

Future Ready

Wisconsin superintendents reflect on providing new tech opportunities to students

Phil Ertl & Joe Sanfelippo

Last summer, President Obama announced the launch of the ConnectEd initiative, which, among other efforts, aims to connect 99 percent of America's students to broadband and high-speed wireless Internet in their schools and libraries. In conjunction with the ConnectEd initiative, superintendents across the country have taken the Future Ready Pledge, which commits school leaders to providing and fostering technology opportunities for all students.

In November, more than 100 exemplary "Future Ready" superintendents from across the nation were invited to a special event at the White House to recognize their work in transitioning their school district to digital learning. This event provided superintendents the opportunity to share lessons learned and help spread promising approaches across the nation.

Phil Ertl, superintendent of the Wauwatosa School District, and Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent of the Fall Creek School District, were part of the select group of superintendents invited to the White House to hear from other superintendents and share

the work of their districts. *Wisconsin School News* asked these superintendents to provide their perspectives from the trip to the White House and to share some insight on their technology initiatives.

PHIL ERTL | Superintendent
Wauwatosa School District

It was an incredible honor to be able to represent the Wauwatosa School District at the White House for the ConnectEd Future Ready initiative. Having our district selected for this honor is a testament to the innovative and visionary work done with technology by the staff and students in the Wauwatosa School District.

While the highlight of the visit was having the opportunity to hear the president's message on the importance of all students having access and use of technology, it was especially meaningful coming from the most important and influential podium in the world. The president requested that all school districts take the Future Ready Pledge, which will ensure all students have access



Phil Ertl, superintendent of the Wauwatosa School District, and **Joe Sanfelippo**, superintendent of the Fall Creek School District, attended a White House event in November.

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— Phil Ertl, superintendent of the Wauwatosa School District

to technology and have trained professionals to maximize their learning in and out of the classroom.

While some districts have already met the president's challenge through a one-to-one approach, the Wauwatosa School District embraces this challenge through a teacher-readiness and curriculum-driven model. In Wauwatosa, we have found that it has been effective to purchase technology as needed as we make curricular decisions and adoptions that require them.

For example, our recent secondary science adoption is supported by digital textbooks and web-based resources. To support these needs, we purchased Chromebooks for each science classroom. A similar adoption was recently made for secondary social studies. At the elementary level, we have teachers piloting the use of touch-screen Chromebooks, which were funded by an Education Foundation of Wauwatosa grant. This has allowed students access to touch-screen capabilities such as Smart Amp — a collaborative learning software.

All of these initiatives are in line

with a conscious decision to commit to giving students access and use of technology to enhance their learning. As a result of this approach, we have acquired 6,500 devices for our 7,400 students. Additionally, we have a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative that more than 1,000 students take advantage of daily. To support these devices, we have full wireless access in all school buildings.

I recognize that the Wauwatosa School District is fortunate to have significant technology resources and access, however, others in our state and across the country are not as fortunate.

At the White House, the president talked about the goal of having 99 percent of all students connected to technology. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan discussed strategies and approaches for effective use of technology. We also heard from other leaders in the administration and were fortunate to have presentations from several classroom teachers who are leaders in their use of technology. It's always inspiring to hear from those that are making it happen directly with the kids.



From dialoguing with other superintendents, I learned there are some incredible initiatives taking place across the country and Wauwatosa is just one example of a district that is supporting the president's Future Ready Pledge.

Technology is a powerful partner for school districts as they continue efforts to ensure all students learn at high levels. The use of technology in classrooms will only enhance the excellent reputation the State of Wisconsin has for providing quality education to all students. I am thankful that the Wauwatosa School Board not only understands the need to be progressive and innovative but also the need to remain fiscally responsible. □

JOE SANFELIPPO | Superintendent
Fall Creek School District

I was humbled to be part of the superintendent summit to kick off the Future Ready initiative with 117 other district administrators from across the country. The inspiration of being at the White House, listening live to the president's vision for digital learning, and discussing what school could look like with the highest ranking officials in the U.S. Department of Education to make life better for kids in our school system was an absolute honor.

The makeup of the room included leaders from both urban and rural schools districts that ranged in size



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It is about creating capacity for our schools to ensure all kids leave prepared to take on whatever their future holds, not what the past held.

— Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent of the Fall Creek School District

from hundreds to tens of thousands. The issues that we face in a district of 800 were the same as those faced in other districts much larger. Quality time for professional development, financial support, and connectivity were all brought up throughout the summit. During the day, we were inspired by presentations by teachers, panels of district leaders and teachers, and an open discussion with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Here are a few takeaways:

Future Ready is about Trust.

Everything we talked about that day will fail if we don't develop trust with our staff, students, and community. Nothing can be done to improve student learning if the people we are hoping to bring along on the journey do not trust where that journey leads. We have a responsibility to build trust first, and above all else, create an environment where trust is the default.

Future Ready is about Leadership. The day was filled with exceptional leaders. Listening to their stories and thinking about how it would translate to the students in Fall Creek was both exciting and exhausting. Their teams were doing incredible things in the area of digital learning. The opportunities that were given to students in their districts were amazing and their ability to cultivate more leaders in their districts was the key to their success. The conversations about how to make school better were at

the forefront of every interaction, and that was absolutely inspiring.

Future Ready is about Teachers, not Tech. I am inspired to work in a place that knows kids are different. Our teachers make great connections with kids and families. We teach because we had someone who believed in us long ago and saw value in what we could bring to others. We have a responsibility to make kids feel like there is someone in the building who believes in who they are, but more importantly, who they will become. As a profession, we also have to understand that a number of us got into teaching because we experienced some success in school. If we teach the way we were taught, it will only resonate with a very small population. We don't want kids to just "do school." We want kids to be inspired to do something different, something bold, something that will make life better ... and we need to understand that "doing school" will not get them there.

Most Importantly, Future Ready is about Students. Future Ready is about kids. Schools are about kids and the adults in that setting have a responsibility to ensure that the spaces reflect that notion. At the heart of that responsibility is the willingness to connect the adults and students so quality instruction can happen and everyone can see the value in learning. If they own it, they will learn. If they feel a connection, they will learn. If they know you trust them, they will learn. We owe it to them to provide a better opportunity than the one we had. The connection leads to confidence, and the confidence leads to change.

Future Ready is about creating opportunities for kids. It is about developing our staff members so we are growing in a digital age. It is about creating capacity for our schools to ensure all kids leave prepared to take on whatever their future holds, not what the past held. It is about the Future ... and together we will be ready. ■

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