

Leading Future-Ready Schools

By Eric Sheneringer

Advances in technology continue to impact society in amazing ways. The evolution of the Internet makes it possible for anyone with access to communicate, collaborate, and learn with anyone, at anytime, and from anywhere. Learners today have embraced this digital world and have begun to explore their passions in ways never before imagined. They thrive in this world and find relevance and value through a variety of technology-enabled experiences. Growing up in a digital world has expanded learners' creative boundaries and created new pathways for self-direction (Palfrey and Gasser, 2010). Virtually every facet of society has adapted to these changes in technology, with one major exception – schools.

The majority of schools in this country operate in ways that directly oppose the world in which our learners are growing up. There is an automatic disconnect when students of all grade levels walk into schools, due to the lack of engagement, relevance, meaning, and authentic learning opportunities available in many schools. Our education system has become effective at sustaining a century old model because this model is easy and safe. The resulting conformity has created a learning epidemic among our students, as they see little value in the cookie-cutter learning exercises they are forced to go through each day. The bottom line is that students are bored (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). It is time that we create schools that work for our students, as opposed to models that have traditionally worked well only for adults. Schools and districts need digital leadership.

Digital leadership takes into account recent changes such as ubiquitous connectivity, open-source technology, mobile devices, and personalization. It represents a dramatic shift from the way in which schools have been run and structured for over a century. Digital leadership can be defined as the use of technology and information to establish direction, connect and collaborate with others, and initiate sustainable change. It involves anticipating and enacting the changes necessary to ensure future school success. Digital leadership requires a growth mindset, and an understanding of the technology-supported practices that shift school culture.

[Creating schools that work for students](#) requires digital leaders who articulate a bold vision for change that not only tackles the status quo embedded in the industrialized model of education, but that also sees the inherent value of technology to enhance the teaching and learning process. Many schools are making large investments in infrastructure and mobile technology to support Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) or 1:1 initiatives. This progress is welcomed, but investments in technology must be combined with effective implementation in order for them to improve learning outcomes (ARCC, 2013). School leaders need to be on the forefront of digital transformations to ensure that there is a sustained focus on measurable learning outcomes.

Future Ready schools focus on learning in a digital age and prepare students for today and for the future. A Future Ready school affords students the opportunity to explore concepts at

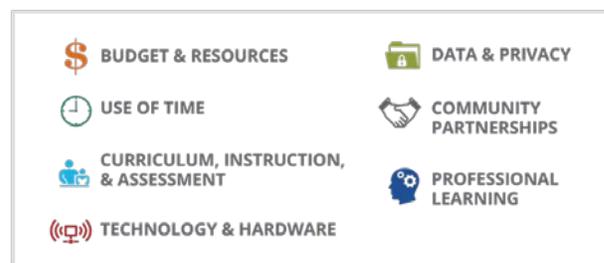
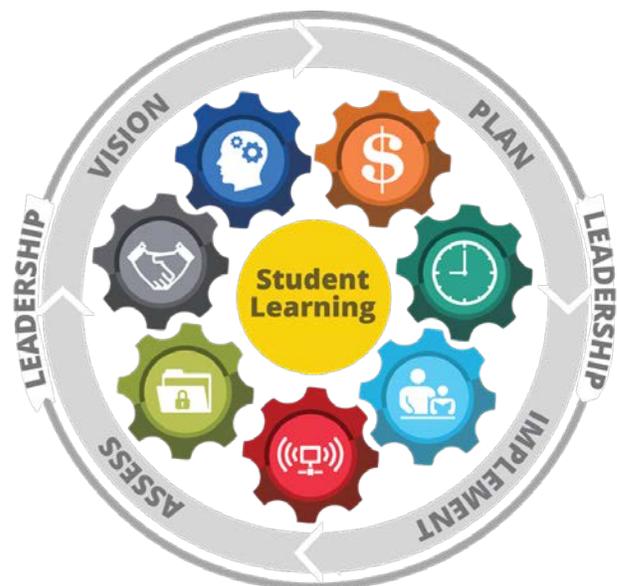
a deep level in order to solve real-world predictable and unpredictable problems. Students are in control of their learning and have access and choice with regard to the digital tools they use to construct new knowledge, demonstrate conceptual mastery aligned to higher standards, and personalize learning. These schools are guided by leaders who implement a bold vision for change, creating schools that focus on improving achievement and preparing learners with the essential skills necessary for success in an ever-growing digital world. Digital initiatives are implemented with proper planning, support, and constant evaluation to ensure a focus on learning and sustainability. Leaders of Future Ready schools use digital media to expand family and community engagement and tell their schools' stories.

The culture of Future Ready schools is developed by building a leadership team, establishing a coherent vision for change, developing a systematic action plan, modeling effective and efficient ways for leaders to leverage digital tools to increase effectiveness, and modeling how teachers can harness tools to support students' learning. Future Ready schools work smarter, not harder, by seeking out natural complements to the work already being done. ICLE's Digital Leadership practice area helps leaders leverage technology to create a culture focused on rigor, relevance and engagement .

DIGITAL LEADERSHIP AND FUTURE READY SCHOOLS

Recently the [U.S. Department of Education](#) and the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#) announced [Future Ready Schools](#) (FRS), which aligns seamlessly with ICLE's Digital Leadership practice areas. FRS is a free, bold new effort to maximize

digital learning opportunities and help school districts move quickly toward preparing students for success in college, a career, and citizenship. Future Ready provides districts with resources and support to ensure that local technology and digital learning plans align with instructional best practices, are implemented by highly trained teachers, and lead to personalized learning experiences for all students, particularly those from traditionally under-served communities. As a coalition partner ICLE is uniquely positioned to assist leaders in transforming their districts to be Future Ready.



Leadership is central to the FRS effort. The [Pillars of Digital Leadership](#) provide a framework that compliments all elements of FRS. Our comprehensive needs

assessment based on the pillars aligns to all areas of the FRS framework and will allow us to develop a customized solution to best meet your needs. With a targeted focus on student learning, our services will help you develop into a successful leader who communicates effectively with all stakeholders and takes control of public relations by becoming the storyteller-in-chief. Sharing your vision for learning in a digital age includes building a community and strengthening relationships with your stakeholders.

THE TIME IS NOW

This effort comes at a critical time. Districts are embracing college and career readiness as the goal for all students, and recognizing the potential of digital tools to help teachers personalize learning. Less than 30 percent of U.S. schools currently have the bandwidth they need to teach using today's technology, but federal and state efforts are expanding this capacity. Within the next five years, at least 99 percent of the nation's students will have access to high-speed Internet in their schools. Such connectivity, along with strategic planning by districts to maximize its availability, has the potential to transform the educational experiences of all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Will your district be ready for this transition? District leaders must respond to these changes with thoughtful planning to align necessary technologies with instructional goals to support teaching, learning, and student engagement.

Is your district or school Future Ready? If not are you primed for a transformation? As a FRS Coalition Partner ICLE is best positioned to help school districts develop a system-wide approach to developing a vision and strategic plan for the effective implementation of digital initiatives.

Our digital leadership solutions focus squarely on enhancing student learning in order to increase achievement. Through our intensive courses led by practitioner pioneers in digital leadership and embedded coaching throughout the process we can help school leaders and educators:

- Integrate technology with purpose by developing quality pedagogical techniques for digital learning
- Increasing capacity for providing effective feedback on digital instruction
- Effectively plan and implement BYOD and 1:1 initiatives
- Empower students to take ownership of their learning in ways that are personalized and individualized
- Develop a vision to create a culture focused on rigor, relevance, and relationships that is enhanced by technology;
- Support teachers in lesson design to develop students' media literacy, digital responsibility, and technology skills, while also supporting critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving, and creativity
- Create structures and supports for engaging learning spaces that reflect the real-world environments students will experience
- Transition to Google Apps for Education (GAFE) and other cloud-based systems
- Improve communications and enhance public relations with parents and the community
- Create your school's positive brand presence
- Build a professional learning plan for your faculty
- Leverage social media to create opportunities for student learning

- Critically vet digital resources to ensure that technology investments are wise

Our comprehensive needs assessment in the area of Digital Leadership will provide your district and or school a baseline as to where you stand in terms of being Future Ready. We will focus on all items of the FRS Framework to ensure that no stone is left unturned. Our leadership courses and embedded coaching provide you with the support you need to lead schools of the future.

To learn more about the International Center for Leadership in Education and our Digital Leadership practice area, visit leadered.com, or call us at 518-399-3776, option 3.

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About the Author

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