PROFILE

NAME: Pflugerville Independent School District

LOCATION: Pflugerville, TX

FOUNDED: 1902

WEBSITE: pflugervilleisd.net

CHALLENGE

Ensure existing, new, and future classrooms are equipped with state-of-the-art visual display technology to accommodate a growing school district

SOLUTION

Utilize long-lasting Epson BrightLink® ultra-throw interactive displays to promote versatile, touch-enabled lessons for engaging instruction and dynamic learning

The Future's So Bright

How Pflugerville Independent School District Empowers the Classrooms of Today — and Tomorrow

Located just outside Austin, Texas — the fastest-growing big city in the nation — Pflugerville Independent School District (PfISD) has experienced dramatic growth in recent years, serving close to 26,000 students within northeast Travis County.

To keep up such an explosive population boom, the district built several new schools across its 95-square-mile area, equipping classrooms with state-of-the-art technology. When it came to deciding upon visual displays, district officials identified a future-forward priority: technology that would not only serve today's students, but tomorrow's, too.

PfISD found their solution in Epson® BrightLink® ultra short-throw interactive displays. What's more, the district didn't just install these displays in new classrooms; older classrooms were upgraded as well. By Fall 2019, the district had BrlightLink installed in every classroom across all 33 campuses.

The Clear Choice

"One of the big selling points of the BrightLink is its lifespan," says Victor Valdez, Chief Technology Officer at PfISD. "When I tell the campuses we can get 7 to 10 years out of the BrightLink and then show them the low cost of ownership, they're giddy."

The district had considered installing flat panel displays on carts, but Valdez was concerned about the tripping hazard this could present for the district's almost 3,000 teachers. Choosing the BrightLink also meant the district could remove projection


screens from older classrooms, while allowing educators to keep their whiteboards.

"Teachers are ecstatic about being able to see the projector content even with the overhead lights on and the blinds open," added Valdez. "Everyone loves the BrightLink."

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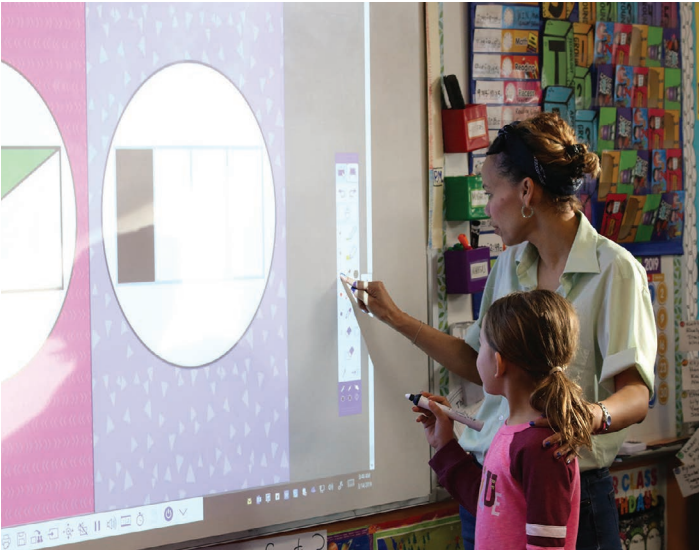
Instructing the Instructors

Any time a company implements new technology, a certain level of change management is required — and PfISD is no different. To ensure successful integration in the classroom, the district developed an ongoing BrightLink training program for educators.

"When you're building a house and the foundation is shaky, the house won't fare well," observes Kathryn Ives, Coordinator of Instructional Technology at PfISD. "That's why we require educators to complete a 60-minute BrightLink orientation and continue this learning throughout the year."

In addition, PfISD's team of instructional technology specialists creates various opportunities for educators to learn new skills. The specialists are invited to lead lessons using BrightLink's interactivity features, as well as attend grade-level or department planning sessions to demonstrate techniques. The team also hosts ongoing "lunch and learn" workshops to showcase interactive tools one at a time.

"The BrightLink can do so much more than just project an image," says Ives. "Our specialists' ability to demonstrate the BrightLink's interactivity and encourage educators' curiosity and creativity has been instrumental in our technology integration. All it takes is for one teacher to say, 'Wow, I didn't know you could do that!' and then they're off to learn more."

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PfISD also created opportunities for teachers to share the edtech tricks they learn. The district hosts an annual "Jingle Mingle" and a "Spring Fling" where teachers can showcase their innovative lessons and what tools they use to make lessons more engaging.

Building Interactive Lessons

With the instructional specialists' support, educators use the BrightLink to lead both whole-class and small-group instruction to further engage students in their learning.

The BrightLink's built-in interactivity application, Easy Interactive Tools, allows teachers and students to draw on projected images or use the display as a digital whiteboard. To help educators creatively integrate this tool into instruction, the instructional technology team found images of commonly used templates such as lined paper, story order charts, and Venn diagrams and saved them as JPEGs. These "Easy Interactive Charts" allow educators to select a background and annotate directly on top of the image with their finger or interactive pen. The instructional specialists are also teaching educators how to make their own Easy Interactive Charts using their own images.

"While this may seem like rudimentary support, teachers often see our ideas and come up with their own charts to make," Ives explains. "When we give them even just a little support, they begin to support themselves."

Working in small groups, students can collaborate and contribute to the charts. This allows students to flex their critical thinking skills and create content to express their learning. At the end of the lesson, teachers can save the edited chart for future reference and grading. This allows them to evaluate students' understanding of the content and develop instruction to clarify concepts or make adjustments to provide more rigor or enrichment.

Discovering New Solutions

While BrightLink includes a year subscription to SMART Learning Suite Software and Epson's own intuitive Easy Interactive Tools, users can also project and interact with free online education apps and websites to engage even the most reluctant learners. Math teachers can project online math manipulatives on their whiteboards and call upon students to drag and drop the manipulatives with their fingers or an interactive pen to demonstrate their understanding of math functions. Science teachers can project online lab simulations and invite students to manipulate the experiment's variables with their fingers or

an interactive pen to see causes and effects. In music class, students can drag and drop notes onto a treble and bass clef with their fingers or an interactive pen.

"We are constantly discovering tools that can work in concert with the technology we've purchased," notes Ives.

For example, Ives recently found a free online math app that allows high school educators to overcome the difficulties they experience when sharing math formulas, functions, or expressions. Teachers need special fonts to type math equations. However, if they write them on the whiteboard using the BrightLink's interactive pen, or even their finger, the online tool will transpose the written equation into typed text. In the app, the teacher can share this typed equation with students' devices, which the students can annotate and solve on their own. The students can then project their answers on the BrightLink.

"The BrightLink is the best solution for us because teachers are only limited by what applications they find and want to use," says Ives. "We wanted to give them autonomy because they know what's best for their students."

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the individual and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Pflugerville Independent School District. Individuals were not compensated for this article.

As a member of the Epson Expert Program, Pflugerville Independent School District will receive an Epson BrightLink 710Ui projector (with an MSRP value of $3,499.00) at the conclusion of the Program.

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