

POWER Innovation: Transforming a Culture

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The Carrollton Exempted Village School District is experiencing a major transformation due to the Utica Shale industry boom that has positively impacted the district. New money has not been passed by the voters since 1977. As a result, the administration and board had to find alternative ways to fund the district, which includes partnering with various oil and gas companies and most importantly, ensuring that students are learning the necessary skills in the classroom to complete in the local workforce. Three strategies emerged from this transformation.

Historically, the village of Carrollton, Ohio was known primarily for its agriculture production, crop growing, and its conservative values. However, the county has experienced a Utica Shale boom that has drastically changed the community, especially the school district. The Carrollton Exempted Village School District (CEVSD) is scheduled to have six wells on its property and a power plan that will bring additional revenue to this poor and rural school district. It is important to mention that the community has not passed a school levy since 1977. Although community support for the schools exists, the majority of taxpayers do not want their taxes raised. Thus, the administration and board had to find alternative ways to fund the district.

District Background and Finances

The CEVSD serves nearly 2,300 students in grades pre/k thru 12 in communities throughout rural Carroll County, OH (population 29,000) and has a free and reduced lunch rate of approximately 50 percent. On the most recent

state report card, the district received an Excellent with Distinction. Despite retaining a stable population, the district has responsibly cut over \$6.3 million in the last decade, which is nearly 25 percent of the overall operating budget, while maintaining excellent academics and programs. These cuts have driven the closing of three elementary schools, a reduction in teachers and administrators, and elimination of 15 bus routes. Without additional efficiency measures, the district will face a deficit in 2015. These are just a few challenges facing the leadership of the district.

After observing the district for approximately the first 100 days on the job, it was evident to my assistant and I that this quaint and quiet community was transforming into something no one ever envisioned – a booming culture consisting of migrant workers drilling for Utica Shale in Carroll County. Although agriculture remains at the forefront of the economy, the oil and gas industry has started and continues to have a powerful impact on this small community. A

major question for us was, “How will this new culture impact the schools?”

It was time to create a vision for this paradigm shift that was quickly occurring as a result of the oil and gas industry. How can the district benefit from this transformation? How can the district take advantage of forming new partnerships with the upstream, mid-stream, and down-stream energy companies? Will the teachers, parents, and community members, and key stakeholders embrace this change? These questions helped with the creation of a framework and a bold plan that was used to obtain buy-in from this small rural community.

This bold plan started to formulate at the middle of our second year when the District received \$4.06 million from the Governor’s Straight A grant initiative in December 2013. CEVSD was one out of 24 recipients to receive monies for innovation out of almost 600 applicants. This is when this visionary plan became a reality, which helped transform the district into an innovative place to learn for all students.

What is Providing Opportunities with Extraordinary Results (POWER)?

The term “POWER” originated out of several meetings with partners while working on the grant. The team wanted an acronym that stood out and had a powerful meaning behind it. POWER focuses on one major goal – to engage the energy and agriculture industries in new symbiotic relationships supporting enhancements for students. It was imperative that the district partner with these industries and also retain revenue in the district that can be leveraged to benefit students. Three strategies drive this initiative.

Strategy 1: Partnering with energy businesses that will assist in developing new pathways for students.

The first strategy focuses on the partnering with outside organizations in the community. Currently, many high school juniors and seniors participate in dual enrollment options with Stark State College. However, there was an immediate need to attract more students and in more different fields of study. POWER allows students to take more postsecondary classes to accelerate education leading to good paying, high demand energy jobs upon completion. The long-term outcomes of this particular strategy include the enrollment of 40 students per year with the opportunity to earn stackable certificates in the energy field.

Stackable credentials provide new dual enrollment secondary options for students, including being able to get a job right after graduation. The district is formalizing a venue for businesses to partner, communicate, and address workforce challenges. In addition, students that plan on attending a two or four year higher education institution will be able to take enriched classes in biology, mathematics, and engineering. These efforts are aligned with energy partnerships throughout the region of Ohio.

Strategy 2: Embracing project-based STEM education to prepare all students for career and college readiness in engineering, agriculture, and safety.

Although pockets of STEM are evident throughout the district, it was not consistent among and between grade levels. POWER includes three programs, which are: (1) STEM School of Engineering; (2) STEM School of Agriculture; and (3) STEM school of Safety. The STEM School of Engineering enhances higher education readiness with a focus on engineering. This includes project-based learning focusing on energy including sustainability, environmental responsibility, alternative energy, and oil and gas. Project Lead the Way (PLTW) is the curriculum being utilized at all grade levels.

POWER Framework



Secondly, students still have the option to enter into a more effective program of agriculture. The STEM School of Agriculture leverages the growing fortunes of farmers resulting from land leases with energy companies and partnerships with the Ohio State University Extension and Future Farmers of America Camp Muskingum to create a 21st century farm on the district's property. CEVSD has 165 acres of unused land. Crops produced in the newly built greenhouse located on the district's property, will be sold at the local farmers market. In addition, students will help construct several nature trails with kiosks as well as a garden designated for each classroom to maintain. Overall, the curriculum will incorporate land and resource management, digital agriculture management, and bio-sustainability.

Thirdly, the STEM School of Safety provides the growing local demand for individuals with environmental safety training. CEVSD is partnering with Eastern Gateway Community College to offer environmental ground water education in partnership with Operating Training Committee of Ohio (OTCO) – Ohio's only certified water quality training organization.

Additionally, curricula will incorporate basic safety certifications such as CPR, First Aide, SafeLandUSA, OSHA 10, and OSHA 30. It is important to mention that grant money will be used to build a 5,000 square foot learning lab for students in grades 6 through 12. Students will have the opportunity to learn a variety of skills utilizing hands on learning. Also, local businesses will take advantage of the learning center in the evening for their training purposes. It is imperative that outside organization have access to the training center to meet the needs of the local economic workforce.

Strategy 3: Converting the bus fleet to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) in order to reallocate more funds to the classroom.

The last strategy focuses on putting more dollars into the classroom by saving on bus fuel costs. The CNG conversion project is estimated to save the district \$150,000 annually, which will be used to support instruction in CEVSD classroom. The district currently runs 18 buses with 12 being converted to CNG this year. In addition, the introduction of distance technologies into the

classroom is projected to have a savings since the district will not have to hire additional teachers to instruct new programs. Distance learning will give students the opportunity to take a variety of courses that are not typically offered in any of the buildings.

Conclusion

In summary, the POWER initiative would not be possible without the numerous partners supporting the district and its vision. There are over 20 partners and each one has a significant role in making this dream become a reality. It is the school district's intent to maintain high expectations for student achievement while at the same time sustaining this initiative, which is expected to raise all levels of achievement. This is an example of how one school district can thrive in a community that does not financially support the district. This does not mean the stakeholders do not support the schools, it means that the administration and board of education must find alternative ways to keep the district thriving.

Program evaluation will continue for five years. New Growth Group and Battelle for Kids will conduct both formative and summative assessments to determine the success of the POWER initiative. Also, Epiphany Management Group will continue to provide technological support for this grant and valuable professional development for all the teachers and administrators.

Although agriculture will continue to be an integral part of the economy, it is impossible to overlook the potential of the oil and gas industry. Schools must mirror and support the local workforce. Thus, students need to be prepared to enter the workforce whether they attend a college or enter the workforce immediately. After all, these businesses are counting on the district to produce quality workers.

Author's Note:

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