partners can result in a variety of situations. Public-private partnerships, grant collaborations, shared services, training, and many other types of collaboration can be the result of this deeper extension of our engagement facilitating the discussion of complex issues and systems (Kenia & Kramer, 2013) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Types of Collaboration

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