

(last updated August 2024)

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE C. "Incubating" the K-12 Digital Consortium

BRIEF DESCRIPTION - FROM THE 2019 LiDA STRATEGIC PLAN:

The LiDA Center has committed to "incubate" the K-12 Digital Consortium (a collaboration among over 20 school districts and BOCES in the region committed to technology-rich innovations) by providing expertise, resources and leadership to support its start-up phase. This presents a unique opportunity for the LiDA Center to influence K-12 digitally-rich learning experiences (Goal #1), increase visibility in the region (Goal #3), and reach out to K-12 educators to become part of the LiDA Community (Goal #4).

(NOTE: hereafter, * indicates LiDA staff, and ** indicates other LiDA Community members, including LiDA affiliated faculty)

"Rebooting" the existing Consortium (early 2018 - April 2019)

In 2016, the *Western New York Digital Conversion Consortium* had been formed as several K-12 schools in the region were beginning to leverage the power of digital technologies for instruction and recognized the value of learning from each other. The initial idea for the Consortium was proposed by East Irondequoit Central School District's Superintendent Susan Allen and CIO Joe Sutorius. Their district, with the Warner School of Education and Monroe BOCES #1 and #2, were the Consortium founding members.

The Consortium's initial activities involved collaborations in a few grant proposals (including a \$3M Noyce Master Teaching Fellowship [MTF] grant awarded by the National Science Foundation [NSF] in 2018) as well as a number of events - most notably the East Irondequoit Digital Conversion Annual Symposium. While these initiatives showed the potential value of the consortium, they were still isolated events rather than part of a strategic agenda.

As the LiDA Center was established in 2018, it provided the opportunity to provide more support to the Consortium in its initial stages - something we saw as similar to the process of "incubating" a new enterprise in typical business incubators. After reconstituting the Consortium Steering Committee (to include *Borasi and *Miller as representatives of the LiDA Center, along with representatives of the other founding members), this entity reviewed and approved the idea of "incubating" the Consortium within the LiDA Center, and began to articulate the current Consortium's [mission and core strategies](#), as well as [membership levels and expectations](#). A new name for the Consortium - the *K-12 Digital Consortium* - was also chosen to better reflect these revisions, as well as developments in the field that raised some concerns with using the term "digital conversion."

To "reboot" the Consortium, we designed and offered a "[Kick-Off Workshop](#)" to be attended by representatives of any district interested in (re)joining the Consortium under the current reconceptualization. Over 70 participants from 20 different districts attended this first workshop, resulting in 17 districts renewing or starting their membership.

The LiDA Center (under the leadership of *Borasi, and in collaboration with Mason Digital) also worked on a radical redesign of the [Consortium website](#) (k12digital.org) - which has been in use since then, while continuing to add contents as well as a few new sections. This website was intended not only to provide information about the Consortium, but also as a vehicle to share information and lessons learned.

Expanding the Consortium's reach and impact (May 2019-February 2020)

Building on these foundations, the Consortium continued to grow its membership by offering more Kick-Off Workshops, reaching a total of 29 members (including 24 school districts in the Western New York region) before the pandemic hit. In addition to Steering Committee meetings, regular bi-monthly Zoom meetings with representatives of each member district were held to provide an opportunity to share information about resources and lessons learned. East Irondequoit continued to offer opportunities for school visits from other districts, and *Miller also conducted a number of school visits to districts to get to know them better and explore the possibility of having them open their schools for visits as well.

The following initiatives also helped create more focused opportunities to learn from each other:

- An in-person Leadership Workshop was offered in May 2019 to over 50 participants from 12 member districts, focusing on lessons learned about how to get started with major district-wide 1:1 initiatives (i.e., initiatives that centered on providing each student with 24/7 access to an individual computing device).
- The recordings of the panel presentations given at the Leadership Workshop were used as the basis to create a dynamic webpage about "[First Steps for Districts](#) interested in implementing a 1:1 initiative or digital conversion" - so as to serve as a "just-in-time" resource for any district embarking in these major initiatives.
- As a way to explore new vehicles to promote sharing of information across districts, in 2019 *Miller facilitated a Zoom conversation between two innovative math teachers from different districts - Spencerport Central School District and Addison Central School District - to share some of their successful practices. While this "pilot" has not yet been repeated, it showed a viable way to make teacher-to-teacher connections within the Consortium.
- A first [LiDA webinar](#) was offered in February 2020 on the topic of "setting up and running student help desks," building on the experience of two district members - Webster and Brighton. This webinar was recorded and posted on the Consortium website, so as to be accessible to interested educators who were not able to attend the live event. This proved to be a viable and valuable format.
- Under the leadership of Dan Fullerton, West Irondequoit K-12 Director of Technology, we also began to develop a "Community" section of the Consortium website that would allow more direct sharing and interactions among educators within the Consortium member districts. An early version was piloted in the last Kick-off Workshop offered in February 2020 shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

In the meantime, in July 2018 we launched the NSF-funded MTF program designed to prepare 20 K-12 STEM "master teachers" to lead major instructional technology innovations was launched (see [program description](#)). This 5-year project represented a unique K12-university collaboration between the LiDA Center, Warner's Center for Professional Development and Education Reform, and seven Consortium member districts (East Irondequoit (as lead), Auburn, Dansville, Geneva, Marcus Whitman, Newark, and Penn Yan) - as captured in a 3-minute [video](#) submitted to the 2019 STEM for All Video Showcase. From January 2019 to May 2020, this group of teachers engaged in a sequence of three graduate level courses and related experiences designed to help them more effectively integrate technology in their teaching, and thus better meet the demanding learning goals articulated

in the Common Core Math Standards and New Generation Science Standards - as described in another 3-minute [video](#) submitted to the 2020 STEM for All Video Showcase. Little did we know how timely this preparation would be!

Dealing with the pandemic and its potential implications (March 2020 to August 2022)

As the pandemic hit and emergency school closures were imposed across New York State in early March 2020, we decided to suspend the Consortium regular activities - such as the Consortium bi-monthly meetings, Kick-Off Workshops and new LiDA webinars - and also put on hold the planned launch of the *Community Space* on the Consortium website. Instead, *Miller reached out individually to district "liaisons" to better understand their situation and offer support as needed. For example, we made districts aware of any professional learning opportunities their teachers could benefit from - such as the virtual "2-day equivalent" [workshops on remote teaching](#) on remote teaching we designed as part of an existing grant and offered to a total of about 150 teachers in the region (many belonging to Consortium districts), and the new [LiDA eModule](#) on practices for remote teaching we made publicly accessible on the LiDA Center website. Miller also had Zoom conversations with 26 school leaders from Consortium schools in Fall 2020 to better understand their experiences during the pandemic.

The Fall 2020 Zoom conversations informed the design of other initiatives the LiDA Center developed to support K-12 schools in the region more generally. Highlights of findings from these conversations were reported in a presentation at the 2020 NYSCATE conference (a [recording of this presentation](#) is available if interested), so as to reach a wider audience of K-12 educators. As a follow up, in collaboration with Andrea Cutt (Warner Director of K-12 Leadership Preparation), *Miller conducted interviews with over 50 K-12 principals within Consortium schools (as well as other schools in the region), to further our understanding of the long-term consequences and implications of the pandemic for K-12 school. Findings from this study were disseminated to the larger community through 3 presentations at the 2020 and 2021 NYSCATE conferences (held in Rochester) as well as in an [article](#) published in the October 2021 special issue of *The Learning Professional* journal.

District liaisons were also invited to participate in the conversations around implications of the pandemic taking place in the 1-hour Zoom events organized for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 [LiDA Colloquium Series](#) - which focused on sharing lessons learned from the pandemic; several Consortium districts' representatives were also asked to serve as "conversation starters" in some of these events. Several educators from K-12 Digital Consortium district members participated, some in the role of "conversation starters."

Our work with MTF Fellows continued throughout the pandemic, while calling for some modifications in our original plan to better respond to the new needs and opportunities generated by the pandemic. This involved designing some new professional learning experiences in Summer 2020 to better support remote teaching (which turned out to be the reality for most of the 2020-21 school year!) and accelerating their preparation for taking on informal leadership roles. It also led to the decision to involve all fellows in a course on Communication and Counseling techniques in Fall 2020, and a course on Equity in Spring 2021. Many fellows remarked that all these experiences were very influential for their professional growth. Although our fellows were just starting the leadership development component of this 5-year program in Summer 2020, many were immediately called to take

on some leadership roles given their newly developed expertise with technology and remote teaching. Some of these early leadership experiences have been captured in a third 3-minute video submitted for the 2021 STEM for All Video Showcase - "[STEM Master Teachers Emerging as Leaders during the Pandemic](#)".

Starting in Summer 2021, in collaboration with the Center for Professional Development and Education Reform, we had the opportunity to offer intensive professional development to prepare for the implementation of the new NYS Computer Science and Digital Fluency standards for K-12 schools, as part of a "Smart Start" state grants awarded to the Wayne-Finger-Lakes BOCES (a Consortium member). In addition to directly serving several teachers within the Consortium, we hope that the professional development designed for this grant will serve as a base to help other Consortium districts as well prepare for the expected implementation of these standards starting in 2024.

Rethinking the K-12 Digital Consortium post-pandemic

In Fall 2022, we felt that schools were finally able to think beyond surviving the pandemic – even though disruptions were still taking place. To re-launch consortium activities in ways that would be most helpful to member districts, Miller first engaged in a series of one-on-one conversations with representatives of member districts.

Based on these conversations we concluded that districts were not yet ready to commit to re-starting monthly meetings nor the "Community" section of the Consortium website, but they would appreciate some professional learning sessions on Zoom as well as an in-person retreat to discuss topics of immediate concern. We also realized that the topics related to leveraging technology of greatest interest to K-12 schools had significantly changed after the pandemic – since now most schools had the capacity to give each student their own device, but they were experiencing push-backs on using technology in the classroom after the forced use of it during the pandemic, as well as a set of new issues,

This led us first of all to drop the kick-off workshop and streamline the application process to become a Consortium member.

We also organized a two-part Zoom series, held in January 2022, to share lessons learned about the current challenges encountered with teachers' resistance to engage in professional learning, as well as new opportunities offered by online learning that might offer new solutions. Recordings and artifacts from this "[Leveraging Online Technologies for Professional Learning](#)" series were posted on the Consortium website so as to reach a large audience.

LiDA also designed and facilitated a half-day in-person retreat for Consortium representatives on April 24, 2023, on "*Reimagining how technology can help K-12 schools move forward*", that was attended by over 80 participants.

One of the topics of interest that emerged from the April 2023 retreat was the realization of the potential disruption that AI may cause for K-12 education, following the launch of Chat GPT in November 2022 and the many controversies this had raised. This influenced our decision to submit a 1-year RAPID grant to the National Science Foundation about understanding K-12 school leaders' perceptions and decision-making about using AI in their

schools, in response to a specific call for proposals on AI and K-12 education. This grant was awarded in September 2023, and enabled LiDA to conduct over 40 interviews with K-12 leaders in the region, which in turn informed the design of a survey that was sent to all K-12 principals, superintendents, directors of technology and district-level administrators in charge of instruction in xx counties across Western New York. Consortium members representatives were instrumental in helping to secure interviews and survey responses.

On May 30, 2024, LiDA organized another half-day in-person retreat for the Consortium, this time on the theme of "Implications of AI for K-12 Schools". Over 60 representatives participated in this event, which also included sessions where participants were expected to review preliminary data from the RAPID grant, and help making sense of them. Themes addressed included:

- A. Realizing the potential of AI to improve instruction/learning
- B. Addressing concerns about plagiarism/academic dishonesty
- C. Realizing the potential of AI to increase K-12 educators' productivity
- D. Realizing the potential of AI to improve school/back office operations
- E. Professional learning on AI for K-12 educators
- F. Addressing the challenge of making AI-related policies
- G. Addressing AI-related privacy & cybersecurity issues

Presentations given by Consortium districts representatives on each of these topics, as well as other artifacts capturing the results of small group discussions on the topic, have been edited and posted on a special "[*Implications of AI for K-12 Schools*](#)" page of the Consortium website.