

# Jackson-Madison County School System, Case Study

## Summer 2022

Districts in Tennessee that received funding through the Innovative High School Models Grant have shared summaries of their work along with lessons learned along the way.

### The Innovation

Jackson-Madison County School System (JMCSS) envisioned a secondary school landscape in their district where each of its seven high schools and the district Workforce Development Center would house at least one of twelve [Innovation Impact Institutes](#) focused on a different high-demand occupation that any student in the district could access as they identify career fields of interest to them. The overall goal of the Innovation Impact Institute model is to prepare JMCSS students for postsecondary education and careers in high-demand occupations — promoting academic and workforce excellence by engaging students with industry-standard equipment, curriculum, and teaching methods in nontraditional, authentic learning environments. Given the district's open enrollment approach to high school, students now not only have an opportunity to select their school of choice but can further ground that decision in their interest in a particular focus area of the school's associated Innovation Impact Institute.

To reach this vision, the Innovation Impact Institutes build on several preexisting programs and structures, including: 1) The district's current career and technical education (CTE), humanities, and early college high school programs; 2) The work-based learning model already underway for manufacturing courses known as Local Options and Opportunities Program (L.O.O.P.); and 3) The virtual academy model that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. New opportunities for students infused into these existing programs are at the core of what makes an Innovation Impact Institute, allowing students to:

- Gain stackable credentials in workforce certifications
- Engage in work-based learning opportunities (paid and unpaid internships)
- Take dual enrollment and dual credit courses

Given these strong foundations, and rather than reinventing the wheel, JMCSS chose instead to infuse new opportunities and partnerships into existing courses of study and modes of learning by planning for the following innovations.

- **Time And Space:** Innovation Impact Institutes are intentionally designed to ensure students have an opportunity to engage in work-based learning at times that work for them and for the employer. Work-based learning can be any block of the day, and JMCSS also piloted an approach where students are able to engage in work-based learning at 3:00 p.m. and begin school the next day on a delayed schedule. To fit in all of the new courses, JMCSS offered some classes that technically fell “after school.” To accommodate these courses, teachers were paid a stipend to teach these classes after school.
- **Partnerships:** JMCSS leveraged a consistent engagement model for the development of each Innovation Impact Institute. They met with the district executive team to discuss potential areas of focus for the institutes and brought each high school building administrator into the conversation to talk to them about their vision for their schools. In these meetings, they discussed the need to build on existing programs in the school or about a school’s interest in offering new programming. In all cases, new programming had to be aligned to a high-demand career in Tennessee, and, where current teachers may experience a change or evolution of their course, they were supported with funds to go on “inspiration trips” for inspiration and space to offer up their own innovative ideas for how to propel programming forward to align to the Innovation Impact Institute model. As external partners were identified, they offered expertise in programming, guidance for specific skills needed in their occupational area, and opportunities for student on-site experiences. The goal is for each institute to have a postsecondary and local business partner to support and guide the work.
- **Modes Of Learning:** JMCSS is housing the new Institute of STEM and Digital Entrepreneurship at the virtual school, providing students with flexibility and a self-paced curriculum for work-based learning opportunities. The district was also strategic in its approach to supporting all students with work-based learning. The district expanded access to the course to all 11th and 12th graders, in addition to students enrolled in a CTE course, and created a team dedicated to supporting students across all institutes. The JMCSS L.O.O.P. coordinator and two retired part-time teachers, whose offices are housed at one of the manufacturing partner sites, offer academic support for students enrolled in virtual courses and ensure that students overcome work challenges. Additionally, JMCSS teachers completed the TDOE work-based learning course for certification and follow the TDOE guidelines for work-based learning.

By building on existing programs and developing a consistent process for program expansion, JMCSS is able to capitalize on economies of scale across all Innovation Impact Institutes and is laying a foundation that will allow them to be responsive to future industry needs and student aspirations.

## The Grant

JMCSS was awarded \$2 million for this innovation. The district has allocated funds to:

- Establish the department of innovation in the district and fund two additional positions through the grant to build out the staffing, including an instructional facilitator and an impact coordinator
- Hire new teachers where needed for Innovation Impact Institutes that reflected new programming
- Offer stipends for teachers to teach courses after school including a summer work-based learning class



- Fund inspiration trips for teachers in each institute to support making connections with postsecondary and/or industry partners to continue to support the program and identify innovative practices
- Fund industry field trips for students to make connections between academics and postsecondary planning
- Purchase equipment to update existing programs and establish new programs
- Provide industry-specific professional development that aligns with potential microcredentials for students
- Fund [Naviance](#) as a program for high school guidance counselors to provide ongoing support to students for career and college exploration, planning, and data collection on student progress
- Purchase curriculum and instructional materials to support microcredentialing in CTE

## Lessons Learned

JMCSS learned several key lessons during their first year of implementation, specifically around the value of pushing the envelope when it comes to innovations in education and in the importance of investing deeply in new and current teaching staff to support their new programs.

- **Seek inspiration that is “out of the education box.”** JMCSS did not only want to elevate their CTE, humanities, and early college programs with stackable credentials, work-based learning, and dual enrollment or dual credit components, they also wanted to make sure that the content of the institutes was as relevant as possible to the fields they were inviting students to explore. Innovation Impact Institute instructors met in January during in-service for an innovation jump-start meeting. A local industry partner provided a session on innovative thinking that challenged instructors to apply systematic thinking to creative solutions. Instructors were invited to plan an inspiration trip and to think big — a push which resulted in innovations across all of the institutes. The district found that partners outside of education were eager to engage with them, and teachers were inspired to elevate their work to continue their own learning. Results from this push include:
  - A new focus on solar energy within the construction program at JMCSS
  - A partnership with a global biotech company that develops, manufactures, and markets products for life science research and clinical diagnostic markets
  - Support from a world-renowned author who was eager to support the district with storytelling strategies for the JMCSS institute model
  - Tours for students and teachers to places like the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) and the headquarters of a nationally recognized periodical
  - Participation in the Supreme Court Summer Institute, where the criminal justice teacher was able to expand his content knowledge and network with legal professionals, the solicitor general, and a supreme court justice
- **Work hard to recruit industry experts and to support their development as new teachers.** JMCSS focused their attention on outreach and recruitment to industry partners, which resulted in their opportunity to hire a top-notch hospital professional as well as a new digital, audio, production teacher directly from their fields. While the district acknowledges that both of these new team members were willing to make less as a teacher than in their current positions, they saw the benefits of a schedule with more time off and in the opportunity to engage students in their field. These professionals have also



been a tremendous asset in forging partnerships within their industries to support their respective institutes. In terms of recruitment strategies, the district made the decision to hire the new digital, audio, production staff member months ahead of when the design of the institute would be complete given his interest at the time. Though this created a cost for the district, it allowed them to engage him in new teacher training well ahead of his first day in the classroom — a practice that the district is considering as a more formal approach as it allows industry professionals time to acclimate to district life and learn more about their new profession as an educator.

- **Match the scale of your initiative to a right-sized and strategically staffed central team.**

The vision to scale the Innovation Impact Institute model in one year required the allocation of three dedicated staff members, prompting the district to establish a department of innovation. The district named a chief innovation officer and invested grant funds to hire two new staff members to support the work. Importantly, JMCSS was strategic in its approach to staffing this department. They hired staff members connected to local industry — who also had skills like web development — who could help quickly foster partnerships and tell the story of their work.

## Sustaining The Work

Though taking on new and revamped program development across their high schools over the last year took a tremendous amount of work and commitment from local stakeholders and current staff, JMCSS felt confident investing in their approach to develop Innovation Impact Institutes. Currently, they have a 52 percent CTE course enrollment rate across the district, ensuring students would be enrolled in the institutes that were built on existing programs. This approach also limited the number of new staff they would need to hire, and the district plans to absorb the cost of any new staff. JMCSS also worked with high school leaders to confirm the areas of focus for any new institutes, requiring that any program selected was aligned to a high-demand occupation regionally and could offer the opportunity for students to earn stackable credentials that would prepare them for employment opportunities after high school should they want to pursue that option. JMCSS also assessed which of their programs were under-enrolled across the district and made shifts as needed.

In terms of ongoing financial sustainability, most institutes also include a plan for a student enterprise venture — a project that will allow the instructor or students to sell a product or offer a service where profits will go back into the program. For example:

- Several institutes are teaming together to build and sell a tiny house
- The digital arts production teacher has become a certified instructor in one of the software packages used by the institute and will offer courses on the JMCSS campus
- The advanced agriculture institute is producing vegetables and flowers for sale
- The manufacturing institute is using its laser printer to create items for sale to the public

## Learn More

To learn more, visit the [JMCSS Department of Innovation](#) website or contact [Dr. Teresa McSweeney](#).

