

A New Uprising

Kentucky P2o Innovation Lab

By Amanda Nelson

An elementary classroom at Eminence Independent Schools uses MacBook computers to enhance a lesson. Eminence Independent Schools Superintendent Buddy Berry and Instructional Supervisor Thom Coffee took part in the College's Next Generation Leadership Academy.



When students in Eminence, Ky., recently took to Twitter to protest a decision made by their town's officials, school leaders held their breath. Perhaps the new culture they had created – one where it's OK to do things like bring an iPhone to school or voice to teachers and administrators how you want to be taught – had opened the doors to “student voice” a little too wide.

Nobody could argue the cause wasn't good-hearted. The students were rooting for a man in town who helped make ends meet by collecting cans to recycle. Some residents were concerned about him coming onto their properties, so he'd been told he was no longer allowed to pick up cans.

As it turns out, the students acted maturely during their cyberspace campaign. The town altered its decision and school officials, proud of their students' responsible use of social media, breathed a sigh of relief.

It's commonly said it takes years for a trend to reach Kentucky. Someone merely passing through Eminence, population 2,200, might describe it as a sleepy little town. But Eminence students' impromptu Twitter campaign is just one example from among the forward-thinking Kentucky schools on track to become models for the state, nation and perhaps even the world.

Given their innovative spirit, it is no surprise that when the College of Education at the University of Kentucky created a program last summer to build capacity in leaders to design new systems for learning, Eminence's superintendent, Buddy Berry, and instructional supervisor, Thom Coffee, were among the first participants.

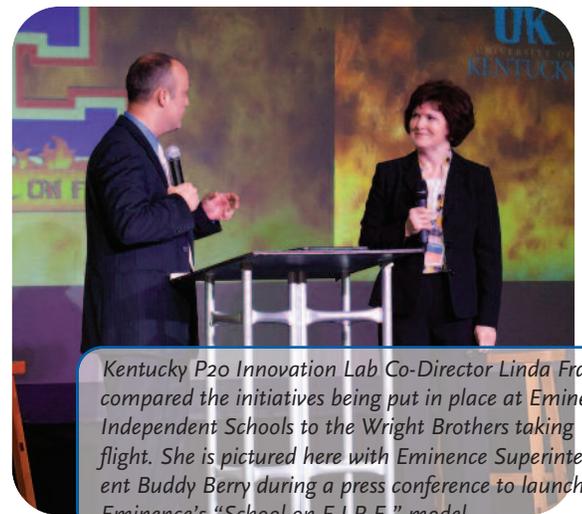
The Next Generation Leadership Academy – an output of the College's Kentucky P2o Innovation Lab – was a game-changer for Eminence. Berry and Coffee were already on an innovative path, but the academy allowed them to get further connected with what school could be. They say it also allowed them to think purposively about how to enact changes in a designed format

that's systematic, rather than happenstance.

In one particularly eye-opening session, UK Associate Professor John Nash brought in some high school students and prepped the academy participants on how to ask probing questions about what they want from school.

“As we interviewed them about how to do school differently, the students were so stuck inside the model they had seen for 15 or 16 years, they couldn't think differently. It convinced me that we've got to go back to Eminence and find a way to get from students what they really want from school – not just a version of what they think school is supposed to be,” Coffee said.

Across America, there are students, teachers, principals and superintendents who, similarly to Eminence, know all-too-well the way we do school no longer works. While we may refer to what is needed as “education reform,” the effort shouldn't be confused with reform programs we've all watched come and go in decades past. The new “education reform” is designed to root out what doesn't work and replace it with ways of learning that will prepare all students for college and careers. Interestingly, this kind of reform is student-centered, meaning students have a say in designing the future of their education. And, perhaps most importantly, Kentucky has spent years building the sorts of infrastructures that will make this work sustainable over time.



Kentucky P2o Innovation Lab Co-Director Linda France compared the initiatives being put in place at Eminence Independent Schools to the Wright Brothers taking flight. She is pictured here with Eminence Superintendent Buddy Berry during a press conference to launch Eminence's “School on F.I.R.E.” model.

Here at UK, we call this type of reform “Next Generation Learning,” or “NxGL” for short. In 2010, we created a launching pad for NxGL called the “Kentucky P2o Innovation Lab,” referred to around here as “P2o.” A lot of people ask us, “What is P2o?” At the simplest level, it means pre-school (“P”) to graduate level (“2o”) education. The activities that fall under the P2o label are diverse and complex; however, the heart of P2o is quite simple. P2o builds a bridge between school districts and higher education. The work we do is parallel, which begs the question, “Why don't school districts and universities –

particularly colleges of education – spend more time working together?”

It's a daunting task, tearing down a system that has remained virtually unchanged since the 1800s. But the participants are up for the challenge and the UK faculty members involved in P2o are excited to lend a hand and be part of the transformation. Within P2o is a set of mini-labs that are based upon issues or themes. For instance, the importance of self-beliefs is a founding principle of Associate Professor Ellen Usher's work as co-director of the Motivation and Learning Lab. Meribeth Gaines, principal of Lexington's new Wellington Elementary, co-directs the lab with Usher.

“The lab gets us out of our silos and helps us share expertise we both have for solving challenging problems we face,” Usher said. “By having a university researcher and school principal collaborate, we are able to ask the right questions and conduct the right analyses, so our lab is able to solve problems encountered daily in Kentucky's schools.”

The NxGL Leadership Academy begins work with school leaders because they are in a position to make school-wide and system-wide changes. Keep in mind, these leaders have been part of the current system since about age 5, when they entered kindergarten. And it's likely most of their career successes have come from performing well within that system. But they also realize how the current system isn't keeping up with the demands of a global world and are ready to lead the state, nation and the College's international partners in changing it to meet current demands.

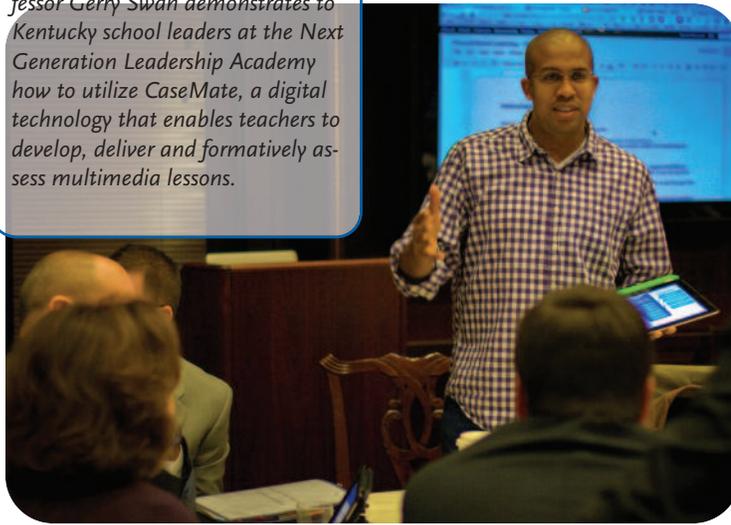
With all this talk of radical transformation, that's not to say we're going to pull the proverbial rug out from underneath the current schooling systems. While the task at-hand is big and the need for transformation vast, we're starting small. Yet, we're making sure we can “scale-up” what works very quickly.

Here's how it works. Once a school leader takes part in the year-long leadership academy, he or she will have a set of goals and ideas for how to make important changes. The ideas worth trying out, we call “prototypes.” We have the chance to work with their schools to test out these prototypes within Learning Innovation Zones (iZones) created inside the schools. iZones provide a safe place for college faculty and school personnel to work together to redesign and rethink current policies, practices and programs to support 21st Century learners.

When something shows promise among the students in the iZones, we have networks set up across Kentucky (at other iZone schools) and in several other states through the Council of Chief State School Officers

(CCSSO). Kentucky is one of seven states chosen by the CCSSO to participate in an Innovation Lab Network (The Partnership for Next Generation Learning) to strategically work together to design new systems for learning to more fully prepare ALL students for college and career. This partnership seeks to spark a broad-based educational transformation through the establishment of state-based networks to create proof points of scalable initiatives and system redesigns that deliver the educational outcomes we seek. UK is working collaboratively with the Kentucky Department of Education to lead this work throughout the state.

College of Education Assistant Professor Gerry Swan demonstrates to Kentucky school leaders at the Next Generation Leadership Academy how to utilize CaseMate, a digital technology that enables teachers to develop, deliver and formatively assess multimedia lessons.



Kentucky is the only state among the CCSSO network that has a high level of involvement between P-12 and a university. We think this puts our state at an advantage, because with a job this important, no one is willing to leave any of this to chance. Collaboration with a tier-one research university allows our schools to deeply analyze prototypes and research the impact on student achievement.

As for Eminence, here are some of the ideas they are implementing within their schools:

- Partnership with Bellarmine College to offer college-level courses to qualified students with no cost to students;
- Redesigned Master Schedule (Core classes three days per week. Benchmark ready students take classes two days a week on Bellarmine's campus.);
- Wi-Fi on school bus transporting students to Bellarmine College in Louisville;
- One-to-one technology devices (MacBook Pro) for all high school students;
- Students trained to give feedback on educational experiences using Twitter;
- Student and Teacher Voice Teams for input in district decisions;
- Standards-Based Report Cards; and
- Working with sister school in England on using results from student aspirations surveys to better engage students in learning. ❖



Next Generation Leadership Academy participants from Madison County share ideas during the February session. Pictured from left to right are Randy Pepper, assistant superintendent; Gina Lakes, director of professional development; and Alicia Hunter Farristown, middle school principal.