

Reinventing Education

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May 3, 2012, Nick Sauers

I spent the day on Tuesday at the kickoff of [Eminence](#), Kentucky's Framework of Innovation for Reinventing Education (F.I.R.E.) initiative. School communities often unite behind athletic or other extra-curricular activities, but are less enthusiastic about supporting learning initiatives. It was awesome to see the excitement generated for Eminences School on F.I.R.E. initiative. Not only were students, board members, and school staff members at the kickoff event, but also many other individuals who had been involved with the launch of their program. Many things from the day were inspiring, but the message from [Terry Holiday](#), who is the Kentucky Commissioner of Education, was very powerful. Commissioner Holiday may have borrowed a line from a popular speech with his "Yes we can" theme, and it was enthusiastically received by the crowd. He noted how many schools said that that they were unable to go 1:1 during such a difficult budget time, but Eminence said, "yes we can". He noted how many schools banned cell phones and social media, but Eminence embraced it. For me, his message was relevant to a vast range of topics or issues. In schools, and in life, we often let rules or obstacles get in our way of changing our behaviors or reaching a goal. In schools those obstacles may be 45-minute periods, standardized testing, the budget, facilities, or a host of other things. Those challenges, however real they are, often become excuses to not make major changes. I say excuses because in most cases there are examples of schools that have overcome those obstacles to improve their learning environment for students. One example of this would be the budget challenges that most schools are facing. I've worked with numerous schools in Iowa who have gone 1:1, and many others who have said that they just can't afford to do it. Those schools that have gone 1:1 in Iowa don't have any unique resources that other schools do not have. In fact, most of them have declining enrollments, which is an essential part of budgets that are created on a per pupil basis. They were able to go 1:1 because they thought it was important for their students and they were committed to making it happen. On Tuesday, there were many examples of how Eminence was overcoming numerous obstacles to improve student learning. Some examples include:

- They have embraced a "surprise and delight" approach to school, and even have included that as something they look for in their walk-throughs. For more information about surprise and delight, contact [John Nash](#) or visit his [dLab website](#).
- Building on the last point, they have thought of creative ways to have professional development. A 9-year old led one training! On another day, they had their training at a local shopping mall. Another was held at a Starbucks.

- They worked closely with an architect to create a great environment for students. In the elementary, the hallways were designed to look like a road and the outside of each classroom looked like a business or other community building. I can imagine that the elementary students were pretty excited about their school! (This was done at minimal costs.)
- They are implementing a 1:1 program in the high school called ACES.
- One of their school buses has been equipped with Wi-Fi!
- Their class schedule includes an amazing list of electives that should be extremely relevant to students. I'm excited to learn more about their syllabi for each course and will likely post about them in the future. One of those courses involves students helping to solve problems their community is facing. Another course, the one that I'm most excited about, will have students trying to create a large digital footprint around a charitable organization. They will use social media to spread their message around the world.
- Students will collaborate with students from a prominent high school in the UK.

These are just some examples of the exciting things that they have done. They also highlight how schools CAN reinvent themselves if they truly want to do so! I hope to follow their school closely and write about some of the challenges and successes that they encounter on their journey. It is extremely exciting to be involved with a school that is very aggressively thinking of creative ways to improve their schools. Eminence closed their celebration with a rap from student Brandon Mitchell, and part of his rap is below. If you'd like to see the entire set of lyrics, you can [find them here](#).

*You know I love those ACES
I ain't talkin bout the card
But with all these Apple products
Got me feeling like Steve Jobs*

*With all these advances
a new era is now entering
Schools are making progress
time to move into this century*

*B. E. Ready, B. E. Ready
B. E. Ready... For fire
B. E. Ready, B. E. Ready
B. E. Ready... For fire*

*Accomplish the impossible
Were living by this code
No better way to start it
Then with MacBook Pros*

*Assigning them to students
Each and every individual
We take the school and flip it
You can call it the reciprocal*

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