

# Dream Team

The 2016 '20 to Watch' educators represent the best in technology education

*Ann Lee Flynn*

**A**fter more than two decades working with school leaders, one of my favorite fantasies is to imagine the perfect district. I would have visionary leaders, passionate teachers, tech-savvy administrators, and a chief technology officer who realizes that his or her primary role is to support learning. I would want the best facility designs and furnishings to support 21st century instructional approaches and rich and engaging digital resources that could be accessed by students at any time, anywhere.

While I don't have a magic wand, the next best thing is learning that many of my dreams are already a reality in the 15 states and District of Columbia where NSBA's 2016 "20 to Watch" educators work. This group offers the perfect set of skills for the district I would love to design.

For starters, my district would have a goal of delivering a dynamic 21st century, personalized learning environment for each student by following the Future Ready framework. **Thomas Murray**, the director of innovation for the Alliance of Excellent Education in Washington, D.C., and his work with Future Ready Schools reduces the uncertainty of planning and implementation. The framework addresses everything from instructional issues and how space and time are used to the importance of a robust infrastructure and policies that protect data and ensure student privacy.

## VISIONARY DISTRICT LEADERS

**Matthew Miller**, of Ohio's Mentor Public Schools, and **Silvia Correa-Abbato**, of New Jersey's Union City School District (NJ,) as superintendents in their respective districts, offer great ideas for my dream district. Miller has put Mentor in the national spotlight with its focus on blended learning and use of flexible learning spaces. Correa-Abbato has formed a partnership with

the public housing authority in her community to bring internet access to students and introduce young Latino students to STEM.

With all the technology I want in my dream district, the technology expertise exhibited by **Luke Wittum**, assistant superintendent of technology and media services in Michigan's Genesee Intermediate School District, is essential. As districts increasingly commit more financial resources to technology, the time has come to rethink staff roles. This rethinking can help develop broad-based technology purchasing strategies and review bandwidth needs for things like expanded online learning. Increased test scores and reduced discipline cases, like those in Illinois's Gurnee School District 56, where **Phil Hintz** serves as director of technology, provide further evidence about how critical these roles have become to support district goals.

**Bryan O'Black**, as assistant superintendent in Pennsylvania's Shaler School District, brings an equally important skill set to my dream district. All of the infrastructure improvements and devices will prove ineffective unless there are accompanying changes in district culture and instructional approaches. O'Black's work on a summer Principals' Technology Academy is high on my list to replicate. While there are as many organizational charts as there are school districts, the most effective districts place a high priority on the role professional development plays to help districts maximize their technology investments and support gains in student learning.

**Rafranz Davis**, executive director of professional and digital learning in Texas's Lufkin Independent School District, embodies this new role among district leaders. Like O'Black, Davis has focused on developing digital leadership across her entire district with the creation of the Lufkin Learns Digital Ambassadors.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO INSPIRE CHANGE

The importance of instructional coaches can't be overstated. Without them, far too many teachers are left to struggle with an ever-expanding set of digital tools and resources. Missouri's **Patricia Brown**, "Ms. EDtechie" in the Ladue School District, and **Regina Schaffer**, from New Jersey's Middletown Township School District, fill those important roles in their districts. Like **James Lanier**, formerly the coordinator of secondary digital learning for North Carolina's Johnston County Schools, they are often described as having a contagious excitement for learning. Lanier's 2T4E initiative (Transforming Teaching for Engagement) and an annual student technology conference offered proof to reluctant peers of just how much students could achieve when technology was infused into learning.

**Katie Chirhart**, in her role as an iPad Lab teacher in Louisiana's Caddo Parish School Board, uses her passion to inspire colleagues by introducing their students to assignments that provide authentic learning experiences that include writing app reviews and learning how to program Dash robots or Ozobots. Investing in professional development opportunities for educators in my dream district will be a priority and one good source is provided by California nonprofit CUE. **Jon Corippo**, in his work as the director of academic innovation for CUE, has been instrumental in helping thousands of educators embrace new instructional models through his Rock Star Teacher Camps and by arranging free loans of cutting-edge robots for schools.

## DEVELOPING DIGITAL CITIZENS

Beyond using technology to support traditional content areas, there is a growing focus on digital citizenship and safety. The Global Citizenship LICENSE (Legitimacy, Identity, Community impact, Education, Networks, Safety and Ethics) launched by **Leslie Pralle Keehn**, instructional technology consultant for Iowa's Prairie Lake Area Education Agency, addresses those issues for the districts she serves. In a similar vein, **Stephen Carr**, the chief technology officer for California's Ventura County Office of Education, works with an e-safety task force that uses the Generation Safe 360 Self-Assessment Tool to build parental confidence about technology use.

Visionary leaders in the district office can do only so much to ensure innovative practices are effectively implemented at the building level. I want my dream principals to exemplify the passion and creativity that **Amanda**

**Stone** and **Adam Welcome** demonstrate through their approaches to innovation. Stone, an assistant principal in Alabama's Hoover City Schools, leads by example so her teachers can see how technology and games can be integrated across the curriculum to support an increased awareness of STEAM. A Maker Studio, like the one she created from scratch, would be a "must" for every school in my dream district. Welcome, a principal in California's San Ramon Valley Unified School District, tapped into the power of social media not only to tell his school's story, but also to provide real-world experiences for his fifth-grade students, who serve as social media interns by snapping photos, preparing tweets, and creating Facebook posts for publication.

As everyone acknowledges, talented educators are more important than all the technology in the world. However, when those talented educators have access to technology, magic can happen for students. **Joanna Beck**, a teacher in Georgia's Clarke County School District, uses Remind 101 to keep parents informed and creates dinner discussion quizzes and study guides to strengthen the home-school connection for her elementary students. English language arts teachers **Josh Stock**, in Kansas's Olathe Unified School District, and **Adam Schoenbart**, in New York's Ossining Union Free School District, also embrace technology to engage their students.

Stock's interest extends to coding, serving as coach for the school's robotics team, and sharing his work with the world on Twitter @teachlikeaninja. Schoenbart adds duties as a capstone technology coach to his role and has most recently been piloting Google Expeditions. Teacher **Christopher Hull** from Illinois's North Shore School District 112 recognized the need to synthesize all of his students' learning data in one place. His real-world experience led him to co-found Otus, a company now serving hundreds of educators.

Countless educators across the country are engaged in work similar to that highlighted by NSBA's 2016 honorees. Sadly, far too many of them continue to do that work in isolation and remain as islands of excellence in systems that have not fully embraced new models for learning. In the not-too-distant future, I hope my dream district becomes a reality for all our students.

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