



# How To: A District-Wide Rollout of Digital Portfolios with Coppell ISD

Coppell ISD, a district with 17 campuses and 13,000 learners, models how to successfully roll out a digital portfolio program that captures the vertical growth of each student, district-wide (K-12).

Behind Coppell ISD's success with implementing digital portfolios are thousands of dedicated educators, and [Nancy Garvey](#), the Director of Digital Learning at Coppell ISD. Because of her passion for digital learning and instructional technology, she was charged with the task to create the framework to carry out a digital portfolio program district-wide, K-12. This is her story of how she did it.

## How it began

Coppell's digital portfolio journey started in 2011, when they realized they needed a system to communicate and showcase the learning between students and educators. They also wanted a system that would track the growth of each individual, and the district as a whole. After hearing about digital portfolios, Coppell decided to look into them. At this point they were still figuring out what exactly a digital portfolio could do, and how it would impact learning at Coppell.

Over time, they uncovered additional reasons why they needed digital portfolios.

In 2015, Coppell started using 1:1 devices, each learner was loaned an iPad for the school year. When each learners' work turned digital, and they weren't going home with worksheets, or projects with comments written in red pen, a new challenge surfaced. How can parents and guardians see what their child is learning? Coppell needed to find a way to encourage community-based communication, so parents and other teachers could see the students' learning.

"We really wanted to make sure that it was everybody's voice, not just the tech savvy or the not tech savvy. We got together and researched digital portfolios, then made educated decisions."

Nancy Garvey

## The decision process

Between 2011 and 2017 Coppell determined one thing: digital portfolios would play a major part of achieving their goals, but how would they decide as a district what digital portfolio tool they were going to use? This wasn't an easy decision. It took Coppell a while to decide on which platform to use, since they wanted to be sure the digital portfolio met all of their stakeholders' needs, and the tool could be used by everyone to help meet their individual goals. For a major decision like this, Nancy wanted to involve and elevate everyone's voices, so she created Coppell's Digital Portfolio Committee.

The Digital Portfolio Committee is a group of educators from all different grade levels and content areas across Coppell ISD. Elementary, middle, and high school educators from core subject areas, extracurriculars, and beyond, came together to make the best decision for the district.

- Their first task as a committee was to research digital portfolios to answer questions like:
- Why are they important?
  - What could they help us accomplish?
- As a district, what are our specific goals in using digital portfolios?

After becoming clear about what they could achieve by using a digital portfolio, their next step was to create a purpose statement that resonated with all learners across all subject areas.

The purpose statement became the center of the entire initiative. Each of the reps took it to their campuses and used it to explain the why behind deciding to use digital portfolios.

After outlining their goals and defining their purpose, their next step was to select a specific digital portfolio.

During these discussions, educators throughout the district were using different EdTech tools to document their students' learning—Google Sites, Seesaw, or bulb. One of Coppell's goals was to have the district use one platform, with students using the same digital portfolio from K-12 to document their vertical growth.

Knowing everyone uses their digital portfolio in a different way to meet different needs, the Digital Portfolio Committee created their checklist of needs. This was the list they used to compare their options. Which platform would ultimately check off the most boxes?

- Engaging with parents
- Easy for kindergarteners to navigate
- Documents growth
- Educators can provide feedback

They compared six digital portfolio tools with this checklist. The district identified the top three and started having conversations with each of the companies. In the end, bulb Digital Portfolios checked off the most boxes.

"What is best for all of our kids?. Not just kindergarteners, not just high schoolers, but everybody."

Nancy Garvey

## Once a tool is selected, what's next?

Selecting the platform was only a third of their work. Now they needed to train everyone. They identified the most natural place for digital portfolio training to start was during their back-to-school trainings. Dr. Angie Applegate, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, provides dynamic PD for all Coppell's educators at the beginning of each year.

During these trainings, here are some of the ways Coppell used the time to train their district to use digital portfolios:

**Train the trainer model** – This was a 3-day learning experience with over 1,000 educators. The training spanned multiple days to ensure everyone was heard, and understood the why behind the initiative. Teachers, Librarians, and Digital Learning Coaches worked alongside other educators to train each other each day.

**Group discussions** – They formed groups by grade level and subject areas to talk about what the digital portfolios meant to each group. Getting the right people together to have these conversations was key to Coppell's success.

**Pre-built templates** – They built templates for each grade level to help facilitate the learning and encourage the adoption of bulb. This was a way to get educators started with the digital portfolios right away and to easily distribute the information to their learners. Getting the educators and learners into the app from Day 1 is another reason Coppell believes they were successful in the district-wide adoption.

## Measurement of success

After Year 1, what steps did Coppell install to measure success?

- They set aside time in their administration meetings to showcase and have conversations around bulb exemplars across the district.
- Educators documented what was happening in their classrooms with the bulb pages to show principals the meaningful and inspiring results.
- They identified exemplar users throughout the district to join their conversation about how to approach digital portfolios, new ways to use the tool, and to help with communication across the district.
- During site visits, they took notes and observed if the portfolios were being used in the classroom, and what conversations were happening around digital portfolios on the campuses.
- They treated every and any "ah-ha" moment as an indicator of success. As long as they're on the trajectory and feel good about where they're headed, it all comes together.

And with each success, they threw parties to celebrate their progress.

Every Principal, Director, and Educator is on their own journey. It's okay if it takes them more time than others to figure out how to use a digital portfolio, as long as they see the shared value of how it impacts everyone.

## Helpful tips & tricks

Throughout this implementation process, Coppell found the following five initiatives to be extremely helpful:

- Getting the principals engaged in all of the training. Principals selected a specific grade level, and joined those educators to learn about digital portfolios.
- Continuing to have the conversations about bulb in their meetings, checking on progress, wins, challenges, and sharing advice with each other
- Showcasing the learner's portfolios mid-year to the administrators and teachers throughout the district
- Curriculum Directors, Principals, and Admin turned in their yearly professional development goals with bulb. Being in the app made them understand the hiccups, and built empathy and a model for learners.
- Remembering every Principal, Director, and Educator is on their own journey. It's okay if it takes them more time than others to figure out how to use a digital portfolio, as long as they see the shared value of how it impacts everyone

## Two pieces of advice

If you talk with Nancy about this experience she'll leave you with two pieces of advice:

1. Focusing on the why is way more important than focusing on the how. Yes, you'll need to learn how to use a new EdTech tool, but success happens when educators and everyone understand why.
2. Make sure you're talking to educators about how digital portfolios can lead to learner growth, showcase processes, and ensure best instructional practices, not solely what the final product is. It's not only about putting something into a digital portfolio, it's about the why, and having fun with it. Having conversations about their experiences, and sharing ideas and creativity is key

## Looking ahead

Coppell is finishing up their second year of using bulb. As they figure out what their new learning environment looks like for 2020-21, due to COVID, they're brainstorming ways to further the use of digital portfolios in their district.

Since the templates were extremely helpful for the educators, they want to create more templates and amplify them by adding help videos, along with other resources. As they continue to use digital portfolios, they will continue to use them for reflection. One way Coppell will encourage more reflection in the upcoming year is through exit ticket templates. They will also have parents and guardians create their own account to see their child's learning.

Coppell has big plans with digital portfolios. And we're excited to see what they continue to do to maximize the benefits with parents, teachers, and the community.