

SCHOOL LEADER DIGITAL LEARNING GUIDE



OFFICE OF
Educational Technology

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WHAT CAN THIS GUIDE DO FOR YOU?

Digital learning is defined as “any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen a student’s learning experience and encompasses a wide spectrum of tools and practices.”¹

This “School Leader Digital Learning Guide” is a resource to help you consider, plan, fund, implement, maintain, and adapt learning programs that meet the unique needs and requirements of the students and teachers that you serve. The guide is oriented toward digital learning principles and practices that enable and empower students and teachers of all abilities and zip codes while advancing student agency (i.e., initiative, intention, and responsibility in pursuing their education), their personalized learning, their mastery of skills and competencies, and protecting their privacy.

This guide is designed to provide resources and recommendations to help leaders in an array of circumstances, including:

- leaders with students and teachers who are experiencing digital learning in school facilities or remotely;
- leaders for whom digital learning presents transformative or incremental change for their students;
- leaders of a school, a school system, an education provider, or a function that supports digital learning; and
- leaders whose organization is funded by municipal taxpayers, non-profit institutions, or individuals and is or is not supplemented by federal monies and programs.

Each section contains key considerations, questions to ask yourself as a leader, and resources to help with your thinking and planning. References to technical and professional methods and resources are presented for you to consider and apply as appropriate in leading your organization’s efforts to meet the needs and requirements of your students and teachers.

This “School Leader Digital Learning Guide” is part of a series of guides, including the “**Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide**” and “Teacher Digital Learning Guide,” intended to support parents and families, teachers, and education leaders in leveraging the capabilities of digital tools and resources for teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION



THE NEED FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP

As you continue your work to build and foster environments where digital learning is useful, available, and safe for students and teachers, you and your stakeholders face the inherent challenges of every technology-enabled endeavor: Technology is only as good as it is used in practice by people. Your leadership matters when it comes to the results and return on investment your organization can achieve with educational technology (EdTech). Without your effective leadership to envision, plan, and deliver an environment where EdTech can be accessed and used well by students and teachers, there are real risks for technology being underused, misused, incompatible, or obsolete.

THE CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITY

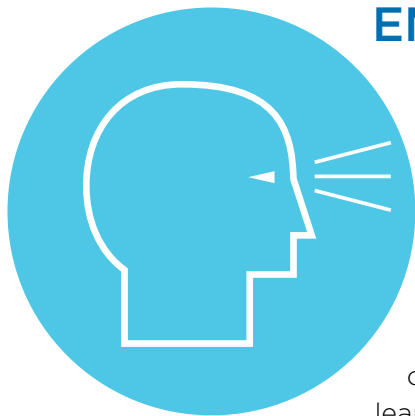
With an unprecedented number of students and teachers experiencing remote digital learning due to the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) related school closures and limited openings, the opportunities—and need—for engagement, innovation, and solutions to challenges inherent in a remote digital learning environment have never been greater.

For many students and teachers, the long-conceived promise of “anytime, anywhere” learning has met the immediate challenges of limited access and limited capacity. Parents and teachers alike have seen their homes become places that have to provide and, for many, competitively manage resources such as access to space, bandwidth, and devices needed to support effective digital teaching and learning.

With your leadership, it is possible to maximize the benefits of digital learning for the students you serve now and in the future. **Effective use of technology can address the impact of any learning losses experienced by students in the current environment and mitigate the prospect of future learning losses.**² As a leader you can learn from, develop, assess, plan, resource, and govern the use of technology by your students and teachers. You can embrace what has worked, adjust what has not, and work with students and teachers to chart the path forward.

THIS SECTION IN 30 SECONDS

Implementing and assessing digital learning is a challenge at any time—and the current learning environment has greatly increased the stakes. Provided below is a roadmap for leaders in schools and school systems that encourages developing a shared vision and goals, and prioritizing teacher professional development to meet the needs of your students and to support parents and families.



EMBRACE DIGITAL LEARNING LEADERSHIP

When used in meaningful ways, digital technologies can empower students to become drivers of their own learning, deeper thinkers, and stronger collaborators. For digital learning to be successful at an organizational level, you should consider developing a shared vision and goals. Planning resources, including considerations for developing a leadership team, conducting a needs assessment, collecting feedback from key stakeholders, and budgeting for digital learning, are provided in Appendix A.

1. DEVELOP A SHARED VISION AND GOALS

It is important for your digital learning leadership team (see Appendix A: “Form a Digital Learning Leadership Team”) to establish a set of straightforward, attainable goals. These goals should be rooted in sound learning principles and developed iteratively based on your school system or school objectives, data, and the needs of your community (see Appendix A: “Conduct a Needs Assessment”). These goals can be shared publicly for feedback from key stakeholders, and they should inform investments in digital tools, supporting digital infrastructure, training, and resources.

Key Considerations

In concert with establishing, and periodically revisiting, the shared vision and goals, there are several key areas on which to focus. Consider, for example, how digital learning can strengthen students’ learning experiences, empower and engage students and teachers, and promote mastery and critical thinking and personalized learning. Also consider the access from school and from home that teachers and students have for digital teaching, learning, and assessment.

Guiding Strategies

- Map out how students and teachers will acquire the hardware, connectivity, knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to get the most out of digital learning.
- Determine how to implement and assess digital learning, as well as manage change in those processes.
- Establish how the standards of success within your school or school system will be met through digital learning.

- Identify how your digital learning goals may align with other school or school system goals for learning and technology use.
- Evaluate and address any learning losses or gains that may have been experienced by students in your school or school system and identify learning supports and other resources available to teachers, students, parents, and families to mitigate potential future learning losses, and to build upon gains.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: DEVELOP A SHARED VISION AND GOALS

Where your school or school system is positioned in its implementation of digital learning—including whether a shared vision and goals for the effective use of educational technology has been developed and communicated—may impact how you consider and answer the following questions.

Planning and Assessment:

- What is the shared vision for effective digital learning within your school or school system over the next year? Three years? Five years?
- Does your current school or school system technology plan require updating or revisions to align with new digital learning goals? What internal and/or external factors are driving the need for changes to the plan?
- What is the timeline needed for teacher buy-in, skillset development, and implementation of the digital learning?
- What is your current investment in digital learning and what is the funding required to meet existing needs? How will you determine that your investment in digital learning is sustainable long term?
- How will you determine whether every student and teacher in your school or school system has access to high-speed internet, a device, and the information needed to use them? For those who do not, how will you work toward a solution?

Teaching and Learning:

- How will digital learning and technology support your school or school system's standards of success and learning goals?
- Where will digital learning take place: virtually or in a blended setting? How will you address continuity of learning in the event of forced school closures?
- How will digital learning and technology support students' social-emotional learning?
- How will you identify and use digital learning technology to support students with different learning needs?
- How will digital learning and technology support students with disabilities?
- How will you identify what strategies are the most effective in the digital learning process under your unique circumstances and then connect those strategies to sustainable, long-term digital learning?
- How will you identify and address learning losses—or gains—that have occurred and effectively use digital learning and other resources to support teachers, students, parents, and families to mitigate any future learning loss and capitalize on gains?

Communication:

- Have you developed a communication plan to notify parents and families of the status, or any change in status, of digital learning and technology support to meet the needs of students?
- What feedback can be gathered to determine what is—or is not—working for students, families, and teachers?
- How will you establish an ongoing system to acquire feedback from students, families, and teachers to assess digital learning and technology support in your school or school system?

RESOURCES

- Missouri Department of Education: [Six Step Process to Creating a Technology Plan](#)
- Michigan Virtual: [Teaching Continuity Readiness Rubric for teacher self-assessment](#)
 - For a more comprehensive resource, the [National Standards for Quality Online Teaching](#) is a **benchmark for quality online instruction**.
- Rhode Island Department of Education: [Virtual Instructional Day Plan](#)
- Future Ready Schools® (FRS) Network: Superintendents: [Take the Pledge](#)
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology: [Personalized Professional Learning for Future Ready Leaders \(Self-Assessment Tool and Exemplary Practices\)](#)
- Consortium for School Networking (CoSN): [Leadership and Vision](#)
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE): [Standards for Education Leaders](#)
- State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA): [Broadband Imperative III: Driving Connectivity, Access and Student Success](#)
- Joint resource paper from former Directors of the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education, with a foreword written by five former U.S. Secretaries of Education, all members of the [COVID Collaborative: Ten Ways to Make Online Learning Work: A Guide to Improving Education in the Time of COVID-19](#)

2. PRIORITIZE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

Providing meaningful professional learning for your teachers is important for their ongoing acquisition of EdTech teaching skills to benefit their students. Just as the students learning with digital tools need time and support from schools and districts, teachers, too, need investment in professional learning from your digital learning leadership team. Prioritizing professional learning, fostering collaboration in the teaching community, and providing access to shared resources leads to an environment of quality instruction and learning for teachers and students alike.

Reference the “Teacher Digital Learning Guide” for key considerations, strategies, and resources to support teachers in the transition to digital learning.

Key Considerations

Consider what professional development and training is needed to expand the technology skills of teachers and administrators in your school or school system. Provide consistent support and professional development that is personalized and incentivizes teachers to meaningfully engage. Some strategies for digital learning are applicable in both face-to-face and virtual settings; however, special considerations should be made to support students learning at home.

Guiding Strategies

- Provide professional development opportunities which incorporate **research-based practices** that promote teacher professional development effectiveness.
- Create professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers can meet in person or online to support each other throughout the year in their use of technology. Examples include grade-level teams, content teams, and teams leveled by technology expertise or interest.
- Establish full- or part-time coaching positions or select a group of mentor teachers to provide ongoing professional development and instructional support for their peers.
- Identify or develop self-paced course modules that allow for the flexible and efficient use of professional learning resources.
- Develop and implement professional learning on topics, such as:
 - How to use devices, adopted curriculum, and EdTech tools;
 - Student privacy and at-home security, including privacy obligations under the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**, relevant state laws, and relevant school or school system policies;
 - Content and learning management systems, apps, and software, as necessary;
 - Other assessments to address any learning losses or gains that may have occurred and intentionally address needed innovation in ongoing practices and assessments to mitigate any future learning losses, and to build upon gains;
 - Pedagogical practices for digital learning that are age appropriate, specific to content areas, tied to competencies, and accelerate student learning after school closures, in both hybrid and distance learning environments;
 - Professional practices for digital teaching, including considerations for scheduling and work life balance; and

- Best practices for virtual learning—remote learning enabled by digital tools—including:
 - Appropriate uses of synchronous (instruction for—and learning by—students that occurs at the same time, but not in the same place) and asynchronous (instruction for—and learning by—students that does not occur in the same place, nor at the same time) connections;
 - Conducting class discussions using video conferencing;
 - Setting up privacy and security settings on online tools; and
 - Setting up one-on-one and small group interactions using video conferencing.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: PRIORITIZE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

Planning and Assessment:

- Has your school or school system allocated funding and resources, as well as time on the school calendar, for professional development opportunities for your teachers?

Teaching and Learning:

- Do teachers have opportunities to develop skills for leveraging learning technology in powerful ways? What do they have and what do they need?
- How are teachers incentivized to create and innovate their digital pedagogy?
- What opportunity do you provide teachers to identify and select professional development that is tailored to their needs?
- What assessments do teachers need to understand the degree of learning loss in their students and how can you innovate in your practices and ongoing assessments to mitigate any future learning loss?
- What resources exist that demonstrate the best evidence-based practices in digital learning? What do you need to procure or create?

Communication:

- What feedback can be gathered to determine what is—or is not—working for teachers?
- How will you establish an ongoing system to acquire feedback from teachers to assess professional learning in your school or school system?

RESOURCES

- Digital Promise: [Micro-credentials COVID-19 Library](#)
- International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE): [ISTE Standards for Educators](#)
- The Learning Accelerator: [Professional Development Strategies to Support Teachers During the Shift to Remote Learning](#)
- GetSetUp: [GetSetUp for Remote Learning](#)
- The New Teacher Project (TNTP): [Learning Acceleration Guide](#)

THIS SECTION IN 30 SECONDS

Digital learning is most obtainable and sustainable with a well-planned and well-maintained infrastructure of EdTech, tools, resources, and access to support your teachers and students. Schools and school systems of any size can be guided by this information to evaluate their current infrastructure and plan for the needs of teachers and student, funding, maintenance, privacy and security, and digital citizenship education.



ASSESS, BUILD, AND MAINTAIN INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to leverage technology to meet your teaching and learning goals, it is crucial that your school system, school, and community have a robust infrastructure for digital learning. The infrastructure includes learning devices and high-speed internet access for students and teachers. It also includes the digital tools and resources for learning. A robust learning infrastructure also ensures that students remain safe online, by complying with key data privacy and security regulations and teaching digital citizenship (refer to the Promote Digital Citizenship section below).

One way to approach building and maintaining infrastructure for digital learning is to consider how you will manage the lifecycle of EdTech investments. Managing the EdTech lifecycle includes assessing the needs of your school or school system, procuring and deploying technology, measuring the efficacy of new EdTech investments, and determining when to renew or replace software licenses.

There are many tools and frameworks to assist with lifecycle management, some of which are included in the resources section below. Your school or school system should explore, evaluate, and use the tools and processes that best meet your unique learning goals, needs, and requirements. Additional factors may include the size of your student population, the structure of your central office, school leadership, and decision-making responsibilities, and the amount and types of funding available.



Refer to the “[Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide](#)” Enabling Digital Learning section and “[Teacher Digital Learning Guide](#)” Access, Safety, and Privacy section for support in partnering with parents and teachers on critical digital learning infrastructure considerations.

1. EVALUATE AND MANAGE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES

Key Considerations

As part of EdTech lifecycle management, it is important to audit your existing digital tools and resources to determine if they are empowering students and teachers while meeting your teaching and learning goals. Quality, accessibility, and privacy are primary considerations regardless of the amount of technology changes that are implemented.

Analysis of K-12 district spending indicates that approximately 67 percent of all educational software product licenses go unused—translating to millions of wasted dollars.³ You can support teachers and focus on the return on investment on EdTech purchases in your school or school system by thoroughly vetting digital tools, using the following evidence-based approaches:

- **Rapid Cycle Tech Evaluations (RCE)** are designed to assist school leaders in making evidence-based decisions regarding EdTech acquisitions.⁴ They are low-cost, quick turnaround evaluations that align with the rapid pace of innovation in technology development.
- Product Certifications can serve as a helpful signal for school leaders, teachers, and families that EdTech products are based in learning sciences research. To receive a certification, technology companies must show that their product meets a rigorous threshold of research standards. Examples of trusted, non-profit organizations that issue product certifications include: **Common Sense Media Privacy Evaluations**, **ISTE Seal of Alignment**, and **Digital Promise Research-Based Design Certification**.

Guiding Strategies

- Audit existing digital tools and curricular resources to determine which resources effectively support learning goals and can be transferred to a digital learning environment.
- Consider selecting a learning management system (LMS) to organize instruction and resources for teachers and students (e.g., Schoology, Canvas).
- Consider single sign-on technology (e.g., Clever, OneLogin, ClassLink) to help students, parents, and families manage multiple log-ins.
- Provide teachers with a process for adopting new devices and EdTech tools.
- Select a searchable and sortable resource database.
- Select devices, tools, and resources that have strong accessibility technologies built in.
- Procure digital learning materials and accompanying supports that are specifically designed to support language and content development, including through translation, text to speech, and other audiovisual supports.
- Thoroughly vet new technologies to establish:
 - Curricular alignment;
 - Development based in learning sciences research;

- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and FERPA compliance; and
- Appropriate security practices are deployed, especially for technology used to deliver services for students with disabilities, discuss student health, and/or share Individualized Education Program (IEP) information.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: EVALUATE AND MANAGE EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES

Where your school or school system is positioned in the journey to undertake and implement digital learning—including your plans and capabilities to evaluate and manage educational technologies—may impact how you consider and answer the following questions.

Planning and Assessment:

- Do you have a digital classroom or learning management system to manage your content and resources?
- What teacher training is required or has taken place to use digital tools and resources?
- What curriculum, instructional apps, and software are you currently using? Have you confirmed that they are rooted in learning sciences research?
- Do all students have what they need—including access to devices, logins, scaffolds, and appropriate curriculum—to engage with digital learning?

Teaching and Learning:

- How will students manage their login information? Do you have single sign-on technology to support multiple usernames and passwords?
- Are your selected devices and applications compatible with students with different learning needs?
- Are your selected devices and applications compatible with accessibility technologies used by students with disabilities? Do teachers and families know how to use them in conjunction with the accessibility software that is used by their students, such as screen reader software?
- How will you collect data and assess the efficacy of the digital learning tools and resources you purchase?

Communication:

- How will you communicate processes for adopting new tools and available resources with teachers?
- How will you communicate digital learning and technology tools, resources, and login processes with students, parents, and families?

RESOURCES

- Mathematica: [Rapid-Cycle Tech Evaluations Accelerate Decision Making](#)
- Digital Promise: [Product Certifications](#)
- ISTE: [Seal of Alignment](#)
- [Learn Platform](#): Tool for organizing, streamlining, and analyzing your education technology
- Digital Promise: [EdTech Pilot Framework](#)

2. ADDRESS ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

Key Considerations

To realize the full benefits of education, digital learning, and pathways to success, students need access to a personal learning device, such as a laptop or tablet, and access to high-speed internet at home. In addition, teachers need high-speed access to support their students. As a school or school system leader, you and your digital learning leadership team play an important role in advocating for digital access for all students and teachers, as well as in communicating effectively with parents about access and available resources.

Guiding Strategies

- Support parents and families in their search for free or low-cost internet service plans in their area through non-profit organizations such as [EveryoneOn.org](#), your state's Department of Education website, and companies that provide low-cost internet services in your community.
- Support internet access for teachers as well as students.
- Join the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) to stay up to date on national policies and programs related to digital inclusion.
- Partner with local internet service providers to expand access to families in your school communities. School districts across the country have negotiated with local providers for low- or no-cost internet services for students and families.
- Consider creative solutions, [like those discussed in this Brookings article](#), if you lead in a rural area where broadband access is not easily expandable.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: ADDRESS ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

Planning and Assessment:

- What are the varying levels of at-home access among your teachers, students, parents, and families?
- What will it take to achieve equal access to digital learning?
- How and with what devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones) are families in your school or school system accessing home internet and at what speed?
- How can you best support students and families in understanding their options, including access to community Wi-Fi or obtaining free or low-cost Wi-Fi?

RESOURCES

- National Digital Inclusion Alliance: [Explore Ways to Promote Digital Inclusion](#)
- Lindsay Unified Community Network: [Guaranteeing Accessibility for All Learners 24/7](#)
- EveryoneOn: [Programs that Bring Low-Cost Computers and Internet to Those Who Need Them](#)
- Microsoft Airband Initiative: [A New Approach to Broadband Connectivity](#)

3. PROCURE, DISTRIBUTE, MANAGE, AND MAINTAIN DEVICES

Key Considerations

Procuring, distributing, managing, and maintaining devices for students takes time to plan, budget, and strategically execute over time. If your school or school system does not already have 1:1 take-home devices, you should consider undertaking the process to procure and prepare devices, then distribute them to students, parents, and teachers. Whether the school or school system personnel prepare devices, or a service provider does the preparation and delivers the devices ready for distribution to students, it is important to plan for device preparation and distribution and then inventory management and maintenance.

Guiding Strategies: Device Preparation and Distribution

- Receive devices in a secure location and provide secure storage.
- Image (install software and updates) and inventory devices to distribute to students.
- Coordinate with assistive technology personnel to address that specialized software and hardware are provided for students with disabilities who have a need for such software and hardware, as described in the student's IEP or Section 504 plan.
- Decide who will cover the cost of insurance and purchase.
- Provide space to prepare devices and communicate policies and procedures for device repairs to parents and students.

- Establish and maintain a five percent pool of spare devices, which will provide continued access when devices require repair or are otherwise out of commission.
- Design a safe device distribution process, including appropriate physical distancing and sanitization of hands, packaging, tables, devices, etc., as necessary. Engage parents and other key community members in the design process.

Guiding Strategies: Inventory Management and Maintenance

- Design a system to track the assignment of devices to users.
- Use asset tags for device identification and tracking.
- Create templates for schools to inform parents and students how devices are monitored and what options may be turned on or off (for example, if the school will remotely turn on the webcam or GPS when a device is reported missing or stolen).
- Communicate to students, parents, and teachers how maintenance issues with devices, including loaner or replacement devices, should be handled.
- Attribute budget and assign staff to manage the inventory records and maintain devices.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: PROCURE, DISTRIBUTE, MANAGE AND MAINTAIN DEVICES

Planning and Assessment:

- What planning and budgeting has the school or school system done for procuring, maintaining, and replacing devices for students and teachers? Where do gaps exist and what needs to be done to address those gaps?
- What opportunities exist, where there are gaps, for public-private partnerships to support students and parents?
- What processes does the school or school system have—or need—for technology inventory, deployment, and support?
- What state and school system-specific purchasing restrictions, rules, and approval processes apply?

RESOURCES

- Digital Bridge K-12: [The Homework Gap Toolkit](#)
- Verizon Innovative Learning Schools: [Device Deployment Best Practices](#)
- ISTE: [The Five Pillars of EdTech Procurement](#)
- SEDTA: [Spotlight on Digital Materials Acquisition](#)
- CoSN: [Understanding Device Capabilities](#)
- CoSN: [Connecting Devices to the Network](#)

4. PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY AND SECURITY

As schools increasingly leverage digital tools and resources, it is more important than ever to address compliance with laws that govern student data privacy and support the safe use of technology. As a school or school system leader, you should be familiar with the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**, the **Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)**, the **Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)**, and the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)**.

Guiding Strategies

- Ensure Student Privacy and Legal Compliance
 - Familiarize yourself with basic school privacy obligations under federal privacy laws including FERPA, COPPA, any obligations under relevant state laws that fall to teachers (e.g., notifying parents about what tools are being used), and school system or school policies related to student privacy (e.g., use of social media).
 - Vet and approve apps and websites that are age appropriate, pedagogically aligned, and have FERPA-required privacy and security protections.
 - Provide teachers with guides on how to appropriately adopt tools that have already been vetted by the school and how to engage with school administration before adopting new tools.
 - Train teachers and staff on how to protect student privacy and security when they collect, use, access, or share student information.
 - Ensure that each staff member with authority to access student data only has access to the data needed.
- Filtering (Internet and Content)
 - Implement internet content filtering to ensure students can only access appropriate content on school devices, both during and after school hours.
- Mobile Device Management (MDM)
 - Deploy a mobile device management system to efficiently provide updates and push system settings and apps to the devices remotely.
 - Manage access to the devices and student data through user accounts.
- Policies for Safe Use
 - Review, revise, and create acceptable technology use policies for online instruction, particularly to support students using a device at home.
 - Review and revise student and employee handbooks to include online learning requirements, expectations, and consequences.
- Curriculum for Teaching Digital Citizenship and Safe Technology Use
 - Identify age-appropriate lessons that support all students with developing behaviors that keep them safe and out of trouble, maintain the privacy of their identity and information, and address digital citizenship (see next section).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Planning and Assessment:

- What systems do you have in place to ensure that all existing and new devices comply with federal, state, and local privacy and security policies?
- How is access to the internet filtered?
- Have you identified curriculum and supporting resources for teaching about privacy and security and made them available for principals and teachers to use with their students and parents?

Communication:

- Are teachers and parents aware of student protection and privacy rules and policies? If not, how will you address awareness?

RESOURCES

- U.S. Department of Education: [FERPA and Virtual Learning](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [FERPA 101: Online Training Module](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Model Terms of Service](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [PPRA General Guidance](#)

5. PROMOTE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Key Considerations

For students to experience a successful digital learning environment, schools and school systems have an important role to promote, model, and teach digital citizenship, in partnership with parents as the primary educators of their children. Students, parents, families, and teachers need education, professional development, and resources regarding how to access and use technology in safe, respectful, and ethical ways.

Broadly stated, “digital citizenship” refers to teaching students the skills and mindsets needed to safely, respectfully, and securely operate within digital spaces—which students across the country are now experiencing, regardless of whether they possess the skills to learn in a fully virtual or hybrid environment. Educating on, and modeling of, good digital citizenship includes teaching the behaviors and actions students need to safely, ethically, and responsibly:

- navigate and participate online;
- exhibit critical thinking and problem-solving skills;

- know and understand their rights;
- evaluate online information for accuracy and trustworthiness; and
- **take ownership of their privacy and digital presence.**

It is important for schools and school systems to support professional learning and development for teachers in digital citizenship in a way that personalizes the learning needs of the individual student. In turn, students need to be equipped with the tools, strategies, and resources for learning and acquiring digital citizenship skills, both at home and at school. Ideally, lessons on digital citizenship take place before students, parents, families, and teachers have devices in their hands and should continue throughout the school year.

In addition, you and your digital learning leadership team should consider how to fully communicate the legal obligations and school system policies outlined in the previous section to students, parents, families, and teachers.

Guiding Strategies

- Prior to device distribution, identify or create developmentally appropriate information and training on the appropriate use of devices and the internet, as well as how to be safe online (this information should also be reviewed and updated on an on-going basis);
- Create rules of engagement or a digital citizenship pledge that students and their parents agree to prior to, or at the point of, distribution;
- Provide ongoing teacher professional development around digital citizenship;
- Partner with parents, as the primary educators of their children, through the provision of resource materials and school-based parent events to support successful digital citizenship skill acquisition by your students; and
- Explore opportunities to include digital citizenship lessons in your curriculum which meet the individual needs of your students throughout the school year, which may incorporate topics such as:
 - The use of good passwords, password managers, and browser plug-ins to limit online tracking ads;
 - Protecting digital identity, developing appropriate communication skills and positive relationships, protecting against cyberbullying and potential predators; and
 - Understanding the mental health and wellness aspects of screen time and making good choices online.
- Coordinate support with school or other district personnel as appropriate (e.g., special education practitioners, counselors, social workers, nurses) to work as a team in supporting students' social and emotional health.
 - Collaboratively determine strategies for response if the safety of any learning in your school, or school system, or that of an individual student has potentially been compromised.
 - Be aware of community supports that are available for students who need additional support, as well as the processes and protocols to follow in identifying students for timely referral to services.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: PROMOTE DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Planning and Assessment:

- Do you promote the safe, ethical, and responsible use of EdTech in your school or school system?
- Have you established processes to determine that your students, their parents, and your teachers know how to act, and commit to acting, responsibly online?
- Have you created an acceptable use policy that is available in multiple languages, and do you collect and maintain a record of signatures?

Teaching and Learning:

- Is professional learning and development ongoing in digital citizenship for your teachers?

Communication:

- Do you provide digital citizenship resources to parents and families?

RESOURCES

- Common Sense Media: [Everything You Need to Teach Digital Citizenship](#)
- Common Sense Media: [Inside The 21st-Century Classroom report](#) on EdTech usage by K-12 teachers with their students and observations on its impact on learning
- The Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society: [Digital Citizenship Resource Platform](#)
- [ISTE: Digital Citizenship in Education](#)
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: [Online Safety Resources for Parents, Educators & Communities](#)
- Common Sense Media: [Screen Time](#) resources
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE): [Resources for Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
 - The NCSSLE is a resource maintained by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) under contract from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students.

THIS SECTION IN 30 SECONDS

Supporting the individual needs of learners has become more important than ever before with the current environment of school closures and limited openings. Explore how EdTech and digital learning can be used by schools and school systems to personalize learning by delivering competency-based education; implement real-time, meaningful assessments; and meet the unique needs of students of all learning abilities.



PERSONALIZE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

For decades, many American classrooms have taken a “one size fits all” approach to instruction, rather than leveraging the uniqueness of each learner. Digital learning and technology can move us toward meeting the needs of each student and providing an individualized approach to education, tailoring support to each student’s strengths and interests by focusing on their competencies and enabling real-time assessment.



1. IMPLEMENT COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING

Digital tools can shift the focus of learning environments away from traditional metrics of progress—such as the number of hours spent in a classroom—toward more meaningful indicators of learning.

Reference the **“Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide”** for help empowering parents to understand and take advantage of the benefits of digital learning.

Key Considerations

Digital learning can support competency-based education, in which students advance after demonstrating mastery of a key skill or concept. In a competency-based system, students work

individually and in teams to continuously learn content and develop skills (e.g., communication, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity) and receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual needs. In this sense, competency-based education enables personalization and learning continuity, regardless of location.

Guiding Strategies

- Design learning outcomes that emphasize higher order thinking skills that promote student independence and creativity, prepare students for college, career, and lifelong learning.
- Commit to ensuring that all students—including students from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, and English Learners (ELs)—are able to demonstrate mastery of content.
- Identify that competencies include explicit, measurable, and transferable learning objectives.
- Evaluate whether additional best practices, supports, or resources are available and needed for your students to address any learning loss or gains that may have occurred, and to mitigate future learning loss and build upon gains.
- Develop clear and transparent expectations for student performance to demonstrate mastery and put mechanisms in place to establish consistency in advancement.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: PERSONALIZE LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

Planning and Assessment:

- What policies and practices will support your competency-based learning system?
- When making instructional plans, how are you making decisions with the most vulnerable populations in mind?

Teaching and Learning:

- What additional best practices, supports, or resources are available and needed for teachers and families to address any student learning loss or gains that may have occurred and to mitigate future learning loss, or capitalize upon any gains?
- What systems need to exist for leaders, teachers, and families in your school or school system to exchange best practices and resources regarding competency-based education?

Communication:

- Has your school or school system communicated and connected teachers, parents, and families to those best practices, supports, and resources?

RESOURCES

- The Aurora Institute: [Introduction to Competency-Based Education](#)
- The Aurora Institute: [Quality Principles for Competency-Based Education](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Competency-Based Learning or Personalized Learning](#)
- National Conference of State Legislatures: [A Look at Competency-Based Education in K-12 Schools](#)

2. ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING IN REAL-TIME

Key Considerations

Quality assessments help teachers gain feedback about what their students are really learning. Real-time, meaningful assessments enabled by technology—whether graded, non-graded, in-class activities, or student self-assessments—are an integral component of personalized learning. Assessments also inform students on their own progress and advise parents and teachers how to best support student learning.

Guiding Strategies

- Coach teachers to check for understanding using frequent formative assessments.
- Identify adaptive software that will provide the student with immediate feedback to support progress.
- Confirm assessment software is compatible with assistive technology used by students with disabilities, including screen reader software.
- Adopt grading systems that are aligned to personalized learning paths, separate behaviors from academics, and encourage students to engage in additional practice until they demonstrate mastery of a concept.
- Identify or design diagnostic and summative assessments that can be used in school or at home.
- Identify other assessments to address learning losses or gains, and intentionally address needed innovation in ongoing practices and assessments to mitigate any future learning loss or build upon any gains.
- Create a model for communicating with students and families, in multiple languages, including:
 - Timing and methods of student assessments and grades;
 - Use of online engagement to assess student progress;
 - Approach to supporting students who are not on track to meet grade-level standards and benchmarks; and
 - Collection of data for accountability purposes, ensuring that metrics used to measure student engagement do not violate applicable privacy policies.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING IN REAL-TIME

Planning and Assessment:

- What are your school's or school system's expectations for assessment, grading, and feedback?
- How will you equitably accommodate students with limited access to internet, devices, or a proctor?
- What other assessments are needed to identify learning losses? What innovation in ongoing assessments is needed to mitigate future learning loss?

Teaching and Learning:

- What existing summative and formative assessments can be used in a digital learning environment?
- What new assessments may be needed? How can you access or develop such assessments?
- To what standards of evidence, validity, and reliability are your assessments bound?

Communicate:

- How will you communicate expectations clearly with teachers, students, and families?

RESOURCES

- Center for Assessment: [Competency-based Assessment](#)
- The Aurora Institute: [Competency Based and Standards Based Assessment](#)
- [Data Quality Campaign](#), [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), and [Collaborative for Student Success](#): [Measuring Growth in 2021](#), joint resource
- U.S. Department of Education: [Fact Sheet on the Impact of COVID-19 on Assessment and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#)

3. SUPPORT LEARNER VARIABILITY

Key Considerations

An important consideration for planning and implementing effective digital learning is the selection of EdTech products that support the full diversity of learners, including, but not limited to, students with disabilities and ELs. Assistive technology software and systems, for example, can increase font size, dim distracting background text, translate text to speech, or provide closed captions to aid students with disabilities. For ELs, many programs integrate translation and interpretation tools or provide rich imagery or video resources to support linguistic development and comprehension.

Students with Disabilities

Federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. Websites and apps used in schools must be accessible or, if necessary, schools must provide equally effective alternate access.⁵ The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education has recognized this definition: “‘Accessible’ refers to information or technology that, at a minimum, affords a person with a disability the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same programs and activities as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.”

Guiding Strategies

- Ensure appropriate parental consent frameworks are in place under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) if the school will be billing Medicaid for services.
- Establish effective communication and engagement with parents throughout the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.
- Support holding IEP team meetings and 504 team meetings remotely with all team members, including special educators and parents.
- Work closely with school counselors to address that schools provide mandated counseling and psychological support in the manner written in students’ IEPs using remote tools.
- Ensure that students with disabilities have access to instructional materials, accommodations, scaffolds, or assistive technologies that are tailored to their specific needs as identified in their IEP. Look for tools made available either by your state, or through the [National Center on Accessible Education Materials](#), or the [National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled](#).

English Learners

Several federal laws and court rulings require school systems to ensure that ELs and students from immigrant backgrounds have equitable and meaningful access to education, including grade-appropriate content and instruction. States must demonstrate that ELs are developing English language proficiency in addition to grade-level content. Existing law provides room for flexibility in how schools meet the needs of ELs, and with the correct resources and practices, digital learning experiences can support ELs in powerful ways.

Guiding Strategies

- Identify tools and resources that are designed to support language development through challenging and grade-appropriate content, translation, text to speech, and other audiovisual supports.
- Continue to identify and assess EL students to confirm they receive adequate language instruction and grade-appropriate content.
- Communicate with parents in their preferred language and make free translation and over-the-phone interpretation services available for students and families.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: SUPPORT LEARNER VARIABILITY

Planning and Assessment:

- Are your selected devices compatible with assistive technologies used by students with disabilities?
- Are you prepared to deliver IEP and 504 services to students with disabilities?
- Are you prepared to deliver services to ELs?
- Do teachers and families have access to appropriate accessibility technologies, including for translation, and know how to use them?
- What are the roles of special educators in digital learning experiences?

RESOURCES

- United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congress (GAO-21-43): **Distance Learning: Challenges Providing Services to K-12 English Learners and Students with Disabilities during COVID-19**
- Digital Promise: **Learner Variability Project: Factors and Strategies to Support Diverse Learners**
- National Center on Accessible Education: **Resources for Access and Distance Education**
- TNTP: **At-Home Supports for English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners**
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education: **Providing Services to English Learners During the COVID-19 Outbreak Fact Sheet**
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: **Limited English Proficient (LEP) Parent Rights Fact Sheet**
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services: **Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Outbreak**
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: Fact Sheet: **Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students**

- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services: [Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities](#)
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: [Questions and Answers for K-12 Public Schools In the Current COVID-19 Environment](#)

THIS SECTION IN 30 SECONDS

The success of students has always been dependent upon a strong partnership of schools and school systems with their parents as the primary educators of their own children. It is crucial for you and your teachers to proactively and effectively communicate with—and empower—parents and families so students' needs can be met. In particular, the support of student health and wellness is critical as the implementation, expansion, and/or change of the digital learning environment occurs during school closures, hybrid learning, and limited openings.



COLLABORATE WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

1. INFORM AND EMPOWER PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Key Considerations

As a school or system leader, one of your most important roles is establishing two-way communication with parents and families.

Families are essential to the long-term success of their student's digital learning, often assuming the role of a coach, facilitator, or tutor. Additionally, parents and guardians are partners in ensuring devices get charged, are cared for, and are used in responsible ways. Effective communication about digital learning will establish that parents and families are informed and engaged and trust the decisions that education and school leaders are making.

Guiding Strategies

- Establish norms for staff members on how and when to communicate with students, parents, and families, including guidance on the primary tools and methods for communication. Confirm staff members are utilizing tools for listening to the ideas and concerns of parents and families and that parents and families understand that, while educators will use a variety of tools, they will not be constantly available.
- Establish scheduled check-ins, especially during school closures. For example, teachers in **Richland School District Two** (South Carolina) have “office hours” at designated times during the week for all teachers to be able to check and respond to emails or arrange to talk via telephone or video chat with parents and families.
- Use multiple communication platforms that are familiar to students, parents, and families including recorded videos, phone calls, video conferencing, social media apps, and texting apps. Identify that communication platforms are accessible to students, parents, and families with disabilities and to ELs and Limited English Proficient parents and families.
- Create a central website for students, parents, and families to receive up-to-date information and resources. Confirm that the site is mobile-friendly to accommodate families that access the internet via smartphones. For simplicity and ease of access, use a single platform across all schools and programs in a school system.

- Establish the understanding with your teachers that parents, as the primary educators of their children, need and rely on effective, responsive, and timely communication from teachers and staff to promote and support student success.
- Provide communications with staff, students, and families that are authentic and model a positive and hopeful tone to improve the emotional state of your learning community.
- Create models for communicating with parents about specific learning outcomes, expectations, and resources available, recognizing that parents may not have access to personal leave or other time off to work with their children.
- Provide information about access to free translation and over-the-phone interpretation services.
- Inform families about how to be digital partners, including sharing best practices on proper care and maintenance of the device, screen time practices, online safety, and digital citizenship.
- For parents and families of students with disabilities, provide training sessions to support their children's needs and requirements at home, including occupational or physical therapy services that require in-person care.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: INFORM AND EMPOWER PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Planning and Assessment:

- How have you empowered parents and families to ask for help and give feedback to support their child's learning at home?
- What languages are spoken in your community and what translation services should you provide?
- Do you set the expectation with teachers and staff that parents, as the primary educators of their children, need and rely on effective, responsive, and timely communication from teachers and staff to promote and support student success?

Communication:

- Have you properly communicated the potential and importance of digital and virtual learning to parents and families?
- Who is communicating with parents and families and how? Which communication methods have the most success?
- Which parents and families have not been reached and why?

RESOURCES

- U.S. Department of Education: [Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide](#)
- TNTP: [Engaging Families Virtually](#)
- Learning Heroes: [Parent-Teacher Planning Tool](#)
- The IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College: [Parents: Supporting Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). The IRIS Center is funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

2. SUPPORT STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Key Considerations

Schools are important community spaces and play a pivotal role in the social development and mental health and well-being of students. In a digital learning environment, it is important for school leaders and digital learning leadership teams to consider how to effectively leverage technology, partner with parents, establish safeguards, and build safe and supportive communities.

In addition, the potential impact of the various fully virtual or hybrid distance learning environments on children should also include considering how to explicitly support the social and emotional health and wellness of students.

Guiding Strategies

Teachers can deploy a number of strategies to meet the individual needs identified in their students, which may include the following:

- Set up weekly check-ins or office hours for teachers; include the option for brief, consistent “wellness checks.” Safeguards to prevent teacher over-extension should be explicitly planned at the school or school system level, acknowledging that teachers may have competing demands for their time during school closures or limited school openings;
- Create virtual teacher lounge hours or professional learning networks for educators to discuss concerns and share best practices;
- Establish consistency and routines for teachers by sharing a clear daily and weekly calendar and learning goals with parents and families; and
- Allow for flexibility in schedules and lesson plans, with the understanding that teachers may have varied access to technology and competing responsibilities.

For students:

- Recommend that teachers work to intentionally carve out time so students may personally connect with each other to meet social needs;
- Establish that each student within the school has at least one designated staff member who will maintain contact with the student, touching base with them and their families during times of school closures or limited school openings (for example, see how [Rocketship Education](#) and [Phoenix Union High School District \(Arizona\)](#) connect and engage with students and families); and
- Schedule fun, shared experiences for students and educators that are authentic to your school community, such as shared read-aloud, themed lunches, maker sessions, or online fitness classes.

For parents and families:

- Provide school or school system contacts, guidance, and resources in multiple languages to all families for supporting the social and emotional health and wellness of their children and themselves, including information on mental health services;
- Connect all families with community supports and resources (e.g., share information in multiple languages about resources for times of uncertain economic situations, such as [American Job Centers](#) or unemployment offices in their city or state); and,
- Use [McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons](#) and foster care liaisons to continue to identify and serve homeless, at-risk, and foster care students and to maintain the positive relationships students have established with school staff.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: SUPPORT STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Planning and Assessment:

- Does your school or school system have a well-articulated plan to address the social and emotional health and wellness of students in collaboration and partnership with parents?
- Are your teachers implementing innovative practices to reach and engage students, and provide students the opportunity to engage with one another?

Communication:

- How are you and your digital learning leadership team ensuring that students, parents, families, and teachers feel safe and connected to their school, one another, and school-based resources?
- How will you connect students, parents, and families with services outside of school to support their social and emotional health and wellness?

RESOURCES

- The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence: [Managing Anxiety Around COVID-19](#)
- TNTP: [Schedule Guide for At-Home Learning](#)
- Institute of Education Sciences: [Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Educators and Students: Skills for Now and Planning for When Schools Reopen](#)
- Institute of Education Sciences: [IES Expands Research in Social Emotional Learning](#)
- Institute of Education Sciences: [Measuring Social and Emotional Learning in Schools](#)

LEAD THE WAY FORWARD

Leaders who seize the opportunity to effectively leverage and use EdTech to meet existing, growing, and emerging needs of their students, parents, and families—in concert with ongoing and well-informed professional development and support to teachers—will have the most successful student outcomes when dealing with challenges.

Rising to the educational challenges of the moment requires an understanding of how to deploy EdTech, adapt curriculum and assessments, and authentically engage students in learning while remaining focused on their health and wellness. It also demands partnering with parents, while connecting families with an array of school-based and community resources so their students stay safe, get educated, and remain supported.

The payoff for leaders who innovate and collaborate with teachers in their schools and school systems will be a stronger, safer, and more successful student population that is more prepared for continued digital learning, in school and at home; possesses ongoing resiliency; and has greater transition and workforce readiness.

The path forward for success in digital teaching, learning, and assessment for schools and school systems across the country will be established by leaders who, themselves, learn.

ENDNOTES

1. ESSA Handbook, ISTE (2017). Retrieved from: <https://cdn.iste.org/www-root/Libraries/Documents%20%26%20Files/Advocacy%20Resources/handbook-essa.pdf>
2. Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning, Common Sense Media. (2020). Retrieved from: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_7_1_3pm_web.pdf
3. Glimpse K12 Analysis of School Spending Shows that Two-Thirds of Software License Purchases Go Unused (05, 2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.glimpsek12.com/blog/schoolsoftwarespending>
4. The Role of Research in K-12 District Decision Making (n.d.). Retrieved from: https://symposium.curry.virginia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/WG-A-The-Role-of-Research-in-K-12-District-Decision-Making_FINAL.pdf
5. Unless otherwise noted this guide does not address schools' responsibilities to provide services or modifications to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Information about the IDEA is available at <https://osepideasthatwork.org/>. Information about Section 504 and Title II is available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>.

APPENDIX A: PLANNING RESOURCES

1. FORM A DIGITAL LEARNING LEADERSHIP TEAM

Key Considerations

A helpful practice is for leaders to select a team of key personnel to make foundational decisions about digital learning within their school or school system. A strong team can handle many responsibilities, including sharing research, setting strategy, monitoring progress, addressing concerns, collecting ongoing feedback, and communicating key information.

It is important that the team represents a diverse array of stakeholders. A professional in your organization may have the skills, expertise, and time necessary to excel in one or more of the roles defined below, or you may need to reach outside of your organization for such skills, expertise, or time.

There are multiple national, state, and local non-profit organizations that set standards and provide resources to support digital learning. However, each leader has discretion on whether and how to create a team and resource it to meet the needs and requirements of your organization. Functional roles on such a team may include:

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Designated Lead	Organize and champion the project, manage communication, schedule meetings, and produce reports
Teaching and Learning Lead	Monitor and share relevant research, align the curriculum goals to digital learning resources
Technology Leader	Collect and share successful practices from other school systems, develop and deploy information technology and assistive technology infrastructure, devices, and technical support
Lawyer or Technologist	Ensure compliance with privacy and security laws and other considerations such as legal requirements for teletherapy
Classroom Teachers, Special Educators, and Bilingual Educators	Represent and collaborate with their peers with varied levels of digital literacy and expertise

School Counselor or Therapist	Set best practices for supporting social and emotional development
Parents, Guardians, or Family Members	Represent and support their students of different grade levels, digital literacy skills, and needs
Students	Represent and support the needs of their peers in the school or school system
Community Members	Offer additional expertise in technology, learning, and privacy

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: FORM A DIGITAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Who has the skills to plan and implement the various components of a digital learning plan, including conducting a needs assessment, vision setting, planning and logistics, communications, budgeting, technology deployment, and teaching and learning?
- Who has diverse perspectives on digital learning, including an understanding of varied teacher, student, and family experiences?
- What template is most helpful to support your planning efforts (note: many examples are available online)?

2. SELECT TEACHING AND LEARNING LEADERS

The teaching and learning leaders identified as part of your digital learning leadership team are key in setting expectations for effective digital learning, preparing teachers to plan and orchestrate powerful learning experiences, and identifying resources and tools that can increase student achievement and engagement.

Teaching and learning leaders can expect to administer a needs assessment, provide professional learning, train teachers in the use of new tools and resources, create guidelines and training on digital citizenship, and plan for long-term sustainability of the digital learning program. Examples of teaching and learning leaders are:

- Grade level or content team leaders
- Coaches
- Librarians and media specialists
- Special educators or bilingual educators
- Assistive Technology (AT) specialists

3. CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Once the vision and goals are determined, a comprehensive needs assessment can help determine the school's or school system's readiness to implement all aspects of digital learning. This information will help to determine the scale of the work and the financial investment necessary to implement or improve digital learning. Importantly, the needs assessment may also uncover any imbalance in a school or school system by identifying the types of access that students and teachers have to the internet and devices at home.

If established, the digital learning leadership team should complete a needs assessment, use it as a guide to monitor progress, and maintain it as a living document. Members of the leadership may also gather input from other staff and community members to address that the needs assessment is as thorough as possible.

Key Considerations

The following may be considered essential components of a comprehensive needs assessment. For many components, schools can start with existing resources, policies, and procedures and expand or modify them. This will significantly reduce the amount of work required and remove some barriers to gaining support and approval.

- **Focus Areas:** These are categories of tasks needed to implement a digital learning program. Factors may coincide with the sections of this guide and include: planning, technology infrastructure (devices and internet access in school, at home, and throughout the community), technical support, professional development, teaching and learning tools and resources, and communication.
- **Factors:** These are key components of a digital learning program that will inform readiness and provide on-going success. In each section of this guide, you will see "Guiding Strategies" that can be used as factors in a needs assessment.
- **Score:** Each factor should be scored to keep the leadership team updated on its status.

SCORE	CRITERIA	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
5	Factor is ready for project	
4	Factor is 75% ready	
3	Factor is almost halfway complete	
2	Some work has started on this factor	
1	Nothing has been done on this factor	
0	This factor does not apply to us	

RESOURCES

- The Florida Center for Instructional Technology: [Technology Integration Matrix \(TIM\)](#)
- The Aurora Institute: [Learning Continuity Readiness Assessment](#)
- Rhode Island Department of Education: [Virtual Instructional Day Plan](#)
- Michigan Virtual: [Teaching Continuity Readiness Rubric](#)

4. DESIGN SYSTEMS TO COLLECT AND IMPLEMENT FEEDBACK

Key Considerations

In tandem with the needs assessment, the leadership team can design systems to monitor progress and make continuous improvement towards stated goals. Feedback is a key component of this process. From the beginning, the leadership team can plan on how it will deliberately gather stakeholder feedback throughout the implementation process and communicate progress toward meeting its goals with teachers, parents, families, and students.

Guiding Strategies

- Align data collection with stated goals.
- Identify key questions to answer, data and evidence to measure progress, and methods to intentionally gather data.
- Design a system that can disaggregate data by stakeholder and category.
- Make feedback public to key stakeholders and available in multiple languages.
- Accept input and varied perspectives for making progress.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: DESIGN SYSTEMS TO COLLECT AND IMPLEMENT FEEDBACK

- What early indicators can you gather about what is working and not working for students, parents, families, and teachers?
- When you see gaps in access to the resources, how will you respond?

RESOURCES

- Educause: [Survey Kit for Remote Learning Experiences](#)

5. BUDGET AND FUNDING

Key Considerations

Implementing digital learning requires strategic short-term and long-term planning and budgeting work, including analyses of available human, financial and technical resources. Based on the data from the needs assessment, it may be necessary for leaders to identify **secure funding streams** to purchase devices, provide maintenance and technical support, and hire or train personnel. The Office of Educational Technology within the U.S. Department of Education has compiled a **list of federal funds** that school system superintendents and school leaders can apply to digital learning. Additionally, leaders should investigate the existence of **state grants** and examine existing budgets to identify ways to finance learning technologies and supports.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS: BUDGET AND FUNDING

- What is the financial investment necessary to work toward every child and family having access to a device and high-speed internet connection?
- Where is additional funding available to support devices and home internet access?
- What budget lines can be reduced once transitioned to virtual learning?

RESOURCES

- U.S. Department of Education: **Education Stabilization Fund Discretionary Grants**
- U.S. Department of Education: **Keep Calm and Connect All Students blog series**
- State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA): **Budgeting** Guidance
- Future Ready Schools: **Budget and Resources** Self-Assessment