

Customer Case Study

District: Affton School District
State: Missouri
District Size: 2,500 Students
Economically Disadvantaged: 40%



Affton School District

Implementing a 1-to-1 Without Creating a Digital Divide

Technology was in a sorry state at Affton School District in 2012: The infrastructure was fragile, there was struggling wireless connectivity in the school, students were using antiquated computers, and instruction lacked effective use of technology tools.

The technology staff rose to the challenge.

“We did 10 years of work in three years,” says Robert Dillon, the Director of Technology and Innovation, and author of *Engage, Empower, Energize: Leading Tomorrow’s Schools Today* (Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2014) and *Leading Connected Classrooms* (Corwin, 2015). “Our goal was not to just catch up but to jump ahead.”

And jump ahead they did. They laid down the proper foundation, purchased devices, and partnered with BrightBytes, an educational research and analysis organization, to help teachers learn how to infuse digital learning into their lessons in an authentic, engaging way.

A Device for Everyone

Affton launched its 1-to-1 program in August of 2014 by handing out Dell Chromebooks to all of its 800 high school students. The plan was to go 1-to-1 at the middle school in two years, but the high school program went so well that the district launched the middle school 1-to-1 program in August 2015.

Throughout the 1-to-1 rollouts, Dillon and his staff were cognizant of the fact that close to half of the district qualifies for free and reduced meals, and around 10 percent do not have home Internet access. “Some of our older students’ parents work second shifts. The older kids take care of their siblings and then do their homework. They can’t go to McDonalds or the library at 9 pm,” he says. “We had to find a way to provide 24/7 access for everyone.”

Then, Dillon attended an EdTech conference in 2014, discovered Kajeet, and knew he’d found a solution.

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Access for All

Now families without Internet access can take home a Kajeet SmartSpot, which lets them connect to a 4G network for free. Dillon and his staff find out which students need to borrow SmartSpots through various sources. For instance, he met a grandmother at a parent meeting who told him she was raising two girls and needed help. School counselors also provide him with names of families who are lacking Internet access. Last but not least, teachers keep track of students who don’t turn in homework assignments and learn of the need within their classes as well.

“Once we know there’s a need, we call folks and tell them about the SmartSpots. We let them tell us if they’re interested,” says Dillon. “This has worked out very well for us.”

The only rule for borrowing a SmartSpot is that students need to check-in with the tech department after a couple of weeks. This is for a couple of purposes. One is to make sure that the devices are optimally functioning, and the second is an opportunity to check with students about their success at school. “As a former middle school principal for 15 years, I know that you can’t surround children in need with enough adults. We can have a quick conversation with a child when they return the SmartSpot, but the point of that talk is more about checking in on an emotional level.”

Because the technology staff has little day-to-day connection with students, Dillon asks his seven-person team to handle check-ins. He likes for them to remember why they’re doing the work they do.

Creating Smart Digital Citizens

One reason the technology staff likes Kajeet is that its management console allows them to easily turn the SmartSpots on and off at certain times and check-in on student use. “We get notifications from Kajeet if something is unusual, but we work from a basis of trust. Our filtering is invisible but compliant,” says Dillon.

If a teacher or student asks him to open up Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, he’s happy to comply. In fact, the district was recognized as a Common Sense Digital Citizenship: Certified District in 2014 for teaching its students to be safe, smart, and ethical digital citizens. Teachers go through digital citizenship modules developed by Dillon’s staff and incorporate what they learn into their lessons when it makes sense. By modeling smart online behavior, they help students understand the importance of using technology safely and respectfully.

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Lessons Learned

By working with Kajeet, Dillon has been pleasantly surprised by what he's learned regarding student usage.

First of all, students are using their SmartSpots both later at night and more productively than expected. "We used to turn them off at midnight, but a student told me he didn't get home from work until 10:30 p.m. and asked if we could keep them open until 1 a.m.," he says. "We thought there'd be more streaming traffic, but the students are doing what they're supposed to be doing. They don't abuse them."

Another surprise is that having Internet access opens doors for the entire family. Parents work on resumes; younger siblings conduct research.

What's Next for Affton?

Dillon says his biggest challenge is to make sure that every project he starts is sustainable. Innovation is tough, and he wants to be sure that communication stays strong and the culture continues to change. "We have to keep the energy high," he says. "And we need to celebrate our successes."

For the 2015-2016 school year, his goals are simple: Make sure the 1-to-1 at the middle school is successful, provide mentoring and additional support for the high school teachers who didn't lean into the 1-to-1 shift last year, and launch a makerspace for grades K through 2.

"We made huge strides last year in shifting a number of learning spaces. We turned computer labs into open idea spaces and libraries into design studios. Now we're ready to move what we've done into some of our classrooms." Creating innovative learning spaces has become a passion of his, particularly because these redesigned rooms pay off in student happiness.

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