How Mason City Community Schools use Jamboards to give all students a voice

Closing gaps in technology access

To ensure future success, Mason City educators work to expose students to as much classroom technology as possible. "We want to provide those experiences to students so they'll be experts at using digital tools when they reach college and the work world," says Dr. Susan Pecinovsky, the district's executive director of curriculum and instruction.

But Dr. Pecinovsky and her instructional coaching colleagues saw gaps in the district's technology access—in particular, access to interactive whiteboards. Mason City's elementary schools had interactive white boards, but in grades 5 to 12, classrooms only had standard whiteboards and projectors.

"In the lower grades, students had access to technology," Dr. Pecinovsky says. "But then they'd get to high school and they'd have very little. It didn't make sense for students to live and breathe technology in the lower grades and then have nothing but a projector in 5th grade."

In the 2018-2019 school year, the district adopted a 1:1 Chromebook program for grades 3 to 12, following several years of Google Workspace use by teachers and staff as well, as Chromebook carts for classrooms. The timing was good for exploring an interactive whiteboard upgrade, says Kassandra Drey, technology integration coach for grades 7-12: Teachers and students were going to use Chromebooks and Google Workspace tools in the classroom and would want to integrate them with interactive whiteboards.

"Principals were asking us how we could take interactive whiteboards to the next level," Drey says. She and her instructional coaching colleagues also wondered how to encourage student engagement using interactive whiteboards. "An interactive whiteboard on its own is really a teacher's tool—not a student's tool," says Drey.

in many different ways that fit various teaching styles. It keeps teaching and student learning fresh, engaging, and continually improving."

Katie Trask, Social studies teacher, Mason City High School

Collaboration strikes a chord

While Googling for interactive whiteboard options, Drey discovered Jamboard. "I watched a video of people connecting with each other on a Jamboard, and that collaboration really struck a chord with me," she says.

The district purchased 36 Jamboards, 17 of which are in Mason City High School. 12 Jamboards are in John Adams Middle School, with the remainder in the district's grade schools and its alternative high school.

To encourage Jamboard adoption, the district trained teachers in small groups and followed up with ongoing support from instructional coaches, who played an essential role. "The instructional coaches really helped accelerate the learning process," says Dr.Pecinovsky. Drey uses her Twitter account to share tips on using Jamboards, and to cheer on teachers who find inspired ways to engage students in lessons using Jamboards.

Since Jamboards are on wheels, they can be moved from classroom to classroom—or even used in places where interactive whiteboards can't usually be installed. "We liked the fact that Jamboards don't have to be attached to the wall, since wall space is scarce," says Christine Peterson, Mason City High School's instructional coach.

Jamboard's mobility is also useful for physical education and sports environments, where a fixed interactive white board might be prone to damage. "For gym class, PE teachers can roll Jamboards back and forth from gyms to weight rooms to show GIFs of lifting exercises," Drey says.

Learning and productivity benefits

Adapting to all teaching styles

"None of our teachers are using it the same way, which I find fascinating," says Drey. One high school social studies teacher who prefers direct instruction uses the Jamboard to bring up images and graphics about Civil War battles from Google Drive, which he can then mark up and annotate for students. Other teachers take advantage of Jamboard's collaborative capabilities: One math teacher presents problems to solve on the Jamboard, then asks students to add their answers using the Jamboard app on their Chromebooks.

In a survey of teachers and students about Jamboard use, 93 percent of teachers agreed that Jamboards have made an impact on learning. "This is the tool I have always wanted, and now it exists," said Nick Trask, a high school social studies teacher. "It helps visually support my teaching, and can be used to zero in on visuals like maps and pictures without all the distractions that come from a projector."
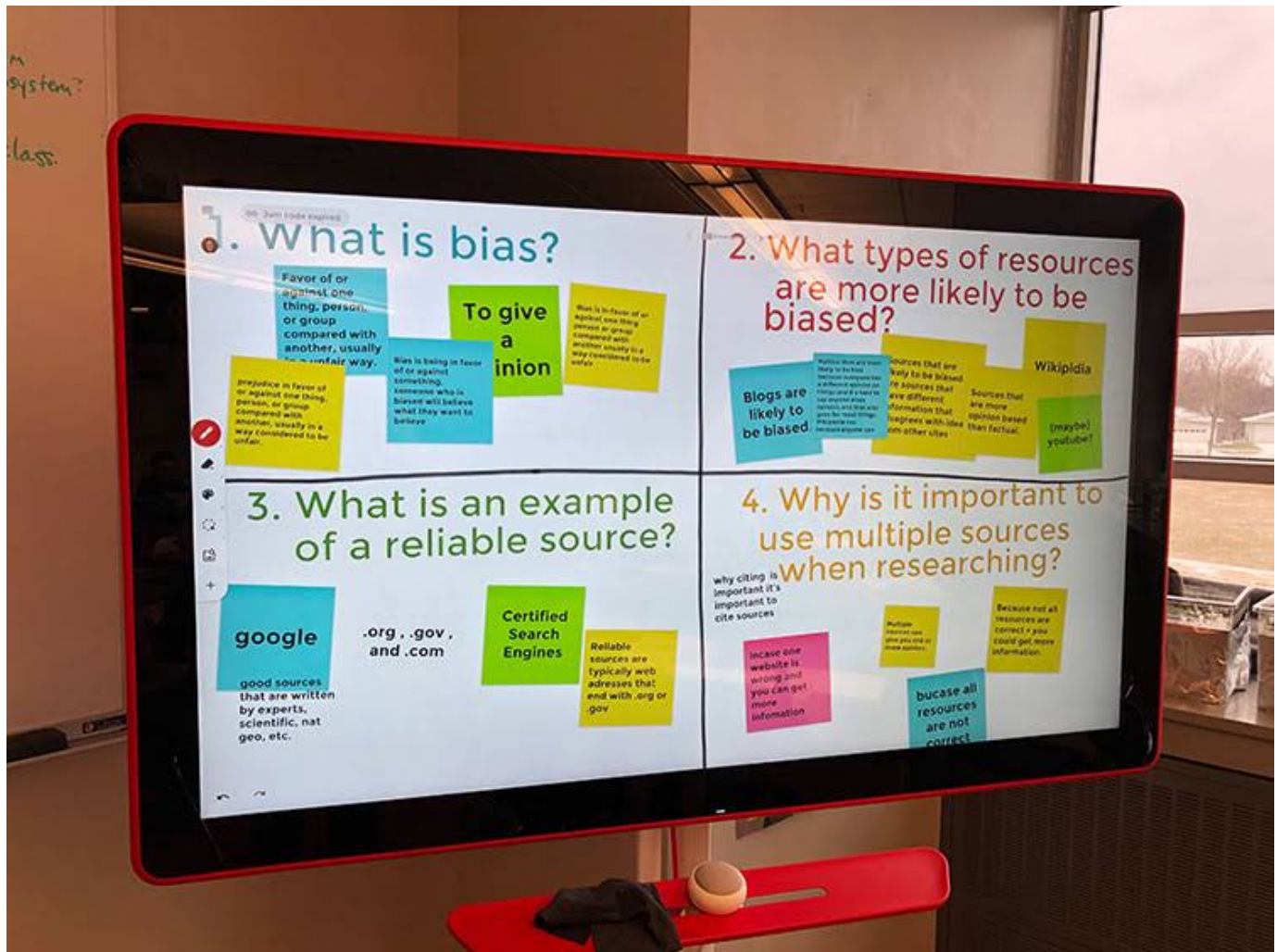
Giving students a voice

"The kids love that with the Jamboard app, they all have a voice in the classroom," Drey says. This was not always the case with interactive whiteboards—if students wanted to participate, they previously had to come to the front of the classroom and add their answers to the board. Now, when students use the Jamboard app on their Chromebooks, they're connected to the lesson the teacher is presenting.

Students don't have to be next to a physical Jamboard to collaborate. In the district's survey, 72 percent of teachers said their students are using the app or the web version of Jamboard.

"When we add Jams to our computers and do the work along with teachers, it helps me understand the content better," a high school student said in the survey. Other students pointed out the value of participating in lessons even if they're not confident enough to go to the front of the classroom—as well as learning from their peer's responses. "When we do group work, it allows me to build my knowledge off of what others display," said another high schooler.

Ashley Stout, a 7th grade science teacher at John Adams Middle School, used the Jamboard's sticky notes feature to ask students how they define "bias." The students' sticky note responses sparked discussion about identifying bias and using research from multiple sources.

Lower maintenance and faster ramp-up time

Sometimes new technology adds to the workload for teachers and instructional coaches, who have to learn complex software features and update devices. That's not the case with Jamboards, say Mason City educators.

"We'd have to ask IT to update software on the interactive whiteboards," Drey says. Something as simple as a light bulb burning out on the board required a visit from the IT team, with the board out of commission in the meantime. Teachers love that the Jamboards update on their own, Drey says, with new features coming online all the time.

Since students and teachers can easily understand how Jamboard works, training time is minimal: Students quickly grasp how to engage with the Jamboard app, which means teachers don't have to devote valuable class time to training.

For Dr. Pecinovsky, the Jamboards' user-friendly features mean that more teachers and students will embrace the tool.

"Too often, we give new technology only to the people who are most tech-savvy," she says. "We intentionally placed Jamboards not just in core instructional areas, but also in places like fine arts classrooms, and at every grade level, so we could see their potential. We want Jamboards to become a core tool for everyone."

What they wanted to do

- Close the technology gap between early grades and high school
- Improve the potential for interactive whiteboard engagement
- Engage students, not just teachers, with interactive whiteboards

What they did

- Added Jamboards across schools and grades
- Assisted teachers with training and coaching
- Shared tips and teacher successes

What they accomplished

- Jamboards support teachers, no matter their learning style
- All students have a voice and are encouraged to participate
- Jamboards reduce maintenance and IT upkeep

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