Hillsborough County

P U B L I C   S C H O O L S

Preparing Students for Life

Flexible, scalable, and supportive edtech solutions

DIGITAL REPORT 2023

Hillsborough County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Preparing Students for Life

Flexible, scalable, and supportive edtech solutions

WRITTEN BY:
JOSEPHINE WALBANK

PRODUCED BY:
TOM VENTURO

Tom Weeks, Chief Technology Officer of *Hillsborough County Public Schools,* outlines the district's pioneering approach to technological transformation

Located in Florida's Tampa Bay area, Hillsborough County Public Schools is the seventh-largest public school system in the United States.

The district is tasked with providing quality education for students ranging from pre-kindergarten through to their senior year, alongside supporting adult learners across the region. As a result, its educational services and support system covers a diverse student population of over 220,000 individuals.

This district is known for being a regular first-mover in the edtech sphere. Hillsborough Schools is one of the leading advocates of the power of technology in the classroom, and it is at the forefront of digital initiatives spanning everything from remote connectivity to audio-visual programs.

To find out more about how the district is deploying technology across its platform and utilizing the latest solutions to support students and staff alike, we spoke to Tom Weeks, the Chief Technology Officer of Hillsborough County Public Schools.

Tech's role in achieving Hillsborough Schools' core mission

Tom Weeks is responsible for overseeing and setting the strategy for all the digital systems and infrastructure within the school district, meaning his role is expansive.

"The mission for the district is to provide an education and the support that enables

"We are always looking for ways to **support** the classroom environment to **enhance** the curriculum and make sure that our teachers have the **opportunity** to use the technology in newer, exciting, and more **innovative** ways"

TOM WEEKS
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER,
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

each student to excel as a successful, responsible citizen. Basically, we are here to provide a quality education for all the students in our county," Weeks explains.

Since joining Hillsborough Schools in 2016, Weeks explains that the district has undergone a significant evolution in its approach to technology, particularly after the global pandemic.

"Looking back, the pandemic demonstrated the overall importance and reliance on technology, not just in the educational space, but in nearly every industry. For us, we need to continue to be prepared for our students to be able to learn from anywhere or for our employees to work from anywhere as the need arises. Plus, it also gives us the added benefit of more flexibility across the board."
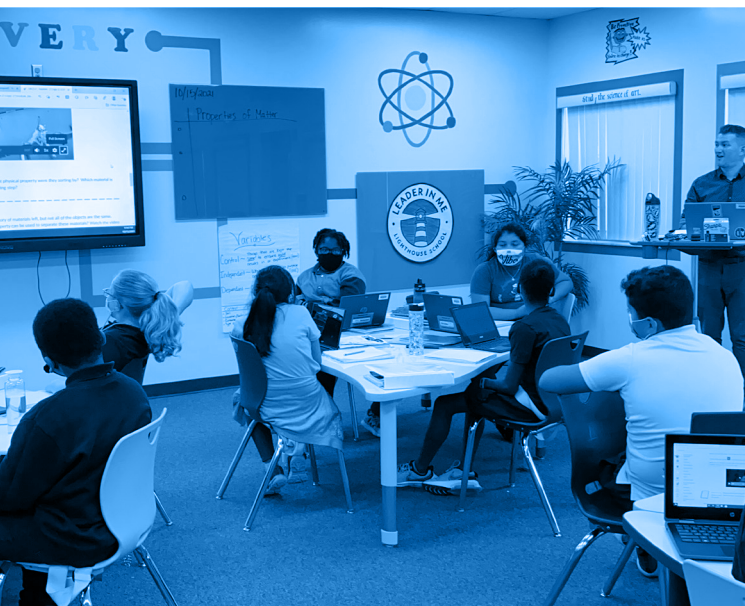
Hillsborough Schools–and the entire education sector at large–are rapidly working towards a deeper integration of technology into the curriculum.

"We're there to support the curriculum, not there to replace sound curriculum decisions. As teachers become more familiar with the technology, I think they'll use it in newer and more exciting ways," Weeks asserts.

"They'll use the newer communications tools that we provide, the newer software packages, and the newer hardware, continuing to push that technology in the classroom to, hopefully, have a positive impact on their students. And we'll continue to do that for our administrative staff."

Weeks explains that technological solutions have formed a core focus of Hillsborough Schools' transformation over the last few years.

EXECUTIVE BIO

TOM WEEKS

TITLE: **CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER**

INDUSTRY: **EDUCATION**

LOCATION: **UNITED STATES**

Thomas Weeks, Ed. D. serves as the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) for Hillsborough County Public Schools. In his position, he provides leadership for the information technology services (ITS) organization supporting the students and employees of the nation's seventh largest school district.

Thomas has worked in the field of information technology for more than 30 years, and has held numerous leadership roles as the technology executive for organizations in higher education and healthcare sectors.

Thomas earned his Doctor of Education degree in Leadership Studies with a focus on Educational Technology from Wilkes University. He currently holds industry certification as a Project Management Professional.

Lenovo | Connection®
we solve IT®

Create the Classroom of the Future

Customized technology, tailored procurement, and ease of use are three top must-haves for equipping today's educators and students with modern technology.

Support their future with the right laptops, tablets, smart devices, accessories, services, and more through the Lenovo and Connection partnership.

Discover Connection

Lenovo, Connection, and HCPS partner for education success

Discussing the partnership that's transforming HCPS, Christian Rivera (Lenovo) and Larry Kirsch (Connection) praise their technology and services delivery.

Hillsborough County Public Schools, HCPS, located in Florida, is the seventh largest school district in the United States. With outdated systems and hardware, the technology team at HCPS recognized a need to update legacy solutions to support the work of its teachers and the education of its students.

The evolving education digital landscape means more than simply supplying new computers. Devices need to be staged, serviced, bundled, and deployed to ensure a secure and positive experience for students, educators, and staff. The key outcome realized in Lenovo's and Connection's partnership is the sustainable support for HCPS and an outlook that leverages suppliers more as partners than as vendors. With its commitment to supporting

HCPS, Lenovo has come to understand the county's needs. Its strategic partnership with Connection brought together a trio of teams to optimize supply chain, leverage funding opportunities, and deliver ongoing device support for both students and staff.

"Whether it's a one-to-one initiative or supporting the staff, which is obviously critical, it seems they went a very long time without technology equity," says Larry Kirsch, President, Connection Public Sector Solutions.

By the end of the 2023 schoolyear, Lenovo and Connection will have supported HCPS with 125,000 endpoint devices in a no-touch environment through Connection's Technology Integration and Distribution Center (TIDC).

One of the key factors that contributed to the successful deployment of devices to HCPS was formulating a solid logistical plan. The TIDC team ensured the devices were queued to ship full truckloads at a time, which streamlined the shipping process.

"At Lenovo and Connection, we have the end-user top of mind. And, in education, the end-user is the student and teacher, both of whom now have the modern technology needed to maximize the educational experience and inspire the future of learning," says Christian Rivera, K12 Account Executive, South Florida, at Lenovo.

Discover Connection

Hillsborough County

P U B L I C   S C H O O L S

Preparing Students for Life

> "From a **technology** perspective, we've undergone a massive **transformation** to ensure that our digital assets, both hardware and **software**, provide students and our **employees** with the means to fulfil their educational requirements and the means to **perform** their jobs"

TOM WEEKS
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER,
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"From a technology perspective, we've undergone a massive transformation to ensure that our digital assets – both hardware and software – provide students and our employees with the means to fulfil their educational requirements and the means to perform their jobs. In these ways, we give them the opportunity to make smart and timely decisions."

Enhancing teachers' capabilities through technology

Through education technologies, schools can not only offer a better experience for students, but they can expand teachers' individual capabilities, which can, in turn, more effectively support staff across
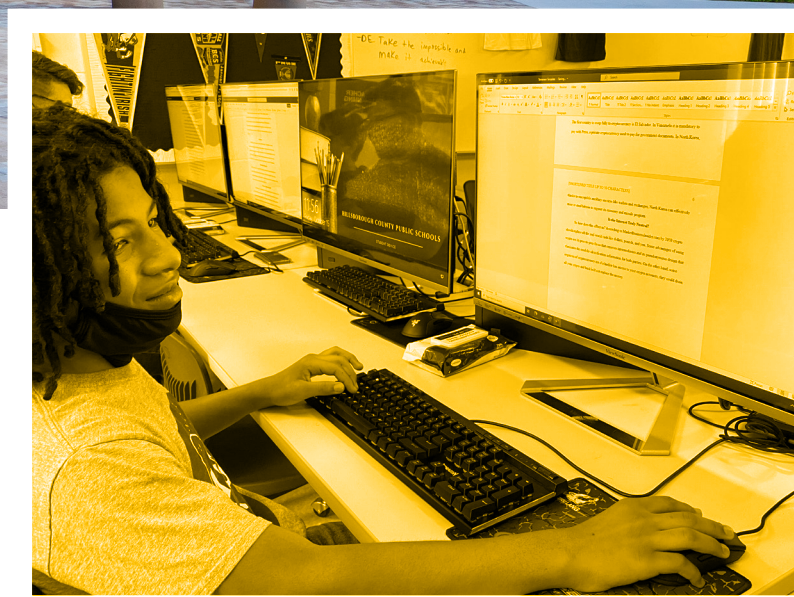
multiple sites. All of this, via structured, standardized, and seamless solutions.

"We've been modernizing our laptops for our students, staff members, teachers, and our administrative staff. In the classroom, we've also been standardizing the technology that we put in place," Weeks explains.

"We are adding audio enhancements—including microphones, speakers, and audio amplification—to ensure that students can hear no matter where they're positioned within the classroom. We're also adding interactive flat panels to all of our core classrooms so that we can ensure that students are able to see clearly what the teacher is trying to present."

Hillsborough Schools is known in the sector for being one of the first pioneers in Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI), as well as one of the earliest advocates of technology's role in the provision of better student experiences.

"For us, VDI was implemented as a stopgap measure of sorts," Weeks outlines.

COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"In terms of the number of devices that we had in place, we were woefully unprepared for the pandemic. So, for us, we relied on utilizing VDI to serve as a bridge between us purchasing newer technology while still getting usefulness out of the existing technology that we had."

"By implementing VDI, we were afforded the capability to still use the older laptops or desktops that teachers or students may have had in front of them, but to connect those to higher horsepower devices on the backend. This way, they could actually perform tasks that they normally wouldn't be able to do on those lower horsepower units."

Critically, high levels of standardization across classrooms has ensured that technology can be implemented, without presenting a further hurdle for teachers.

"We have provided all of our teachers with the same laptop. As we standardize our audio devices and our visual display devices, we're going to establish familiarity in all the classrooms. So a teacher can go from one classroom to the next, and not worry about any differences in the technology that's in place," Weeks explains.

"With our students now approaching that magic one-to-one ratio, and all of them having a device available in front of them, and giving teachers the opportunity to learn how to effectively use the technology, we're giving them the flexibility to leverage technology as they see fit to support the curriculum and help their students learn."

Enhanced audio visual programmes

Weeks and his team are consistently on the lookout for ways to support the classroom environment, enhance the curriculum, and give its teachers the opportunity to use the technology in newer, exciting, and more innovative ways.

"We're there to *support* the curriculum, not there to replace sound curriculum *decisions*. As teachers become more familiar with the *technology*, I think they'll use it in newer and more exciting ways"

TOM WEEKS
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER,
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To this end, Hillsborough Schools is at the forefront of edtech, adding newer devices and technologies to the classrooms, while giving its teachers all of the support that they need to fully utilize them.

"So, we're working on a program where we are providing training and professional development for our teachers, ensuring that they understand how to use the technology and obtain ideas on how to incorporate that technology into their lesson plans as part of the overall curriculum."

Taking Hillsborough Schools' audiovisual programs as an example, the value of technology in terms of engagement, support and interactivity is immediately clear.

"We're going from ageing projectors to more modern interactive display devices. And again, we're also looking at utilizing various software applications to not only stream the content up on these new display devices, but also to stream those to student laptops, and/or, teacher laptops," Weeks outlines.

"So, we're working on how to truly develop a more interactive experience, focus on those capabilities to allow teachers and

students to learn at their own pace, while still being supported by the existing curriculum."

The role of partnerships in implementing new solutions, faster

For Weeks, the district's partner ecosystem—particularly its partnerships with Connection and with Lenovo—has proved critical in helping Hillsborough Schools to achieve its pioneering approach.

"Lenovo and Connection have both been wonderful partners for the district," Weeks asserts.

"We have worked with Lenovo to standardize our students' digital devices, particularly our laptops. Working with the Connection and Lenovo teams, we were able to determine what met the needs of our students in terms of a compute device; then we worked with Connection to drive the best price in securing those items from Lenovo.

For us, it started off as a transactional relationship, but it really grew above and beyond that."

Not only does Connection ensure that Hillsborough Schools has selected the right product at the right price, but this partnership also brings extensive additional value to the wider purchasing process.

"The Connection team worked with district staff to come up with a solution to track the assets as we ordered them, so that we had a digital copy of where those assets were going," Weeks explains.

"Connection places a physical asset tag on the device. Then, they provide us with the documentation as to where the asset belongs. Additionally, they also ensure that the devices are ready to go, as we go to deploy them at the school sites. And that's really saved us critical deployment time."

With a limited number of staff at its disposal, this extra degree of support has proved pivotal for Hillsborough Schools and its technological transformation strategy.

"We couldn't have dealt with this type of volume without a partner like Connection being intimately involved in the process. Those efforts were, and they continue to be, critical to our overall modernization and standardization efforts in the classroom," Weeks adds.

"For us, I want to make sure that a partner brings value by taking time to really understand what it is that we need as a district and that works with district staff to come up with a solution. Sometimes, the solution isn't even something that they as a vendor can sell you. But, you know that they're looking out for your overall success, and that's truly what makes them a valuable partner."

For Weeks, Hillsborough Schools' best partners add value every step of the way, whether it's coming up with a collaborative solution, finding the product that best fits the needs, or making sure that the district gets a good price point on those products.

"My value as CTO depends on the strategy that I can set for the district, the skills that my staff bring—in terms of implementing that strategy—and the effort that my vendor partners bring and put forth to help fill in the gaps where we, internally, can't meet those needs. So it's really a cohesive ecosystem that our partners fulfill."

Hillsborough County

P U B L I C   S C H O O L S

Preparing Students for Life

www.hillsboroughschools.org/