

**Needs Assessment for Jim Ned CISD**

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## **Introduction**

The Jim Ned Consolidated School District is a rural district that consists of two elementary campuses, one intermediate campus, one middle school campus, and a high school campus. Altogether the district houses around 2,500 students. The technology department for the entire district currently consists of one technology director and two IT specialists for all campuses. The Chief Academic Officer oversees the department and plays a role in making important technology decisions. This Needs Assessment was developed in an effort to assess the current inner workings of technology leadership and how these roles affect the proper integration of technology into learning, as well as train and support teachers in utilizing the technology that has been provided by the district. As research and interviews were conducted the areas of technology needs such as digital citizenship, funding, infrastructure, professional development, and technology integration were addressed. The district is currently operating in 1:1 learning at the middle school and high school levels and will be initiating this type of integration at the intermediate level in the fall of 2023.

## **Early Conceptions**

As this Needs Assessment was developed, it became clear early in the process that the district lacks proper personnel to handle all the components quality technology integration entails. The district leadership team is highly motivated to stay on top of trends and make decisions that best benefit students. However, they lack the funding to create an essential team that can execute all that must be done within the educational technology realm. The district is working hard to keep up with the rapid growth it has experienced over the last decade and have had to mainly focus on other larger issues such as building space and inadequate transportation for the number of students they currently house. Because of these issues, many areas pertaining to technology have been pushed to the side since the pandemic. This situation became very evident as research was conducted for this Needs Assessment and heavily influenced many of the conversations.

### **Interview with Chief Academic Officer and Technology Director**

Because the roles of the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and the technology director are so intertwined, an interview was conducted with both simultaneously to ensure all bases were covered and discussed. Cristi Doty has been the CAO since the role was created in 2020 and Holly Moore has been the technology director since 2021. The role of the CAO within the district “is to ensure that each of our students have the opportunity to participate in an engaging and rigorous learning experience that brings instruction, assessment, curriculum and technology together so they can achieve their highest potential” (Jim Ned CISD, n.d.). She is the head of all curriculum and instruction and works alongside the technology director to make sure technology choices support student learning. The role of the technology director for the district is to offer support for district used programs as needs arise from teachers. The interview questions that were discussed are listed below:

1. As you begin planning for the new school year, what is the biggest technology need for students?  
Staff?
2. How is digital citizenship and digital literacy being emphasized for students?
3. What funding barriers have you faced in providing adequate technology for each of your campuses?
4. How do you plan to provide professional development for the 1:1 set up on your new intermediate campus?
5. What is the current goal or vision for technology implementation across the district?
6. How do you justify the important use of technology in the classroom to families who are hesitant about their students using technology so frequently?
7. What resources are currently offered through your district to aid teachers in utilizing technology to its fullest potential?
8. What are some ways your school is ensuring and encouraging the responsible use of devices?  
Particularly in your 1:1 settings?
9. What is the plan for updating or replacing devices as technology trends change?

10. What barriers do you predict you may face in initiating a 1:1 implementation on your new campus?
11. What kind of funding resources are available for educational technology?
12. How do you prioritize student security within technology use in your district?
13. Do you feel your teachers are equipped and ready to properly implement a 1:1 learning setting?
14. How do you plan to support your teachers as you make the transition into 1:1 learning?
15. How do you feel 1:1 learning best supports learning?

### **Data Review**

The data for this Needs Assessment for JNCISD was collected from interviews with the CAO and technology director, as well as from the information provided by Jim Ned on their website, through their district improvement plan, and Acceptable Use Policies. Unfortunately, the district does not currently have a Strategic Plan for Technology that specifically discusses strengths, weaknesses, and goals for technology within the district. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the district has used funds to purchase numerous Chromebooks making three out of its five campuses one-to-one. The district has also purchased several Chrome carts for the elementary campuses that allow them adequate access to technology when needed. The data for this assessment will review the district's strengths and weaknesses, as well as highlight needs within certain areas.

### **Digital Learning**

Digital learning became a major priority as learning was pushed online at the end of the 2020 school year and at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. For this small, rural school district, this push caused mass chaos. The district just simply was not ready for this type of digital learning to take place so quickly. When schools shut down, most families were expected to utilize the devices that they had at home but could reach out to try to gain access to the district's minimal resources they had to offer. For the most part, they ended up pulling from the few Chromebooks classroom teachers had at the time and issuing them out to families. Now, post-

Covid, the district has purchased numerous Chrome carts and has continued to encourage teachers to use online applications such as Google applications.

### **Assistive Technologies**

Google applications used heavily on the Chromebooks offer many assistive technologies for students who need extra support and can be beneficial to the Universal Design for Learning. “Google Classroom can support the three principles of UDL and perceive that Google Classroom applications can scaffold the learning of students with and without exceptionalities (Sharpe, 2019). JNCISD works to make sure that all students receive the appropriate support and encourages teachers to use the technology provided to best support these students. The learning software called LearningAlly is used on all campuses to support students in reading. “Learning Ally provides new, integrated tools to help educators drive sustainable transformational change in literacy leadership and student achievement” (*About Us - Helping BVI Student - Helping Dyslexia*, n.d.).

### **Infrastructure**

As of now, the district feels like their infrastructure is adequate to maintain the technology use they are currently using. However, when asked what barriers they predict they may face as 1:1 computing increases across the district, infrastructure was brought up as a potential issue. They are also able to keep up with the purchase of new devices right now but are predicting that the student to device ratio will begin posing issues as funds run out to keep replenishing Chromebooks. Because of this prediction, the need for other funding options as this barrier approaches will be important to begin researching.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development is an enormous need in the general field of educational technology, and JNCISD is not exempt from that barrier. As we discussed teacher preparation throughout the

interview, particularly for the new intermediate campus that will be 1:1, the CAO expressed concern on the district's inadequacy to provide proper training for teachers in these areas. While both the CAO and the technology director oversee and conduct training over very basic technological needs within the district, they both expressed a need to better this area and find more ways to provide applicable training to teachers and stated that there simply isn't enough time to do it well. While the district requires teachers to attend regular professional development, there are no requirements that any of those trainings pertain to technology integration. It was discussed that an ideal goal would be for the department to grow and be able to staff reputable leaders that can provide proper training and support for teachers as they integrate technology into learning.

### **Security**

As things were discussed, the biggest technological need that is being explored for next school year is high quality internet safety filters that better protect students. In addressing the major barriers that occurred over the past year, JNCISD expressed the concern that students were able to access too much on the devices and they would like to have better protective features on each device. The fact that middle school and high school students can take their devices home poses a problem with this, so the district is looking into solutions that could protect students anytime they are on a district device.

### **Policy**

JNCISD issues an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and a Chromebook Handbook to all students using district technology devices. The AUP is a concise document that reiterates the expectations in using the devices, provides examples of misconduct in using the device, and demonstrates specific consequences for misuse. This document is also where the district further addresses cyberbullying and Internet safety expectations. Within the Chromebook Handbook, students and parents are given details on how to receive and return the device each school year.

Detailed care instructions are also included, as well as terms for repairing. The district has a three-strike rule on repairs and requires students to pay for replacement of the device upon the third repair incident. The policy lays out clear student expectations and terms of loan towards the end of the document.

### **Resource Identification and Usage**

Many of the district's educational resources are accessed through technology. In fact, it was discussed that many of the textbook purchases for the 2023-2024 school year will be digital versions, rather than hardback. The district utilizes TEKS Resource System for instructional alignment, as well as the Cambium online testing software that is utilized to interim test students throughout the year and issue end of year STAAR testing.

### **Support Services**

As stated before, the district houses two IT specialists within the technology department that work under the technology director. Where the technology director deals more with the educational side of technology, the IT specialists are generally the ones who are installing and repairing devices and physically working in the field to help maintain equipment. The technology department works hard to meet the needs of the district, but they just simply lack the manpower to support all the needs of the district.

### **Strengths**

Leaders within JNCISD are highly motivated to provide learning opportunities that prepare students for life beyond the classroom. They even have forward-thinking listed as one of their core values within their mission statement. The culture within the district is very positive and student-centered. The district also receives ample support from the community and other stakeholders in a variety of ways. Considering they are a smaller district; they actually have adequate access to devices and maintain a relatively small student to device ratio. District

officials and leaders have wisely allocated funds from the Emergency Connectivity Funds issued during and after Covid and have chosen to spend a good majority of the money they received on technology advancements throughout the district. They have also done an exceptional job of keeping up to date with bandwidth and infrastructure barriers to keep devices running smoothly throughout school days. The potential to diminish many of the barriers they face is possible through the drive and motivation demonstrated by the leadership. They just need access to more funds to support those dreams.

### **Weaknesses**

Time, money, and resources are the greatest barriers this district is currently facing.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated weaknesses that can be easily addressed. The lack of properly trained leaders to aid in supporting teachers and help provide professional development is a substantial need within the district. Teachers have ample access to devices, with limited knowledge on how to best use them for learning. The district also lacks a strategic plan to prioritize technology goals and visions, as well as target needs.

### **References**

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