

A person's hands are holding a white tablet against a red, textured background. The tablet screen is black with white text. The text reads "3 Key Principles of Digital Transformation".

3 Key Principles of Digital Transformation

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3 Key Principles of Digital Transformation

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Introduction

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to share the story of our digital transformation in the [Salisbury Township School District](#) with audiences of school leaders just beginning their journey. While our work has been documented in detail on [TL2020.org](#) (and previously [TL2014.org](#)) and in our published [iBook](#), I wanted to prepare a simple message for the audience - one that broadly described the principles behind our journey and inspired action.

The simple message of our digital transformation is this: Lead it. Support it. Evaluate it. This ebook outlines each of these principles in detail and provides resources others can learn from and explore further. (While I'm presenting the principles in a linear manner, think of them as cyclical. You're never really finished!)

Principle #1: Lead it.

The deeper I get into the work of digital transformation (and it's been almost a decade), the more I see evidence of the importance and value of effective leadership. Digital transformations cannot be successful without leadership on multiple levels - district, school board, building, teacher and student.

District Leadership

If you don't have district leaders

- Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Curriculum, Director of Technology - who understand the power and potential of digital learning, transformation will be limited to isolated classrooms.



In 2006, our schools had very limited access to technology, and both teaching and learning were rooted in 20th century models. Since then, our vision for teaching and learning and [the goals of our digital transformation](#) have largely been driven and coordinated by district level leadership. Today, we have increased access to technology (1:1, grades K-12) and increased use of progressive teaching and learning models. For a glimpse into student learning, instructional design and curriculum design, [check out our iBook](#).

School Board Leadership

Be prepared to invest the time and energy into sharing your vision and goals, and educating the school board around the need for change. They are the gatekeepers of human and financial resources.

Our board meets as a committee of the whole for Curriculum & Technology Committee meetings once a month. Early on, we frequently engaged our board members in conversations about the need to change the way we teach and learn. We reinforced this need through presentations from teachers and students who were embracing the change process. Over many years, board members developed a rich understanding of the vision and need for change. When it came time to provide the human and financial resources, the decision was not a difficult one since the board had witnessed the benefits and understood the need. Today, we continue to have Curriculum & Technology Committee meetings in our school buildings with students and teachers regularly and publicly sharing their work. As our digital transformation develops, the board continues to play an important role, endorsing the vision and providing the resources to support its implementation.

Building Leadership

Principals can make or break the transformation through the manner in which they establish expectations and create opportunities for

conversations focused on improving practices in teaching and learning with digital tools.

In line with our [digital transformation goals](#), building principals recently used [a data protocol](#) to analyze data from [our walkthrough protocol](#). Building principals then took the data protocol and initial data analysis back to their school leadership teams for further discussion and action planning. Through building leadership, the incremental, day-to-day work of transforming our classrooms is being monitored and adjusted through regular conversation about practice.

Teacher Leadership

Pioneering innovators and those who are naturally intrinsically motivated to tinker and experiment with new ideas, tools and pedagogy will provide valuable inertia as you implement and refine your vision for teaching and learning.

This year we have created the [Innovate Salisbury team](#). Consisting of 15 teachers who have either demonstrated innovative practices in their classroom or an inclination to try something different, the Innovate Salisbury team is working to identify [“uncommon dots”](#) in education that could potentially become part of our vision for teaching and learning in 2020. Through the leadership and voice of this group of teachers, we will be reimagining the classrooms for tomorrow.

Student Leadership

Even though students are our “customers” and have valuable insights into how they best learn both inside and outside of school, we too often leave their voices out of our digital transformation efforts.

As we focus on redefining teaching and learning this year, we are actively engaging the voice of our students. [Lynn Fuini-Hetten](#), our Assistant Superintendent, along with our building principals and I have been meeting regularly with students. For our first meeting this year,

we asked students to describe [how they learn best](#), [inside](#) and [outside of school](#), and [how they collaborate](#). For our future meetings with students, we will work on a STEM-oriented Lego design challenge and engage students in conversation around what the future of learning looks like to them.

For me, there are two important takeaways on the topic of leadership and digital transformation:

- Take leadership out of a digital transformation and you miss the foundation on which everything else is built.
- The traditional notion of leadership - people with titles - is no longer valid. For digital transformations to be successful, leadership must be developed and distributed at all levels of the system - district, school board, building, teacher and student.

Questions to think about...

- What role has leadership played in your digital transformation?
- Which area is a strength?
- Which area needs more development?
- Are there areas of leadership you would add to this list?

Principle #2: Support it.

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” ~Alvin Toffler

Simply providing a digital device for students and staff does not a transformation make. To reach the goal of transforming teaching and learning through digital tools, teachers (and students) will need to learn, unlearn, and relearn.

They'll need to be supported to turn vision into reality. Without regular professional development for teachers and leaders, and rethinking human and financial resources, it is impossible to yield an effective transformation.

Professional Development for Teachers

Be prepared to provide a variety of learning opportunities that align with the goals of your initiative. Just like our students, teachers are at different places in the journey and should be supported wherever they happen to be.

Here's what we've done and are currently doing for our teachers:

- Build a common language around technology and pedagogy - In the early days of our transformation, professional development took the form of a cohort model over three years, with approximately a third of the teaching staff each year receiving



professional development to build common language around both technology and pedagogy.

- Provide differentiated PD opportunities through choice - Our current goals focus on developing transformational learning opportunities with technology as defined by the [SAMR framework](#) and [Webb's Depths of Knowledge](#). To reach this goal, we are supporting our teachers' learning by providing a variety of differentiated opportunities through weekly team/grade level meetings, department meetings, [Summer Academy](#) and attendance at conferences such as [PETE&C](#), [ISTE](#), the [Bucks-Lehigh EduSummit](#) and various Edcamps.
- Don't forget the innovative teacher leaders - We are also providing opportunities for our most innovative educators, the [Innovate Salisbury Team](#), to produce their own instructional innovations in areas such as genius hour/20% time, makerspaces and project-based learning.

Professional Development for Leaders

In Principal #1: Lead it, we focused on the importance of leadership in the digital transformation process. Your leaders need to be supported, too!

In Salisbury, the leadership team participates in their own professional learning. The team meets monthly in a [lunch and learn format](#). Past topics have included

- The SAMR framework - As we have implemented [our walkthrough protocol](#) focused on SAMR and Webb's Depths of Knowledge, we have had to "norm the group," making sure that we have a common understanding of levels of technology use and rigor.
- Webb's Depths of Knowledge - Administrators were led through a series of activities to develop a rich understanding of rigor and the Webb's hierarchy in preparation for leading professional development for teachers. On last year's opening day, every

administrator was responsible for [leading a session to introduce the full staff to Webb's Depths of Knowledge](#).

- [Transitioning to PA Core](#) - The administrative team participated in various book studies including [ASCD's series on Common Core](#). This new learning was valuable for administrators to engage teachers in conversations as curriculum was rewritten or updated, depending on content area.
- [Numerous technology tools](#) - Through the years the leadership team has received professional development on the various software tools used by our students and teachers. One of the most memorable, though, was [an impromptu professional learning session on Twitter](#) which occurred in the middle of winter. As a leadership team we took good advantage of a 2-hr cold weather delay!

Rethinking Resources

We want our teachers and students to be creative and innovative, designing new products and processes that have value. How can we use our human and financial resources in ways that will more effectively support your digital transformation? How can we model creativity and innovation?

As a result of asking these questions several years ago, we discovered some innovative ways of using our computer technicians and librarians to support our professional development and digital transformation.

- Computer technicians were hired with expertise in software applications in addition to computer repair.
- The changing role of the librarian was documented in an [updated job description](#).
- A new administrative position was created, Supervisor of Instructional Practice, to coordinate the support mechanisms of the digital transformation.

These varied job roles came together in the formation of a support group (we call it TLC, representing technicians, librarians and coaches) to best identify and support the professional learning needs within each school.

For me, there are two important takeaways on the component of support in a digital transformation:

- Frequent opportunities for professional learning keep your digital transformation goals at the forefront with everyone in the organization focused on transformational learning, professionally and for our students.
- While everyone needs a common language around technology and pedagogy, effective supports meet teachers and leaders where they are and challenge them to embrace a growth mindset for continuous improvement. Building and district leaders must work collaboratively to ensure the individual and collective needs of teachers and leaders are being met.

Questions to think about...

- In what ways have supports been critical in your school's digital transformation?
- How have you approached supporting your teachers and leaders in innovative ways?
- What additional components of support would you add to this list, such as instructional or technology coaches?

Principle #3: Evaluate it.

There are many reasons you will want to evaluate your digital transformation: to understand how and where teaching and learning are evolving, to determine if the financial investment is paying off, to measure progress toward meeting project goals, and to support shifting action plans with data. To best support your efforts to evaluate your transformation, you'll want to focus on two areas: (1) adopting an evaluation framework or process; (2) using the results to move your transformation to the next level.



Your evaluation framework

As a result of monitoring our digital transformation for several years, we [developed a framework](#) to help guide us through the process of evaluation and assessment. Our framework includes the following:

- [What are the goals](#) of the transformation? Goals are too often overlooked! What are you working for? What changes in teaching and learning do you want to see in the classroom? Clearly identify these so everyone is clear on where the work is heading.
- [Who is your audience?](#) Decide who needs to know about the progress of your digital transformation. Community, school board, teachers, parents, taxpayers? This is important to know since it will guide you in your data collection, analysis and reporting.

- What data will you collect? When answering this question, think about your goals and the data sources that will be most helpful in demonstrating progress. We've used a variety of tools to collect a robust sample of data throughout the school year: a [classroom walkthrough protocol](#); [parent](#), [student](#) and [teacher](#) surveys; [stories of teaching and learning](#); honor roll and GPA data; and commercial tools such as the Apple Educational Technology Profile, Apple Educational Leadership Profile and BrightBytes [Clarity survey](#).
- How will you analyze the data? Ideally, analysis of the data, especially if you have lots of it, should be a collaborative effort. The group should aim to identify strengths and challenges. We have started working with principals to use a [data protocol](#) for data analysis and engaging conversations with building leadership teams.
- How will you share the results? Think about your audience. Will you share at faculty meetings (teachers), school board meetings (school board) and/or on a public web site (community, parents and taxpayers). We have shared the results of our assessment/evaluation at the building level, [at school board meetings](#) and [on the web](#).

What's next?

The most valuable outcome of an evaluation is a snapshot of the transformation at a particular moment in time. The snapshot is what helps determine the evolution of the transformation and how to navigate the changing landscape of "college and career readiness." As a result of our careful assessment and evaluation, here's "What's next?" for us:

- 1 [Action Research](#) - We want to see more transformational learning opportunities in our classrooms (as [defined by SAMR](#)). The questions driving our inquiry are (1) What are the critical factors of success for our teachers who are creating transformational learning experiences?; (2) What factors of

success can district and school leaders foster? We have interviewed teachers and have shared the exciting results in a TLTalkRadio podcast episode. More will be shared in the future as this project develops. We foresee this action research having significant implications for our work in the first section, Lead it.

- 2 Innovate Salisbury - Thinking long term, we know that we need to explore the “uncommon dots” in education - those ways of “doing” teaching and learning that are not yet common in schools and classrooms - and embedding relevant and appropriate innovations into our vision for teaching and learning. We are currently working with a group of 15 teachers to explore the “uncommon dots.” This exploration will result in a more clearly defined vision for our classrooms in 2020 and the outcomes for our ongoing digital transformation.

For me, there are two important takeaways on the component of evaluation in a digital transformation:

- Every digital transformation should have clearly defined goals and a plan to document progress toward those goals. Taken together, clear goals and a plan for evaluation are the rudder of an effective digital transformation.
- Evaluation and assessment require a significant investment of human resources, particularly in the area of time. However, the data collected and results shared will be invaluable in informing the short-term and long-term vision of the initiative.

Questions to think about...

- How has the evaluation/assessment process informed your school/district digital transformation - long-term and short-term?
- What process have you followed?
- What have you learned from evaluating your initiative?
- What are your next steps?

About the Author: Randy Ziegenfuss, Ed.D.



Randy currently serves as Superintendent in the Salisbury Township School District. Prior to his current position, Randy was a classroom teacher, Department Chair, Technology Integration Specialist, Director of Technology and Assistant Superintendent. Randy is also Clinical Adjunct Professor of Education at Moravian College, teaching courses in inquiry, assessment and technology in the undergraduate, graduate and principal certification programs. He graduated from Moravian College with a B.Mus. degree, earned his M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University in technology leadership, and an Ed.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in educational and organizational leadership. In 2014, the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (PSLA) recognized Randy as the Outstanding District Administrator for the state of Pennsylvania. In 2015, Randy was recognized by the Pennsylvania Association for Educational Communications and Technology (PAECT) as the Outstanding Leader of the Year. Follow Randy on Twitter [@ziegeran](#), read his blog [WorkingAtTheEdge.org](#) and listen to the podcast co-hosted with [@lfuinihetten](#) at [TLTalkRadio.org](#).

Interested in learning more about the principles of digital transformation? Please contact Randy at ziegeran@gmail.com