




NEW TECH NETWORK

Reynoldsburg City Schools: A District Vision of Deeper Learning: Structured, Purposeful, and Lasting





Just 15 miles east of Columbus, Ohio, sits Reynoldsburg City Schools (RCS). This 7,500-student district, served through five high school academies, four middle schools, and six elementary schools, emphasizes deeper learning in every classroom every day.

In 2018, RCS Superintendent Dr. Melvin J. Brown and his team placed graduate outcomes at the center of the district's strategic planning process. "We knew when we made our new five-year strategic plan that we wanted to expand what we do with project-based learning and deeper learning to reach all schools and all students, regardless of whether they're STEM or not," said RCS's Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Jocelyn Cosgrave. "That led us down the path of creating a district-wide Portrait of a Graduate for all K-12 students. The competencies are shared among all buildings in the district," Cosgrave explained.



Superintendent Brown observed that "Prior to (our partnership with New Tech Network) we were just doing the things we've always done, while at the same time, our local industry was evolving and changing— and we were not changing with it. We recognized we had to do better to prepare kids for the reality they were going to walk into after high school and beyond." His contagious dedication to real readiness, illustrated in the Portrait of a Graduate, anchored the strategic plan.

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- Dr. Melvin J. Brown

"Parents and community members were passionate about our Portrait of a Graduate because they realized those were the skills that students would need to be successful," Cosgrave shared.

To realize the Portrait of a Graduate, every school in the district committed to implementing deeper learning practices in every classroom every day;

instead of impacting just one or two schools, RCS's ambition was for a fully transformed K-12 system. "Even though not every RCS school is a full New Tech Network (NTN) implementation, our Portrait of a Graduate reflects many similar outcomes to the NTN learning outcomes,"

said Nadine Phillips, teacher at **The 9X Impact Academy**, the first full NTN-implementation school in the district. "We're trying to create students that are well-rounded citizens, regardless of if they're in elementary, middle, or high school." "It's a very different conversation in our district now," says Cosgrave. "Deeper learning is what we're embracing in all aspects of our teaching and learning here."



Deeper Learning Professional Development for Leaders and Teachers

"When we approached all of the action steps for our strategic plan, it became a personal passion of mine to make sure that we weren't just building an outline, but we were building a sustainable plan and that we were strategic about how we were rolling out the support," said Cosgrave. RCS leadership understood that any sustainable plan began with focused professional development for leaders and teachers. Dr. Cosgrave acknowledged that "RCS prides itself on being an innovative district, but

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was ready to take on that work."

- Jude Garnier

to develop a tiered plan to support each school. Four RCS schools moved directly to implementation of the New Tech Model, while each of the other schools engaged in a differentiated trajectory focused on deeper learning.

Through more than 20 years of experience, NTN has learned that one of the keys to successfully implementing the New Tech Network Model is intentional leadership with a united focus on transformation. NTN's partnership with a school district begins at the leadership level. RCS school leaders participated in workshops, collaborated

teachers have shared it was innovation with no support. We wanted to make sure they had the support needed to implement New Tech with fidelity."

As a result, Dr. Cosgrave worked closely with NTN

with other NTN leaders, and received one-on-one support, facilitated through specific NTN induction and implementation experiences: Leadership Institute, Residency, New School Training, and coaching. "It was evident that RCS leaders placed a heavy emphasis on providing quality adult learning to their staff," said Jude Garnier, NTN senior director, district and leadership development. "Part of our work at NTN is developing leaders that listen to the needs of their staff, students and community, and Reynoldsburg was ready to take on that work."

Garnier continued, "NTN organizes leadership support in ways that reflect the kinds of learning experiences school leaders need to provide for teachers. This means providing a space where leaders can easily surface challenges, explore new ideas and have their thinking pushed." Breen Slauter, principal at Hannah Ashton Middle School, echoed the significance of professional feedback outside of the district structure. "Our cohort with Jude and the time spent with her is invaluable beyond measure," said Slauter. "To sit down with someone, who is not an evaluator of you, who doesn't provide you with test scores or assessments, and to be able to voice challenges and questions to receive feedback and resources has been invaluable to me. It has caused me to rethink and reframe my thinking as a leader."

Teacher training for implementing schools begins at Teacher Residency, which has a focus on culture and norms. NTN puts a significant emphasis on school and classroom culture in all professional development and coaching. It's in the realm of culture that schools and districts often see the first



About Reynoldsburg City Schools

7,573

Students

05

High School Academies

04

Middle Schools

06

Elementary Schools

results. "NTN places the first, and heaviest emphasis on building and maintaining a culture in the classroom that supports social-emotional learning, connectedness, and positive relationships," said Sarah Leiker, New Tech Network school development coach. "A healthy classroom culture is where deeper learning can happen, and our full-scale implementations in Reynoldsburg have distinctly different classroom cultures."

For students who may have had a less-than-positive experience with school, RCS teachers and leaders see them engage more fully in the classroom as a result of the work. "I see instances where kids who are ready to check out don't check out because, one, they have this relationship with teachers in their classrooms, and two, they're learning things in those classrooms they are genuinely interested in," said Superintendent Brown.

This work has enabled the RCS district to address inherent inequities and to develop methods that engage and meet all students' needs.

Following Teacher Residency, teachers participate in New School Training, the foundational training for teachers implementing the New Tech Model. At New School Training, teachers experience professional development and coaching to support the move to PBL as the primary instructional strategy in a culture that empowers students. To support teachers' ongoing growth in the NTN Model, each implementing school is assigned an NTN School Development Coach. "One of the best pieces of support I receive from NTN is the

knowledgeable, unbiased dialogue I get to have with our coaches," said Shannon Hunt-Stokey, a data facilitation coach for RCS. "If I'm struggling with helping a certain teacher understand a concept, I surface those challenges to Kelley (Kelley McKaig, NTN coach), because she's an expert in the models of the learning cycle, specifically deeper learning, and she coaches me to be a better coach."

For the eleven remaining schools on a different development path, NTN delivered a series of three trainings designed to help schools shift towards deeper learning classrooms:

- School Design Academy - building a clear purpose for innovation
- New Tech Instructional Practices - learner-centered instructional strategies and outcomes
- New Tech Leadership Practices - practices to lead innovation

These trainings helped teachers and leaders move the Portrait of a Graduate competencies from a theoretical idea to daily classroom practice. "Gaining familiarity with and being able to put a name to these deeper learning practices for our staff is so valuable," said Summit Road Elementary principal Latasha Turner. "Giving tangible, go-to instructional strategies helps teachers reflect on what the kids engage with and adjust from there. Seeing, and then implementing, these practices, and being able to reflect on the differences has been very beneficial for our teachers."

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To further address the challenge around needing stronger support to sustain innovation, the district strategically placed itself at the center of transformation by repurposing silos of innovation across the district into a single Center for Deeper Learning (CDL). Born from the separated offices of Innovation, Instructional Coaches, and Educational Technology, the CDS unified all supports under a central focus on deeper learning, innovative practices, and instructional supports.

The coaches who are part of the Center for Deeper Learning also receive coaching from NTN through the NTN Coach Development Community (CDC). The NTN CDC creates an opportunity for RCS coaches to develop

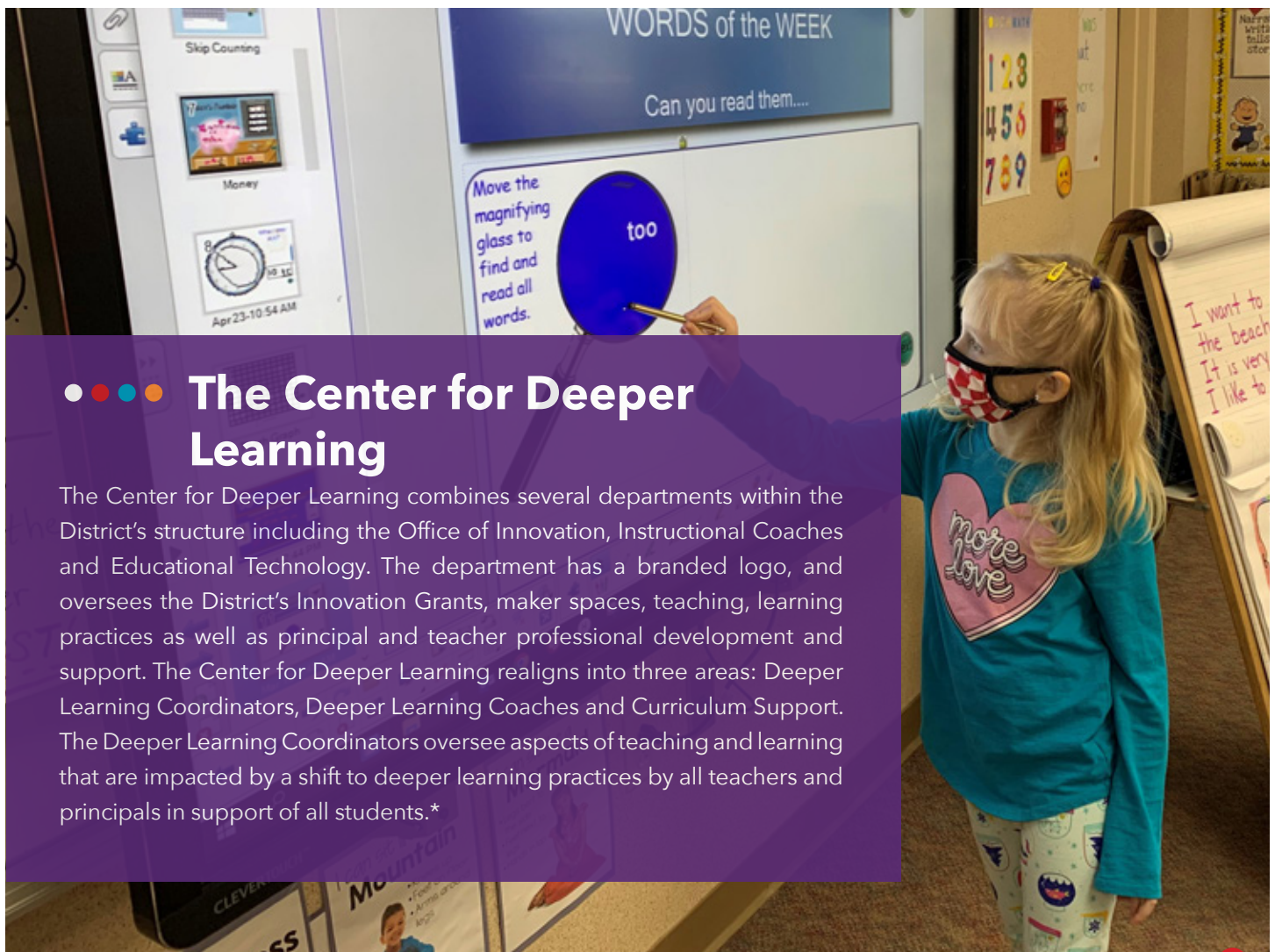
a comprehensive understanding of deeper learning and the practice of instructional coaching.

Shannon Hunt-Stokey shares that the on-the-ground support has helped build relationships with her colleagues, but the training in coaching style has allowed her to elevate her team building within the district coaching team. "Our partnership has led me to ask, 'How can I develop skills within myself to replicate this style when someone I may not have a relationship with needs my support?' I want to be to my teachers what NTN coaches are to me."

The combination of these adult learning opportunities for teachers provided a common foundation for all staff. "The NTN adult learning training

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The Center for Deeper Learning

The Center for Deeper Learning combines several departments within the District's structure including the Office of Innovation, Instructional Coaches and Educational Technology. The department has a branded logo, and oversees the District's Innovation Grants, maker spaces, teaching, learning practices as well as principal and teacher professional development and support. The Center for Deeper Learning realigns into three areas: Deeper Learning Coordinators, Deeper Learning Coaches and Curriculum Support. The Deeper Learning Coordinators oversee aspects of teaching and learning that are impacted by a shift to deeper learning practices by all teachers and principals in support of all students.*

program is so good that our teachers leave feeling very empowered," said Cosgrave. "We've had teachers say 'these are some of the best professional development experiences I've ever received.' They love that they know it's not going away because this is something we're doing together as a district long-term. And I think they're more engaged because they know our commitment to the work."



Looking to the Future: What's Next for RCS

The schools in RCS have been engaged in the partnership with New Tech Network for more than two years and are witnessing changes in student culture. From a teacher's perspective, the shift towards more deeper learning practices can only be positive. "For me, deeper learning happens when you really stretch the students' mind through inquiry and the projects that they're doing," said John Downing, humanities teacher at *The 9X Impact Academy*. "I don't see how that could be a downside to any school district when you're trying to push your students forward, and the results speak for themselves. They start to perform better on tests, even state tests, because they know how to problem-solve and process information, which is a result of them stretching their minds."

Dr. Cosgrave and her leadership team continue to work

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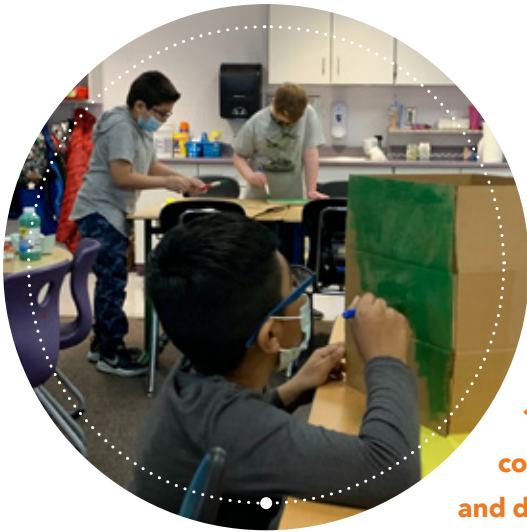


with principals and school leaders to determine the next move for each school. "The final tier is full-scale implementations," shared Cosgrave, where the school works fully within the NTN project-based

learning model, with integrated courses and a focus on assessment practices geared towards learning outcomes. RCS currently has four full NTN implementation schools in the district and is considering expansion with a fifth. "Almost half our schools have decided on full-scale

implementation. And those include middle schools and high schools right now with the potential of elementary," said Cosgrave.

As RCS leadership looks to the future, the lean-in attitude towards bringing better learning experiences and building better schools continues as the district plans to work on the evaluation of new implementations and expansions in the district. For Cosgrave, while there's more work to be done, she expressed gratitude at having a partner to guide the work. "We wanted to make sure that we were actually talking the talk and walking the walk, and we couldn't do that without the support of a comprehensive network like New Tech Network."



The origin story for New Tech Network goes back to 1996 in Napa, California where the first school was a collaboration between local entrepreneurs, teachers, and district leadership.



Business leaders felt the high school experience was not helping students develop the collaboration and communication skills they needed, alongside their academic preparation. The start to a completely re-imagined school experience was based on a bold vision. Within a few years, student-centered focus, attention to culture, and pervasive use of project-based learning was the genesis of a new school model. NNTHS attracted national philanthropic support to create what is now New Tech Network, a non-profit organization based in Napa, California. What started as one district-operated high school is now a vibrant network of more than 200 elementary, middle, and high schools in diverse communities across the country and in Australia.

