

**INTERVIEWED**

▶ **Chris Nitti,**
Digital Age Coordinator,
Hoquiam School District

INDUSTRY

▶ Education

CHALLENGE

- ▶ Upgrade the school district with 21st century digital tools
- ▶ Equip teachers with the tools and training to boost student engagement

ViewSonic ViewBoard Displays Boost Digital Education “Revolution” in Struggling School District

SCHOOL

The Hoquiam School District, founded in 1891, serves over 1,600 students in the city of Hoquiam, located in western Washington state. To achieve the district’s mission of Linking Learning to Life, Hoquiam consistently strives to be a world leader in employing the latest in educational technology, curricular design, and equity and inclusion principles. The district operates three elementary schools: Emerson, Lincoln, and Central; the Hoquiam Middle School; Hoquiam High School; and an alternative learning environment, Homelink.

CHALLENGE

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the Hoquiam School District, like so many across the country, was ill-equipped to meet the needs of remote learning. To address this challenge, Superintendent Dr. Mike Villarreal charged English and technology teacher Chris Nitti with providing immediate-response support to educators that were learning to teach remotely on the fly. The following year, Dr. Villarreal promoted Nitti to Digital Age Coordinator, tasking him with determining and deploying technology to upgrade the district’s digital teaching capabilities.

“At the start of the 2021-22 school year I inherited a tech department run for 30 years by the person who started it in 1993, who ran the first five cables,” said Nitti. “Most technology was well beyond end-of-life. We didn’t have the infrastructure needed to support technology-based learning.”

The seismic changes brought by the pandemic called for a corresponding sea-change in the district’s approach to education technology. Additionally, Nitti envisioned equipping the community’s young people with critical career skills.

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— **Chris Nitti: Digital Age Coordinator, Hoquiam School District**



SOLUTION

- ▶ Leverage FCC EFC grants and state DEI grants
- ▶ Deploy the first 1:1 fleet of Chromebooks
- ▶ ViewSonic ViewBoard displays deployed in every teaching and learning space across the district

“There’s a tech industry hungry for trained people,” said Nitti. “Along with using tech for teaching, we can give students technology skills that they can use to work remotely right from Hoquiam.”

Before this Hoquiam technology revolution could begin, Nitti and his team would have to equip teachers with the tools and training they needed to deliver on this visionary goal.

SOLUTION

Difficult as it was, the Covid-19 pandemic was also the spark that helped ignite the flame of the Hoquiam edtech revolution. Students needed individual devices to be successful at remote learning. Educators needed support and training in how to use these new tools.



“At the direction of Dr. Villarreal, we set out to bring the district up to 21st century digital learning standards,” said Nitti. “The first step was to tap into FCC EFC grants to procure student Chromebooks. After that, the goal was to equip classrooms with interactive displays.”

With two grants across two years, Nitti and his team created the first true 1:1 fleet. Every student now had a Chromebook less than 1 year old. Next, Nitti teamed up with KC Merchant, supervisor of the Washington State Digital Equity and Inclusion grant, and John Buyse at reseller partner Vivacity. With the support of Merchant, the district earned a substantial DEI grant. Buyse arranged demonstrations of interactive flat panel (IFP) displays from six major manufacturers.

RESULTS

- ▶ With virtually 100% buy-in, educators were quickly trained in using the ViewBoard displays
- ▶ Educators are creatively adapting curriculum to leverage the displays
- ▶ Student engagement has notably increased

DISPLAYS

Right away, it was clear that the ViewSonic® ViewBoard® IFPs were a perfect fit for the district, said both Nitti and Tech Assistant Jen Thorp. The integrated myViewBoard software tools were intuitive and expansive. The touch response and image quality were outstanding. And the IT team was thrilled with the centralized management that would allow them to handle all maintenance without having to physically go to seven buildings.

“We’re a MAC district and it was notable for us that the ViewBoard displays connect with a single USB cable,” said Nitti. “We just connect them and they work. It couldn’t be more simple or efficient.”

What’s more, Nitti emphasized, was that ViewSonic was the only company that sent a team along with their demo display.

“Our sales rep, a trainer, and the ViewSonic national sales manager all came to Hoquiam. That meant a lot to us,” said Nitti.

Thrilled to move forward with this level of support, the IT team purchased 105 ViewBoard IFPs – one for every classroom, library and learning lab. That order was quickly followed by one for another 16 ViewBoard displays, for specialists and coaches.

“Everyone wanted a ViewBoard,” said Nitti. “I took a demo board to the schools, showed them what it could do, and the ViewBoard sold itself.”

RESULTS

The start of the 2022-23 school year was unlike any other in the history of Hoquiam. Not only did every student walk in with a personal Chromebook, virtually every teacher, coach and other educator was ready to begin engaging and educating using their ViewSonic ViewBoard IFP. This was better than Nitti had anticipated.

“Initially we planned three rollouts spanning the summer and the upcoming school year. The pandemic years were tough on our teachers and I only expected twenty percent or so to take time away from their summer plans to do extra training,” said Nitti.

To his happy surprise, 97 of the district’s 105 teachers signed up for the training needed to receive a ViewBoard at the start of the school year.

“Those that didn’t sign up had conflicts, otherwise they would have been there,” Nitti said. “If that’s not buy-in, I don’t know what is!”

Hoquiam teachers embraced the potential provided by the ViewBoard displays as they planned their curriculum for the new school year.

“We coached them to see the ViewBoard as a full ecosystem, not just a board you can write on,” said Nitti. “It’s essentially an entire classroom support system: anything teachers do on their Chromebook, iPad or phone they can throw to the screen, then several students can annotate on it. The applications are endless.”

A middle school teacher who received two ViewBoard displays to support her stations-based approach to math education exemplifies this versatility.

“This outstanding math teacher does incredible work with stations. She’s like a juggler, it’s incredible to watch,” said Nitti. “We set her up with two displays and two management accounts so that she can be logged into both at once and guide students to bounce between complementary activities on the ViewBoard displays.”



► ViewSonic® ViewBoard®



District English teachers tell Nitti that the ViewBoard displays will be a game changer, adding mobility, proximity and interactivity to lessons.

“In the past, our teachers were stuck behind their desks. Now they can display the assignment on the ViewBoard, move around the classroom to work with students individually, and direct them to interact with the board,” said Nitti.

Beyond core subjects, educators throughout the district are finding unique ways to use the ViewSonic ViewBoard displays to increase engagement.

For example, said Nitti, not only can the high school athletic coaches review recorded game tape with students on the large ViewBoard screen, they can stop the recording, annotate on top of the video, then keep this record for reference.

“The technology is enabling things that weren’t possible before,” said Nitti, “The coaches say, it’s just like ESPN! They’re certain this will amp up engagement in sports.”

An elementary PE teacher that works with mobility-impaired students asked Nitti to create an app for the ViewBoard that turns it into an interactive target board. Students learning to throw would receive a visual reward when they successfully hit the target. While Nitti acknowledges that this is a bit of an “out-there use case,” he has no doubts about making it a reality. He knows that the ViewBoard displays can take it.

“When evaluating displays, I always do what I call a ‘knock test,’” he said. “The ViewSonic ViewBoard IFPs have the toughest surface I’ve come across. I can pound on it and it does no damage.”

Engagement is the common denominator of the countless ways in which Hoquiam educators are using (and plan to use) the ViewBoard displays.

“Student engagement is the essential element in successful teaching,” said Nitti. “I think the most important thing teachers do is earn students’ attention. The ViewBoard displays are like a cheat code – they draw students in and kids want to get up and touch them.”

