

FEATURE STORY

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Lifelong Learning and Celebration

Barbara S. Upton, Principal, Evans Elementary School, Jackson County

Barbara Upton is the kind of principal with whom every teacher hopes to work. Eminently sensitive to her faculty members as human beings, Upton knew her school needed a culture shift around technology, but also that she needed to walk closely with her teachers through the transition.

“More program implementation was being required by the state with no additional support, and I could see the teacher frustration level rise,” says Upton. “I knew that technology was the key to help my teachers meet their students’ individual needs.”

Upton had one computer lab at her school, but she needed mobile digital tools that students could use in the classroom. The \$50,000 SEEDS grant allowed digital tools in each classroom at Evans Elementary. Students use iPads for classroom projects, research, and remediation of skill deficits; they also track their own educational progress. “Our students are reading more, because we can download high-interest books to their iPads, and they are improving their writing through comic strip development apps,” says Upton.

Upton worked closely with her coach Dr. Leonard Allen of Marshall University Graduate School, and with mentor David Hardesty, former president of West Virginia University (WVU) and current Law Professor at WVU School of Law to design her SEEDS initiative.

“Dr. Allen encouraged me, and allowed me to talk through the process. He offered suggestions and research-based information that helped our school team solidify a definite direction,” says Upton. Allen connected Evans Elementary to Dr. Amy Cottle, a technology integration consultant whose expertise increased everyone’s comfort level. “Our teachers could express concerns and challenges within an environment of trust,” says Upton. Dr. Cottle developed technology plans for each teacher based on his or her individual needs. Embedded staff development allowed teachers to include technology in their teaching strategies.

“This was a major factor in the cultural change within our school,” says Upton.

Hardesty helped Upton focus on the leadership skills she needed to facilitate change. She learned to communicate the vision, challenges, and victories to not only the employees of Evans Elementary, but also to the central office staff and parents.

With students and teachers discovering new and innovative ways of using technology, Upton sees this as just the beginning: “Learning is fun and engaging. Students created movie films on their iPads; our speech teacher discovered apps that helped in her articulation training; and teachers found programs that helped students learn content while they exercised. We’ve discussed distance learning on multiple levels. I would like to see students learn Spanish using distance learning tools. I would like for our classrooms to have pen pal classrooms in the United States as well as abroad. Students from different countries could work on a single project and communicate with SKYPE or some other face-to-face communication program to develop a solution. These life skills are essential in the 21st Century job market.”

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