

PROFILE

Name: Walled Lake Consolidated School District
Location: Walled Lake, MI

CHALLENGE

Use interactive projection technology to help teachers develop effective, participatory lessons and give students enhanced opportunities to control and interact with academic content.

SOLUTION

Use Epson[®] BrightLink[®] interactive displays and Epson Document Cameras to engage students and support instruction flexibility for whole class and smaller group learning environments.

Earliest Adopter

Technology Pioneer Advocates Deliberate Planning, Thorough Training, and Great Technology, Including Epson Interactive Displays

Even though he was one of the first in the nation to implement a 1:1 laptop program—back in 1999—Mark Hess is a realist on classroom technology.

“Looking back on that pioneer program, I’d like to say it was transformative, but it was not,” he recalls. “We did learn a valuable lesson, however: a device without a plan won’t do anything. It’s not the device, but how we use it.”

Hess, now the Executive Director of Instruction, Technology and Assessment for Walled Lake Consolidated School District outside Detroit, has used his experience to make an astonishing array of educational technology available for his teachers—but you can bet he has a solid plan behind it.

Among his favorite devices: the BrightLink interactive display from Epson.

20 Years of Innovation

In 1999, Hess was one of eight sixth-grade teachers who volunteered for a pilot where every student in their classrooms would be equipped with a Windows laptop. “It was very basic,” he recalls. “We would write in Word rather than in journals. The laptops at that time were slow and heavy, and we didn’t have enough outlets, so we would plan our lessons based on two or three hours of battery life. We were ahead of our time, but we had a visionary in our district who was willing to take risks.



“Here’s the mistake we made, however,” he adds. “We thought that if we put the device in the hands of teachers and students, it would transform our classrooms, and the device itself would do that. Still, it was our first step in envisioning a better curriculum, one that would be interactive, participatory, and far more effective, with our teachers facilitating, rather than controlling learning.”

Today, Hess heads an effort to continuously transform Walled Lake schools. “It’s not without its challenges,” he says. “We have 15,000 students and 19 schools. It takes some effort to get almost 900 teachers moving in the same direction, working toward the same goal, but we start small and take incremental steps.”

For example, in 2014 the district purchased its first Epson BrightLink displays, putting them in pilot classrooms equipped with Chromebooks, Epson DC-12 document cameras, FrontRow sound systems and the ability to record lesson content for students to review at home. “We identified teachers in each building who would be our early adopters and later our digital coaches. We asked them to roll up their sleeves and spend time learning how to develop effective, participatory lessons using

this technology. Once they tasted some success, we knew other teachers would want to learn more, that they would spark a conversation that would build toward better learning.”

The BrightLink, Hess says, is a special device. “It’s something kids can work with together and respond to, use and talk about. It’s the center of a learning ecosystem where the teacher is not the only one controlling the content.”

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—MARK HESS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION, TECHNOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT, WALLED LAKE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

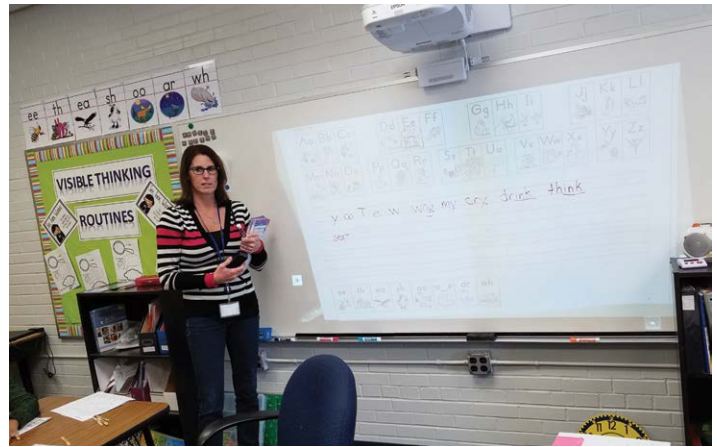
For example, elementary teachers create lessons using interactive software called SMART Notebook, where two or three students can work together on a math problem the BrightLink is projecting, check each other’s answers and learn from one another. “Most of our fifth grade classrooms have 30 students,” Hess says, “but a teacher might work with a group of 12 or 15, while four to six are at the front of the room interacting with content projected by the BrightLink. Or the teacher might put up a graphic about the Civil War, with two opposite views side by side, while the kids look at them, talk about them and make inferences.”

One key, Hess says, is that students are working together, having fun while they learn. Another is that they get immediate feedback, knowing right away whether they are on the right track, so they can adjust accordingly.

“I’m telling you, when implemented correctly, when the teacher really gets it, you will see a classroom where all 30 students are engaged and working. Kids want to learn, they have a positive intent, but you have to give them the chance to take control of their learning.”

A Giant Notebook

Part of the appeal of the BrightLink is its finger touch capability, which allows a flat, light colored surface like a wall or normal whiteboard to work like a giant touchscreen. “Finger touch is a game changer,” Hess says. “Before our kids even start school, they’re controlling phones, iPads, and electronic games by touch, so they’re immediately familiar with the BrightLink and ready to use it.”



Walled Lake is a BYOD district. Any student can bring in their device or use one of the district’s 6,500 Chromebooks. “It’s important to note,” Hess says, “that we do not just put kids in front of a device—we still have good lectures, we still teach note taking. It depends on the lesson content.”

For those many lessons that do use computing devices, it’s often important for a student to project a presentation they created to the entire class to demonstrate what he or she has learned. Hess favors the Epson iProjection App, which allows Chromebooks, PCs, and Mac computers, as well as iOS and Android devices to wirelessly connect to the BrightLink. “We’re device agnostic, so it helps to have an app where any device can connect, yet the teacher can still control access.”

The wireless connection is crucial. “Think about a group who is assigned a presentation on the Ojibway tribe. In years past, the kids might create a PowerPoint, save it to a thumb drive, and then give it to the teacher to pull up on a computer connected to the classroom projector. Time is precious. You save a minute or two on every presentation if the students can project it from their devices, and it adds up fast. We want to spend our time on learning.”

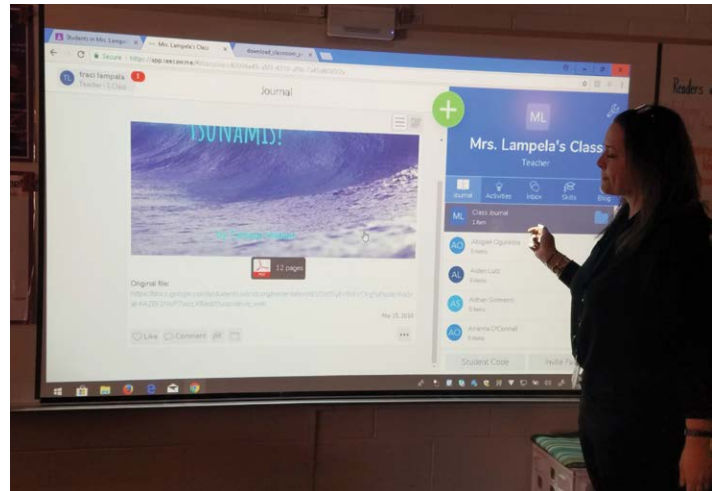
Months of Evaluation

Hess says the technology team spent months evaluating the devices they chose, relying on the help and advice of integrator Macprofessionals in nearby Novi, Michigan. “We set up a couple of mock classrooms in the administrative office and brought in teachers to test interactive devices. We wanted something that was easy to use, durable, and met our vision for instruction. We looked at projectors, interactive flat panels, and various annotation devices, but we just kept coming back to the BrightLink.”

They chose the Epson document camera for similar reasons. “In our primary schools, teachers love it because they can project two pages at a time, while in the high schools, they love that they can zoom in on small text and not lose image quality. But the main reason we bought it is it’s an Epson. The online documentation, training videos and customer service are rock solid. You don’t get that from many other companies.”

Teachers love the new technology, Hess says, because of the careful planning, testing and training that underlies its use. “I love visiting the schools, taking pictures and tweeting what I see. We’re excited about what the next few years will bring. We have the infrastructure now, so we can concentrate on the wonderful things we can do in the classroom.”

“There’s no question that the best resource in any school is the teacher,” he adds. “But give good teachers good tools and technology and you can make them more efficient, more interactive and more engaging. When you do, you will see some pretty amazing lessons, because the kids’ attitudes come alive.”



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