

# CONVENING RHODE ISLAND AROUND DIGITAL LEARNING

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AN EDUCATION CASE STUDY


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June 2012 | E-CS-011  
[www.innosightinstitute.org](http://www.innosightinstitute.org)

# CONVENING RHODE ISLAND AROUND DIGITAL LEARNING

*This case study describes the process and planning that went into convening a successful conference about student-centered digital learning in Rhode Island in the hopes that it can serve as a model for people in other localities to undertake similar efforts.*

 On February 11, 2012, about 300 school leaders, teachers, legislators, field experts, parents, and students gathered in Providence for a day-long conference devoted to digital learning in Rhode Island. Teachers left the conference, titled “Innovation Powered by Technology,” with a sense of what they could begin to do in their own classrooms to further blended learning; principals had a chance to think about whole-school transformation; and superintendents heard about district-wide opportunities for change. Feedback from attendees was effusive. As a principal from Newport, R.I. said:

Within five minutes, my eyes were opened completely to the future of education in this country. The presenters were excellent and incredibly informative. Perhaps more importantly, they were practical and concrete in their messages and advice. The day was very productive from start to end, and I left feeling rejuvenated. Members of my staff who attended have echoed the same sentiments. The conference really forced us to start thinking about the future.

The idea for the conference took root when Rhode Island Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist expressed an interest in an event that would educate the entire community about opportunities in digital learning. In October 2011, Commissioner Gist assigned an internal team to begin the planning and logistics for the event. The team, consisting of her chief of staff, her legislative liaison, her communications officer, and a digital-learning specialist, began meeting weekly. It first selected a date for the conference. The team decided to hold the conference on a Saturday so that educators would not have to take a day away from the classroom in order to participate.

Over the next two months, team members spent a lot of time thinking about their target audience and about which speakers would most effectively reach the target group. The team members decided that they wanted to reach and inspire superintendents, principals, technology leaders, school-committee members, teacher leaders, and technology teachers by showing them how digital learning can excite students about school, improve instruction, and transform education. With help and advice from several national experts on digital learning, in November

2011 the team from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) invited six experts from around the country who could inspire Rhode Islanders about the overall importance of digital learning and inform educators about the issues they might face as they began smart implementation, navigating purchasing logistics, and revamping classroom structures.

Also in November, RIDE began to inform the Rhode Island community about the conference by announcing the event in the weekly Field Memo that the Commissioner sends out to all superintendents. In December, Commissioner Gist announced a grant opportunity to support a school that could demonstrate a strong commitment to innovation powered by technology. The grant was for \$470,000—85 percent of which came from the federal government’s Enhancing Education Through Technology program with the remaining 15 percent coming from foundations. The grant application required strong community buy-in and thoughtful planning to fund fully a school that would become a model and a proof point for schools across the state.

RIDE formally announced the conference and posted an agenda in early January 2012, and RIDE explained that the conference would be a way for schools interested in the grant to learn more about online learning and what RIDE expected of applicants. Tying the event to a grant opportunity provided a clear imperative for leaders to attend so that they could understand the evolving field. Because the grant explicitly required community engagement, Commissioner Gist encouraged school leaders to bring students, parents, and teachers to the conference—and most did so.

By mid-January, with the conference about a month away, publicity began in earnest. Commissioner Gist included details and reminders in her Field Memo. This communication avenue proved to be effective, as superintendents passed the information along to relevant staffers in technology and curriculum, teachers, and parent leaders. RIDE staff members also discussed the grant opportunity and brought details about the conference to parent and teacher leadership groups across the state. Finally, RIDE also posted information on its website and sent information out to an e-mail list of more than 5,000 teachers who had participated in intensive summer trainings funded with Title IID funds, the federal government’s Enhancing Education Through Technology program, which was in existence until recently. Attendees who registered online received links designed to engage and excite them leading up to the event, which included notices about national news and Digital Learning Day.

The event was free, thanks to support from foundation funding. RIDE scheduled the event at Rhode Island College because Commissioner Gist believed that working with an institution of higher education would raise awareness within the Rhode Island higher-education community, which might be important down the line. The conference organizers planned the day down to the minute, and each staffer had a well-defined role. The conference began with a welcome from Commissioner Gist and then went straight into two morning panels followed

by a small-group rotation, lunch, and two break-out sessions. The goal was to give participants background information at the start and then allow them to think through how they could apply this information to their district or school.\* The RIDE team set up a Twitter address for the conference, and many participants Tweeted throughout the event, as they exchanged ideas and impressions with one another over the course of the day.

The conference was a huge success; local media covered the event, which helped to raise awareness about the grant and inspired 12 schools to submit applications by the April 27 deadline. The conference provided a point of reference for future conversations, and the event encouraged legislators, educators, and community members to think about the importance of and the possibilities for digital learning.

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\* See **Appendix A** and **Appendix B** for a more detailed description of the day.

## Appendix A Conference agenda

8:00 - **Coffee and Registration** - (Location: Donovan Dining Center)

9:00 - 9:10 - **Welcome and Overview - Commissioner Deborah Gist**

9:10 - 9:45 - **Panel 1 - Student Access to Online Learning - National Perspective**

- **Governor Bob Wise**, President of Alliance for Excellence in Education
- **Allison Powell**, VP for State and District Services for iNACOL
- **Tom Vander Ark**, author of *Getting Smart: How Digital Learning is Changing the World* and founder of GettingSmart.com

9:45 - 10:20 - **Panel 2 - Creative Restructuring of Schools - Blended Learning Models**

- **Michael Horn**, Executive Director of Education at Innosights Institute, co-author of *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*
- **Anthony Kim** - Founder and CEO of EdElements
- **Jeff Mao** - Learning Technology Policy Director, Maine Department of Education

10:20 - 10:40 - **Networking Break**

10:40 - 12:00 - **Small Group Rotations - Building a Personal Digital Learning Environment**

- **Michael Horn**: Choosing and Purchasing Content - Buy it, Borrow it, or Build it
- **Allison Powell**: Getting Buy-in From the Whole School Community
- **Governor Bob Wise**: Real or Imagined Barriers to Implementation
- **Anthony Kim**: Design Process
- **Tom Vander Ark**: Communicating the Options to Parents and Teachers
- **Jeff Mao**: Systems, Bandwidth and Infrastructure

10:40 - 11:10 - First Rotation

11:15 - 11:45 - Second Rotation

11:45 - 12:00 - Report Out

12:00 - 12:45 - **Birds of a Feather Lunch - Roundtable Discussions**

Join others interested in discussing blended and online learning topics over lunch!

12:45 - 1:35 - **Breakout Session 1** - (Location: Craig-Lee and Gaige Halls)

1:45 - 2:35 - **Breakout Session 2** - (Location: Craig-Lee and Gaige Halls)

2:45 - 3:00 - **Closing Remarks - Door Prizes!** - (Location: Donovan Dining Center)

## Appendix B Conference breakout strands and sessions

### Blended Learning: New Learning Models



**"The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning"** - Michael Horn - [mhorn@innosightinstitute.org](mailto:mhorn@innosightinstitute.org)

Gaige Hall Room 209

What is blended learning? Is it a fad or is something deeper driving it? What is its ultimate potential? In this session we'll explore the disruptive innovation fueling the growth of blended learning and the different emerging blended-learning models we are seeing on the ground. We'll also explore the different ways to get a blended-learning program started.



**"Blended Learning: From Idea to Reality"** - Anthony Kim - [anthony@edelements.com](mailto:anthony@edelements.com)

Gaige Hall Room 211

What is blended learning and who's doing it? What does it look like? Many are talking about blended learning, personalized learning, and differentiated instruction. How does this work with technology, teachers, and classroom? We hope to seed some ideas around blended learning.

### Build It, Buy It, and/or Borrow It: Curriculum and Online Courses



**"Best practices for Successfully Leveraging Digital Curriculum"** - Hersh Cristino ([cristinoh@psdri.net](mailto:cristinoh@psdri.net))

Gaige Hall Room 255

Hersh Cristino will share his strategy and success implementing digital curriculum in Pawtucket Schools with Apex Learning Digital Curriculum. Learn about the different programs that have been implemented and how they have been able to custom tailor Apex to align with Pawtucket's curriculum. Find out what steps you will need to take to implement a successful digital curriculum in your school district to meet the individual needs of your students.



**"教室にはロゼッタストーンを使用して、世界の言語の製品を展開!"**

**(Title Translation: Expand World Language Offerings By Using Rosetta Stone For The Classroom!)** - Michael Ferry - [Michael.Ferry@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Michael.Ferry@ride.ri.gov)

Gaige Hall Room 254

Rosetta Stone can be used to complement classroom teaching or to allow students to work independently, building their basic speaking, listening comprehension, reading and writing skills. Rosetta Stone advances students to the next level only when they achieve a level of proficiency defined by the teacher. Suzanne Leja, e-Learning Academy facilitator and students from Woonsocket High School will be on hand to demonstrate how Rosetta Stone works and answer any questions from attendees.

## Appendix B continued



**“Open Educational Resources - Free Digital Content Including e-Textbooks, Curriculum and Lesson Plans”** - Dave Fontaine - [davefontaine1@gmail.com](mailto:davefontaine1@gmail.com)

**Gaige Hall Room 256**

Dave will share his experiences as an Open Educational Resources (OER) Fellow with [Curriki.org](http://Curriki.org), as well as his work with the [CK-12.org Foundation](http://CK-12.org). [CK-12](http://CK-12.org) focuses on exceptional quality, digital textbooks that are free from copyrights and allow the teachers to edit the content; [Curriki's](http://Curriki.org) goal is to deliver high quality curriculum material (lesson plans, teaching units, tests, and measurements) that have been peer-reviewed and donate them freely to the world. A particular emphasis will be on the practicality of integrating OER's in RI schools and the economic benefits from kindergarten classrooms to college.



**“Increasing Opportunities for Students Through Virtual Learning”** - Chris Savastano - [csavastano@MPSRI.NET](mailto:csavastano@MPSRI.NET)

**Gaige Hall Room 258**

Chris Savastano will focus on how the Middletown School District has contracted with Virtual High School (VHS) to expand course offerings for its students. The presentation will address the logistics for the successful implementation of a virtual learning program, as well as the implications associated with virtual learning.

### Online and Blended Learning: Ensuring Quality



**“Operating a High Quality Online Learning Program”** - Allison Powell - [apowell@inacol.org](mailto:apowell@inacol.org)

**Craig Lee Hall Room 224**

What are the best practices when it comes to operating a high quality online program? The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) has released three sets of Quality Standards for Courses, Teaching, and Programs. A review of these national standards, regional accreditation, and recent research will be reviewed, as well as best practices in the field.

### Online and Blended Learning: Leadership and Advocacy



**“The Pivot to Personal Digital Learning”** - Tom Vander Ark - [Tom@GettingSmart.com](mailto:Tom@GettingSmart.com)

**Craig Lee Hall Room 205**

During this session author and blogger, Tom Vander Ark will highlight the three main benefits of personal digital learning; customization, motivation and equalization. He will also focus on blended learning including schools example, models and benefits. Given this new innovation-driven world, Tom will discuss how to combine online and onsite learning, and review “smart tools” for learning including global examples. An overview of [Digital Learning Now](http://Digital Learning Now) and the [Roadmap for Reform](http://Roadmap for Reform) will provide a policy framework that states need to adopt to make all this work.

## Appendix B continued



**“The Power of Digital Learning: How Innovation and Technology Can Help Power Improved Student Learning”** - Governor Bob Wise - [wise@all4ed.org](mailto:wise@all4ed.org)

**Craig Lee Hall Room 206**

Public education is faced with numerous challenges; declining state revenues, mounting teacher shortages, and increased global demands for better skilled workers are three of the biggest concerns facing education leaders. But every challenge presents an opportunity. Governor Bob Wise will discuss these challenges and the opportunities they present to improve public education. When high quality digital learning is used effectively in the schools, it offers students the chance to have a more personalized approach to learning and to better master the subject matter they need to graduate from high school with the skills required to be successful in the modern world. From online learning to implementation of new blended learning classroom models, the session will focus on innovation in our schools and how the effective use of technology in combination with great teaching can better prepare our students for today’s modern world.

### Online and Blended Learning: Technology Access



**“At the Point of Learning”** - Jeff Mao - [jeff.mao@maine.gov](mailto:jeff.mao@maine.gov)

**Craig Lee Hall Room 231**

Learn about how Maine has successfully provided ubiquitous 1:1 learning environments to all of its middle schools and over half of its high schools through the largest and only statewide 1:1 student computing program in the United States. At the heart of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative are the student and learning. When the technology fails however, learning suffers and your investment is wasted. Maine’s program is in its tenth year and has served over 150,000 students since 2002.



**“Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) - One District’s Struggle”** - Jim Monti - [jmonti@WESTWARWICKPUBLICSCHOOLS.COM](mailto:jmonti@WESTWARWICKPUBLICSCHOOLS.COM)

**Craig Lee Hall Room 228**

Jim Monti will participate in an open discussion regarding the West Warwick Public School's (WWPS) rationale and process towards implementing a district-wide wireless network that ultimately caused us to address the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) conundrum. The conversation will focus on the following:

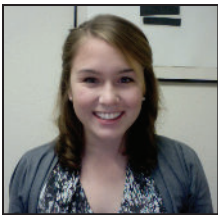
- Why was a district-wide wireless infrastructure so important to teaching and learning for the WWPS educational community?
- What were the lessons learned about the technology solutions that were chosen in WW?
- What were the lessons learned about the funding to get the necessary pieces in place?
- What were the lessons learned about the policies for staff, students & the public in WW?
- What are the next steps?



## **About Innosight Institute**

Innosight Institute, founded in May 2007, is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit think tank whose mission is to apply Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen's theories of disruptive innovation to develop and promote solutions to the most vexing problems in the social sector.

### **About the author**



MEG EVANS is a Research Assistant in Innosight Institute's Education Practice. She graduated from Yale University with a BA in Political Science in 2011. Her senior thesis focused on the education reform work in New Haven. While at Yale, she served as president of Yale's chapter of the Roosevelt Institute, a national non-profit student think tank.

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