

# Creating an Arts-Infused, Tech-Savvy School Culture

**P**ainfully shy sixth-grader Sarah would have rather melted into the floor than give a speech in front of the class. But when called upon to present her documentary about the snow leopard, she walked to the front of the room, plugged in her iPad, and mesmerized her classmates with a highly creative, digital presentation that incorporated music, animation, and her recorded narration. “It was incredible,” says Michelle Hayward, principal of McNair Middle School in Fayetteville, Arkansas. “That experience just opened up a young girl’s world.”

The words “incredible,” “amazing” and “unbelievable” pop up often when principals and other school leaders talk about the power of the arts and technology to engage, inspire, and motivate students—and also teachers—to successfully achieve.

In fact, numerous recent education guides—from the Common Core State Standards to the ISTE Technology in Education Standards to the National Core Arts Standards—attest to how an arts-infused, tech-savvy school culture maximizes student acquisition of digital-age skills, such as problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, cultural understanding and research fluency, as well as educator communication and organizational efficiency.

When Michelle Hayward first arrived at McNair 10 years ago, she found closets full of dusty laptops and very few staff using technology professionally. Determined to create a digital-age school culture, she began modeling use of apps and other technologies in faculty meetings, mandated monthly teacher peer observations of tech-leader colleagues, provided extra training opportunities for innovators, and created a schedule with time to share best practices. She also prioritized technology purchases for iPads, laptops, and Chromebooks, and created a student Geek Squad to quickly solve classroom technology problems.

“My job is to help tech innovators shine,” says Hayward. “At McNair, technology is now used in every course—from core subjects to physical education and art.”

Indeed, the link between technology and art and the growing recognition of art as a key element to learning is reflected in the addition of the “A” to the long-standing Science, Technology, Engineering and Math STEM acronym to create STEAM. Studies from the Wallace Foundation, the President’s Committee on Arts and Humanities, the National Art Education Association, and others also link art



to both social-emotional health and academic achievement, especially for at-risk youth. At NAESP we are promoting arts-enhanced learning through the Arts Education Partnership, supported by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts, and we are

also continuing to partner yearly with Crayola to provide grants for arts-integration across the curriculum.

Art also organically finds its way into all subjects once students have access to technology tools, notes Rich Rodriguez, principal of Newport Elementary School in Costa Mesa, California. After a trip to a WWII museum, Newport Elementary sixth-graders convinced their history teacher to let them create video projects on period aircraft. “The idea came from the students,” says Rodriguez. “I find the best way to support teachers is to set a vision, supply the resources, and then get out of the way.”

Principals are also helping teachers leverage technology to connect the dots between schoolwide initiatives such as pre-K, arts-infused learning, and afterschool programs. The afterschool Lafter Program, at the pre-K-6 Dover Elementary School in East Dover, Vermont, encourages even the youngest children to use technology to storyboard, script, film, and edit videos they present in front of “green screens” depicting moonscapes, deserts, oceans, or other backgrounds. All projects are Common Core-aligned and an East Dover-based regional Film Festival kicks off each fall with these student presentations, which Dover principal William Anton says really motivates youngsters toward self-guided learning and future new media careers.

Back at Newport Elementary, technology also helps facilitate pre-K-3 alignment by identifying kindergarten readiness in transitional kindergarten students. Using iPads and visual touch math and reading programs, four-year-olds are learning independence along with early literacy skills, says Rodriguez.

Promoting pre-K-3 alignment, including its intersection with technology, NAESP is expanding professional development services to members through a new partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Principals will find increased pre-K-3 leadership programming at NAESP’s annual conference, July 6-8, 2016. Additionally, NAESP will launch a new multifaceted and engaging professional curriculum and credential program for administrators by next spring.

Returning to the story of Sarah and her snow leopard documentary, it is important to remember how technology facilitates creativity and enhances a learner’s life, despite challenges schools face in obtaining and utilizing technology to enhance teaching and learning in and out of the classroom.

Hayward says that after Sarah’s presentation, “resounding applause broke out from her peers.” Sarah told Hayward, “If I had to speak publicly about my project, I could never do it. But by creating this video I got to show who I am.” **P**