

District Transforms 19 Different Media Centers into Innovative Learning Hubs



Taking a single media center and transforming it into a modern learning hub can be a major undertaking, depending on the current state of the center and the school district's specific goals. Taking 19 different existing spaces and turning them into innovative, engaging learning environments is a completely different animal, and something that the Bartow County School System took on last year.

This would be no small feat. According to Paula Camp, director of advanced learning, STEM

and gifted programs for the 14,000-student district, the project included overhauling 19 media centers and turning them into "incredible learning hubs." The district partnered with Georgia-based PowerUpEDU to facilitate the furnishing of the new spaces, the implementation of new classroom technology and the delivery of professional learning.

FOCUSING ON STEM

In 2017, the Bartow County School System got a new superintendent in Phillip D. Page, Ed.D., who immediately began talking to teachers and staff across all departments.



Page wanted to find out what their goals were, current program statuses and what type of help and support those individuals needed.

In charting out a course of action for the following 3-5 years, one of the district's priorities was STEM implementation. "We worked together to map out what that would look like and what kind of support we needed to help coordinate with the schools," said Camp, who works with students at 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and a college and career academy.

"Each of those schools had already implemented the foundation for STEM," said Camp. "We also had a district-wide initiative in place that included professional learning, equipment, instructional technology, a mission and a vision."

THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP

With those initiatives in place, Camp said the

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next logical step was to review feedback from community partners and local businesses, and then conduct in-house STEM walks to obtain state certification. At that point, it was clear that the schools needed to allocate more physical space on campus to hold these types of meetings and other STEM-related events and instruction.

Camp formed a committee that included a board member, a few principals, some instructional leaders and media specialists. "We visited some existing STEM labs, did our homework and then took our ideas back to our district leaders," she said.



The core idea involved transitioning our media centers to increase circulation, expand STEM learning and give community members a place to go when they were on campus.

"This is something we just weren't set up for," she said. "We have older buildings with bookcases coming away from the walls. Students and teachers weren't interested in spending much time there. It made sense to transition our aging libraries into more of an extension of the classroom and use it for STEM outreach with our community partners."

Camp developed the parameters for several areas that would be transformed into required learning space that incorporates STEM. For example, each renovated media center would include maker space, research space, collaboration center, presentation area, a drone and robotics.

"We wanted to create a very functional space that would also help increase circulation," said Camp, who worked with PowerUpEDU and MiEN to select an assortment of furniture and fixtures for all 19 media centers. For Camp's vision of learning hubs to come to fruition, she utilized PowerUpEDU's expertise in STEM solutions. PowerUpEDU offers a total solution, complete with technology, curriculum and training.

Both companies held in-person, on-site meetings with Camp, the committee and all of the district's media specialists. If an on-site meeting wasn't

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doable, those interactions happened virtually or via email/phone. "Having these partners alongside us, being transparent and providing a high level of support really added to the success of this project," said Camp.

IT'S THEIR SPACE NOW

For its new media centers, Bartow County School System picked a selection of furniture that included tiered seating, comfortable chairs, tables for group work and a lot of power stations. "The kids overwhelmingly love the big, collaborative tiered seating," said Camp. "They all go in there and sit on the poufs."

Students also love being able to plug in their laptops, use the printer, work in groups and conduct research in a very professional-yet-comfortable environment. "They know their environments and they have their ownership and buy-in," said Camp, who holds a monthly STEM Ambassador Group meeting in the space.



"The media center is our collaboration area and where I can present to my groups," said Camp. "They really have ownership of the space and know that this is where they come to conduct research, do their 3D printing and myriad other STEM-related projects."

The centers were also equipped with computer research stations, each of which includes five desktops, a 3D printer and a traditional printer. The district also installed several large presentation boards that can be used by teachers, students (for small group learning) and community partners.

"We also have a robotics and maker space, which include all of the instructional technology that's needed to use LEGO robotics and VEX robotics," said Camp. "Students and program mentors

can come in and be productive in a space that's dedicated to these types of STEM activities."

CAREFUL COORDINATION ACROSS 19 SITES

Coordinating the media center project across 19 different schools required some careful orchestration. The existing spaces had to be shut down (along with book circulation); bids had to go out; construction crews had to come in; and the district had to coordinate with both MiEN and PowerUpEDU to get the new spaces outfitted and ready to use.

When the construction crews started on the media center in the district's oldest school, it was immediately apparent that it would need more power outlets, better Wi-Fi and new lighting.



"Basically, you take the bookcases out and start discovering all sorts of problems," said Camp. "We also worked with PowerUpEDU and MiEN to select furniture that could be designed and coordinated for those areas; it wasn't just picking pieces out of a catalog."

The effort was well worth it. The new centers opened for the 2023-24 school year, with all spaces now accessible for student, teacher and community use. The district held several grand openings in 2023, with the majority of those events taking place this year.

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST

Reflecting on the scope of the project and the impetus behind it, Camp said the district's ultimate goal was to give students what they wanted: an updated learning space on campus where they can learn, collaborate, engage, work with mentors and hear from the district's community partners.

"There were so many things that kids were very adamant about, and now we have STEM media centers that are all set up for a high level of collaboration and teamwork," said Camp, who is pleased with the end results. "Students have a place to do research, work on their projects, hold or attend presentations and work with one another—something that they just couldn't do in their traditional classrooms."



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