PROFILE

NAME: Tuscaloosa City Schools
LOCATION: Tuscaloosa, AL
WEBSITE:
https://www.tuscaloosacityschools.com/

CHALLENGE

Tuscaloosa City Schools wanted to select the best display for the district to standardize on to help increase interactivity and student engagement. Key components when deciding on the technology were image size, simplicity, network management, and Chromebook collaboration.

SOLUTION

Standardizing on the Epson BrightLink ultra short-throw interactive display to provide students with large, bright collaborative workspaces well-suited for modern classrooms.

A Districtwide Digital Transformation

An F4 tornado tore through the heart of Tuscaloosa, Alabama and left a trail of destruction across the city. Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS), serving 10,600 students, felt massive losses throughout its 21 school buildings and had to completely rebuild two of its facilities.

When the schools were rebuilt, they became models for the district's future. In addition to the construction and renovations taking place, the district took this opportunity to design a curriculum that better met students' needs and integrated technology to make coming to school more exciting for students.

As part of this rebuilding, the Board of Education for TCS passed the Integrated Curriculum Facilities Demographic Strategic Plan. The plan laid out a structural framework to reshape how the district approached instruction and took a deep look at educational programs. The superintendent's recommendations highlighted investments in staff, curriculum, teaching, and learning. The plan that emerged was shaped by the need to provide spaces where students could work together and learn the skills needed for future jobs.

Since the plan passed, the district has made several changes in its classrooms. The district built five new facilities and renovated existing buildings to ensure that it was adding additional learning spaces. "We redesigned the libraries as discovery centers to make it much more open for students to move around and collaborate," said Chris Jenks, director of technology at TCS. In addition to creating new learning spaces for students, part of the plan was to complete a digital transformation across the school system.

Pilot Classrooms

To help prioritize what would be best for the school community – both teachers and students – the district designed pilot classrooms to help determine which technologies would truly transform learning

in its classrooms. The district tested different displays, including projection displays and flat panels. They were looking for the most practical product that would have the greatest impact in classrooms.

After the pilot, the district made the decision to standardize on Epson's BrightLink interactive displays. "BrightLink interactive displays are easy to support and great in terms of flexibility," said Jenks. The BrightLink ultimately became a key piece of their digital transformation.

"We piloted flat panels, but the display is very limited," said Jenks. "Ultimately, we chose the BrightLink display because it offers vibrant images, versatility, interactivity and a great warranty."

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- CHRIS JENKS, DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY

Choosing the Right Technology

The district has installed approximately 800 BrightLink projectors in instructional spaces and is expected to install 200 more. "The image size we get with the BrightLink is amazing," said Jenks. "It is such an easy process to install and mount the projector. In return, our classrooms have these big, bright images."

Teachers throughout the district have shared how much they like the brightness of the display and its ability to increase student engagement through interactivity. "It's been great getting feedback from teachers and hearing about the impact the projectors are having in their classrooms," said Jenks.

Investing in Staff

In addition to standardizing on the BrightLink displays as part of every classroom's technology offering, the district strengthened Wi-Fi connectivity throughout every building and started a 1:1 student device initiative. The BrightLink's ability to share content from four devices simultaneously has led to more collaboration by students.

As with anything new, if the staff isn't trained, implementation can suffer. To help support its teachers and help them use the technologies provided in the classroom with confidence, the district offers professional development courses. As part of this training, they've also hired instructional technology coaches who observe teachers in their classrooms and then discuss ways to better integrate the technology in their curriculum.

Moving to Laser-Focused Learning

As technology continues to evolve, TCS has been able to rely on Epson to consistently create products that exceed expectations and meet the needs of the district's digital transformation.

TCS is continuing to work towards standardizing on the BrightLink Interactive display throughout the district, and as they order additional BrightLinks they are now switching to laser models. "I'm really excited about the laser projectors because they provide incredibly vibrant images even in ambient light," said Jenks.

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