



SCHOOLS TRANSFORMING LEARNING

Nominee Campus: Dean and Mildred Bennett Elementary
Nominee District: McKinney Independent School District
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Article 1 of the Visioning Document: Statement of Principle states, *"Digitization and miniaturization of information processing power are expanding exponentially and are changing the world, our lives, and our communities at an overwhelming speed. To be viable, schools must adapt to this new environment. We must embrace and seize technology's potential to capture the hearts and minds of this, the first digital generation, so the work designed for them is more engaging and respects their superior talents with digital devices and connections."*

Dean and Mildred Bennett, our school's namesakes, never could have dreamed or imagined the digital classroom environment that exists in our school named after them, Bennett Elementary, in McKinney, Texas. Dean and Mildred were long time McKinney ISD educators and trailblazers for their time in public education. Mrs. Bennett still comes to our campus, even at the young age of 103. Her spirit, tenacity, independence, and her love for learning continues to live out each day at Bennett Elementary. We truly have the "Best School in McKinney!"

Bennett Elementary, home of the BEARS, currently serves 525 amazing students in kindergarten through 5th grade. Each day, we tell our school family, "We have the BEST students, staff, and parents." Every student, staff, and parent we serve, comes with their own unique strengths, talents, and needs. Bennett students speak 16 diverse languages at home. Our Bennett staff members have more than 540 years of teaching experience, 15 Bennett staff members have advanced degrees, and 6 staff members are graduates of McKinney ISD. Our parents are highly involved with over 600 volunteer hours per month.

Since the doors of Bennett Elementary opened in 2002, there have been many transitions and transformations including school size, administrative changes, and our ever changing student demographics. However, no transformation has been greater, than the transition from traditional classroom learning to the digital learning environment that now exists.

Our transformational journey began in the Fall of 2014, when Bennett Elementary was one of five McKinney ISD schools selected by the district through an application process to pilot Project Based Learning in kindergarten through 5th grade in the areas of Science and Social Studies. From the get-go, our Bennett staff was fully on board with this transformative approach to learning and interacting with the world outside of our school walls. With the campus implementation of PBL, McKinney ISD and our Bennett PTO, inundated our classrooms with the best technology available. Technology, such as MacBooks and I pads, helped our students and staff with the transformation of a new digital learning environment through thinking, creating, researching, collaborating, problem solving, and learning. With the abundance of technology, came the important responsibility of teaching our students how to be good digital citizens. This is an ongoing, teachable moment that our Campus Improvement Tactic Team #3 frequently meets to discuss, as well as, a Digital Citizenship and Tech Talk Tuesday, segment each week on live Morning Announcements. Monthly Digital Citizenship Posters are created by Tactic Team #3 and shared on Morning Announcements with our school family. Then, each classroom teacher hosts a Community Circle with their class to discuss the important Digital Citizenship poster for the month. Last, each child signs their class Digital Citizenship poster and the posters are displayed in every classroom across the school.

Over the past four years, Bennett Elementary has served as a flagship school to host numerous campus visits through the North Texas Visioning Consortium for teachers, administrators, and Central Office leaders. Visitors frequently visit our school to spend time in our classrooms and Makerspace to see the digital learning taking place each day and in every classroom.

In 2015, the Bennett Elementary Media Resource Specialist position became available. Campus administration realized this was a unique opportunity to hire the right person to help lead the digital transformational charge for our campus. As the new hire joined our school family, she began transforming the Bennett library into more than a book depository. A true Makerspace was born and the space came alive. This space has become the heart of the learning at our campus with integration, student choice, and student voice, happening every day and in all content areas.

At the same time, Bennett's PTO caught the vision of the transformation taking place at Bennett Elementary. As their children began coming home excited about the changes to their learning, the Bennett PTO actively raised \$35,000 to transform the learning spaces in every classroom through flexible seating. Students now had choice and voice as to what was the best learning environment for them to do their best work. Also, Bennett's community partner, CoServ, caught the vision and donated additional flex seating, as well as, sponsored a \$14,291.70 grant to lead 2nd grade through 5th grade girls through "Girl POWER" to excite and inspire their love of Technology, Science, and Math. This program took place every day after school from January to May, 2017.

Our transformational journey continued in 2016, with Bennett Elementary attaining Level 1 Certification as a High Reliability School through the Marzano Institute. Also, hiring a part time Instructional Coach and the schoolwide implementation of PLC,s helped facilitate and transform our school's success. Our IC continues to be instrumental in team planning, coaching teachers, and collaborating with staff to provide the best digital learning environment for our school. Through earning our High Reliability Level 1 certification through the Marzano Institute, the focus on grade level and campus PLCs allowed staff to develop their Team Norms, Team Vision, Team Protocols, and Agendas. PLC meetings helped teams discuss student's strengths, areas to improve, provide immediate feedback, and next steps to ensure academic success for all.

Digital learning plays a key role in helping our school share and tell "Our Story." Sharing "Our Story" is an ever evolving process through the use of social media. During Academy in August, 2016, we kicked off our first Twitter Challenge which yielded over 300 tweets per week to #bearshine. In 2017, after attending the first Principals' Institute for Cohort 7 in September, 2017, I implemented a new Twitter Challenge to the staff - weekly hashtag winner.

Our Bennett Elementary staff are committed to enhancing their digital learning and transformation by staying ahead in the ever changing world of technology. This fall, McKinney ISD encouraged staff members to submit a team video to be considered for participation in the Apple Innovative Educator Academy. Six Bennett staff members were selected and are partnering with McKinney Independent School District and working directly with an Apple Coach throughout this school year to develop in-depth capacity and use of Apple products.

Developing the "whole child" through student choice and student voice is just as important as focusing on the academic learning that takes place each day. Our students come to us with a variety of gifts, talents, and interests. To meet their unique interests, our campus has created a variety of school clubs. For example, Bear Buddies Mentor Club, Bennett Batons, Girl Power 2.0, Makerspace, Tinkercad 3D Printing, Drama Kids, Chess Club, Engineering, Choir, Tech Crew, Ambassadors, Book Clubs, and Safety Patrol. Students actively seek out and participate in the activities that interest them.

Bennett Elementary is truly a collaborative school that has been transformed in so many meaningful and powerful ways. Such ways include Project Based Learning, Digital Learning, Technology, Makerspace, Media Resource Specialist, Instructional Coach, PLCs, McKinney Education Foundation Grants, Twitter, Facebook, Google Classrooms & Hangout, Campus Improvement Tactic Teams, Vertical Teams, Team Leaders, Learning Walks, and the BEST staff ever, to name a few. It would be an honor to be selected as a 2018 Principals' Institute School Transforming Learning.

Superintendent's Signature and Endorsement



Dr. Rick McDaniel