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Introduction: Why Digital Learning?

Digital learning is changing the world by connecting billions of young people to the idea economy and improving working \textit{conditions and career opportunities} for educators. Shifting from print to digital transforms formal education and expands access to learning opportunities across the globe.

Digital learning doesn’t merely involve ordering enough devices to go 1:1. It’s not replacing teachers with technology.

Digital learning is about personalization and customization. It’s about access and outcomes and powerful student data helping to inform individualized instruction.

Digital learning can be defined as “Any instructional practice that effectively uses technology to strengthen a student’s learning experience. It emphasizes high-quality instruction and provides access to challenging content, feedback through formative assessment, opportunities for learning anytime and anywhere, as well as individualized instruction to ensure all students reach their full potential to succeed in college and in their careers.”

Why Digital?

Making the shift to digital education \textbf{benefits} your school and your students in a \textbf{variety of ways}: It unlocks the potential of high-engagement personalized learning, it extends learning time and options, it powers professional-quality work products, and it boosts collaboration.

The shift also includes new, broader outcomes—real measures of college and career readiness including creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and habits of success. Along with broader aims and powerful learner experiences comes a new list of things to look for in a learning environment.

To realize the full potential of technology in order to meet these goals, the shift to digital learning requires an intentional, well-developed plan for implementation that begins and ends with teaching and learning.

With that in mind, how do you make sure your classroom, school, or district stays on the path to realizing these benefits?

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1. Alliance for Excellent Education. Digital Learning page. \url{http://all4ed.org/issues/digital-learning/}
Four Hallmarks of Digital Learning Success

Our work with hundreds of school and districts—some with successful implementation efforts and others without—has led to four foundational look fors in a successful digital learning environment.

Whether a fully online or blended learning environment, a successful shift to digital learning requires:

1. A shared vision for powerful learning;

2. Empowerment of teachers and leaders to achieve coherence;

3. Innovative, digital learning models;

4. Thoughtful approach to purchasing and evaluating EdTech.

Progress and the Path Forward for Digital Learning.

Listen to a conversation between Mickey Revenaugh and Tom Vander Ark as they share their past predictions, their current observations, and their hopes and concerns about the path forward.
A Shared Vision for Powerful Learning

What’s really important when it comes to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions students have upon graduation? What does college and career readiness mean in 2016? These are the kinds of conversations that schools and districts need to have with students, teachers, parents, business leaders, local leaders, policymakers, and the community at large. Developing a “graduate profile” can help create a vision that guides planning and implementation from start to finish. Community conversations should consider ways in which the world is changing, and jobs and civic participation are changing.

Your vision should answer two key questions:

1. **Aims**: What should young people know and be able to do?

2. **Learner Experience**: What powerful learning experiences will help develop the desired knowledge, skills and dispositions?
District Examples

**Houston ISD** worked with the community, businesses, and HigherEd partners to develop a **Global Graduate Profile** that defines the knowledge, skills, and characteristics they believe to be critical for student success. The district uses the goals set in the graduate profile to properly align their district and **PowerUp** initiatives. “We are working together to use technology so that our classrooms remain student-centered and students become critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and leaders—all traits of the Global Graduate,” said former superintendent Terry Grier.

**Marion City Schools** recently defined and realized their **personalized learning vision**. A discussion with teachers helped determine their understanding of personalized learning which then led to identifying the differences between teaching for achievement and teaching for growth. MCS also partnered with community members to create a **“Portrait of a Graduate.”** This vision was built upon what a graduate should know and be able to do—based on the needs of the community and given what the world may look like in a few years.

**Highline Public Schools** (south of Seattle) developed a **strategic plan** that includes a community vision for student success and a plan to get there. At Highline all students are “known by name, strength and need, and graduate ready for college career and citizenship.” A few goals for students include core subject mastery by grade 3, success in algebra, graduating students prepared to choose and become successful in their future, graduate students who are bilingual/biliterate, and graduate students who are tech-savvy/tech-literate. Highline’s four pillars—equitable access, results focused professional learning, strong family partnerships, and being a culturally responsive organization—support the schools’ instructional vision and help guide professional practices.

**Danville Schools** (south of Lexington, Kentucky) demonstrates that **Good Schools Start With Good Goals**. Carmen Coleman—now working with Gene Wilhoit, **National Center for Innovation in Education**—led community conversations that resulted in a Deeper Learning agenda. See the **Danville Diploma** for a compelling vision of opportunities and outcomes.

**Aiken Virtual Program** serves a diverse population and offers anytime, anywhere learning for **students who face challenges** that make a brick-and-mortar school schedule difficult. AVP’s vision aims to serve its diverse population and enable personalized learning in a 21st-century learning environment that prepares students for future success. In 2012, AVP implemented **Pearson’s** digital learning solution **GradPoint**, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction with multiple learning pathways and allowing students to work at their own pace while taking ownership over their learning.
Denver Public Schools has created a powerful picture of what each student should be capable of, which includes: actively engaging in his or her own development, growth and goals; working with teachers to co-create customized learning plans to reach content mastery leveraging his or her strengths; and accessing engaging and standards-aligned curricula that supports academic, social and emotional needs. The DPS Team believes, “Effective personalized learning will create lifelong learners that graduate prepared for success in college and career.”

Frameworks for Learning Outcomes
Several national organizations offer useful summaries of student learning outcomes.

New Tech Network, a national network of project-based schools, focuses on including Collaboration; Oral Communication and Agency; Knowledge and Thinking; and Written Communication.

Summit Public Schools, an innovative California network of secondary schools, defines student outcomes as content knowledge, cognitive skills, habits of success, and expeditions.
NGLC developed MyWays, a synthesized definition and toolset for mapping a student’s current readiness and then a plan to attain that deeper/richer definition of success. Building on work by David Conley, Summit and others, MyWays identified 20 competencies arranged in four general areas: Content Knowledge, Creative Know How, Habits of Success, and Wayfinding.

**20 Competencies Comprise the MyWays Model**

**Content Knowledge**
- English Core
- Math Core
- Science, Social Studies, Arts, Languages
- Interdisciplinary & Global Knowledge
- Career-Related Technical Skills

**Creative Know How**
- Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
- Creativity & Entrepreneurship
- Communication & Collaboration
- Information, Media & Technology Skills
- Practical Life Skills

**Habits of Success**
- Academic Behaviors
- Self-Direction & Perseverance
- Positive Mindsets
- Learning Strategies
- Social Skills & Responsibility

**Wayfinding Abilities**
- Surveying the College, Career & Life Landscape
- Identifying Opportunities & Setting Goals
- Developing Personal Roadmaps
- Finding Needed Help & Resources
- Navigating Each Stage of the Journey

Source: NGLC
Instructional Models for Powerful Learning

Instructional models like blended and competency-based learning are not the ultimate goal. Rather, they offer a path to achieve broader goals for the student outcomes described above. The examples that follow are supplied by leading experts in digital learning implementation and highlight these connections.

“Blended learning involves leveraging the Internet to afford each student a more personalized learning experience, including increased student control over the time, place, path, and/or pace of learning. The definition of blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns:

» at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace;

» at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home;

» and the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.” ²

“Blended learning is the strategic integration of in-person learning with technology to enable real-time data use, personalized instruction, and competency-based progression.” ³

“Personalization includes student agency, differentiated instruction, immediate instructional interventions, on-demand supports, flexible pacing, individual student profiles, Deeper Learning, and problem-solving to develop meaningful, frequent feedback from instructors and peers, standards-based, world-class knowledge and skills, anywhere, anytime learning, and performance-based assessments.” ⁴

Blended learning means:

» “The strategic integration of teaching, technology and data to increase personalization, engagement and mastery of all essential skills for all students.

» A movement away from teacher-centered lecturing and testing to a student-centered learning environment in which students of all ages have increased choice over the path, pace, time and place that their learning happens.

» A spirit of learning that creates space for innovation, experimentation and design thinking for educators and students to incorporate 21st-century and real-world skills.” ⁵

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Empowering Teachers and Leaders to Achieve Coherence

Today's schools are built upon layers of local, state, and federal policies; lots of bonds and budgets; and the residue of fads and fickle political leadership. History yields a distinctively incoherent system.

Coherence is the key to quality. In a coherent system, everything works together for students and teachers: content, learning experiences, assessment, professional development, schedule, structure, staffing, and supports. Coherence makes good work easier, and improves learner experience and teacher satisfaction.

There are two ways to create coherence. The first is an enterprise approach—everybody across the system doing the same thing, using the same systems. The other approach is a portfolio of schools, each with a unique model and customized supports. Both empower teachers and leaders to accelerate change.

A Coherent Enterprise

Original efforts to create coherence were called managed instruction (or managed curriculum). This started with standards and included common lessons, pacing guides, and benchmark assessments. The approach stifled and scripted teachers. It worked pretty well for kids in the middle, but not so well for students above or below grade level. Teachers were told to differentiate, but weren’t given the tools to do so.

We’re now in the process of inventing systems that personalize learning for all students. Blended environments help, but the components still don’t work together as well as they should. It’s complicated work, and many districts have delegated leadership to the school level, hoping they will figure out how to leverage technology to reach higher standards.

**Mooresville Graded School District** has been a leader in taking a systemic approach: common goals, a collaborative culture, and shared practices, tools and systems. This sort of enterprise approach usually feels top-down, but Superintendent Mark Edwards developed a system of distributed leadership in Mooresville where teachers have a say and feel supported.

When you visit the Mooresville summer institute, the distributed leadership becomes evident throughout the program. Teachers and principals clearly have important roles in defining challenges and solutions. Distributed leadership, the subject of Edward’s most recent book, emerges in the way the project proposal has been crafted and presented. Edwards said, “We’re excited about the goals and the impact they have on student knowledge and understanding.”
Seven years ago, superintendent Terry Grier launched a unified approach to improving Houston schools with a focus on literacy, talent development, and technology. These systems were developed and deployed across the district, serving more than 215,000 students. Struggling schools received more help (through the Apollo 20 initiative) and magnet schools received more flexibility, but the strategy was an enterprise approach. Strong implementation of this strategy won Houston ISD the Broad Prize, recognition given to a large urban school district that has made the greatest improvement in student achievement.

To recover from a decade of mindless test prep and corruption in El Paso ISD, Superintendent Juan Cabrera led community conversations that resulted in a vision of Active Learning: challenging, personalized, and engaging work with strong supports. Cabrera learned from Houston’s PowerUp initiative and planned to provide tools, resources and training that support blended and personalized learning for both students and teachers. The targeted outcomes aim to increase student engagement and bolster personalized learning, both of which can yield higher achievement and completion rates. The organizational strategy remains an enterprise approach, but unlike the scripted test prep approach, the Active Learning model empowers teachers to create and curate engaging projects and experiences.

A Portfolio of Great Schools

The alternative to a coherent system is one that supports the creation of coherent schools and networks. This approach empowers schools to make decisions about instructional models, curriculum, staffing, and devices.  

A portfolio approach is flexible and empowering, but it asks a great deal of school leaders who are required to facilitate and implement a coherent and effective plan. It also requires system heads and policymakers to be proactive about providing equitable access to quality by being mindful about school improvement/formation, enrollment and transportation policies.

David Haglund, Deputy Superintendent of Santa Ana Unified School District recently spearheaded a shift from an enterprise to a school-led portfolio approach. In Santa Ana, teams of teachers have the ability and responsibility to create coherent personalized learning models.

You could walk into one SAUSD school and find Chromebooks, while the school down the street used iPads. The district doesn’t mandate what devices must be used, but instead looks at learning goals, then works with principals and teachers to select what works best and what’s most relevant to the instructional program.

California’s new model provides flexible funding and allows for the allocation of more resources to high-need schools. Both changes benefit the Santa Ana portfolio approach.

Flexible learning allows teachers to figure out what works best for them and to have meetings that feel more like an ISTE conference than scripted PD. Haglund’s team provides professional learning opportunities to support implementation, but he often tells his team, “You guys gotta figure this out; you’re leaders of a school system.” He asks them to consider why someone would want his or her child to go to their school versus the one down the street or the charter school across town.

Using school-based decisions with a shared vision of personalized learning has worked well in Metro Atlanta’s Fulton County Schools. They started by identifying and supporting innovative teachers, setting up each school’s “Vanguard Team”. Now with four teachers per school, Vanguard teachers receive tools and training, often with an annual theme. Last year’s theme: “Transformational, personalized learning experiences for our students while learning about effective coaching strategies.”

Fulton’s plan for personalized learning starts with an assessment of school readiness. “The first half of the Readiness Rubric asks questions about the school’s leadership and teaching practices,” says Caitlin Day-Lewis, Director of Personalized Learning. “We find out how ready teachers are to collaborate and adapt to learning styles of different students.”

The remainder of the rubric gives insight into the school’s use of space and determines how well personalized learning aligns with the school plan. Results determine when and how a school gets provided with budget and resources to make a digital conversion. Combined with the assistance from the Vanguard Team, the supports allow schools to make informed and supported choices.
Denver may be the best example of a mixed portfolio with district-operated and district-authorized schools that share a common enrollment, funding, and facilities plan. The elected board seeks to “dramatically accelerate the progress we’ve made by investing more in what is working and embracing innovation.”

Denver Public School’s Vision of a Graduate

- **Individualized Learning Paths**
- **Vision of a DPS Graduate**
- **Strategic Use of Time, Physical Space, Technology and Community**
- **Evolving Teaching Administrator and Student Roles**
- **Next Generation Curriculum and Ways to Demonstrate Learning**

Source: Denver Public Schools
While most urban districts rely on external innovation incubators, DPS launched their own innovation lab, known as the Imaginarium. Modeled after IDEO, Stanford’s d.school and 4.0 Schools, DPS seeks to “stimulate and support innovation” across the district to transform learning.

New Orleans is a fully decentralized portfolio with 46 different nonprofit school operators displaying some great examples of innovation. However, school operators realized they needed some of the infrastructure usually provided by a school district, including common enrollment and discipline policies. Some shared transportation is the next portfolio feature on the list.

So that every school doesn’t have to design an entire instructional model and IT stack from the ground up, school networks have proven invaluable to making diverse portfolios work. These can be affiliate networks—e.g., New Tech Network, NAF—or managed networks. In Denver, it’s DSST, Strive.
Innovative Digital Learning Models

The most important things to look for as evidence of the benefits of the shift to digital learning will appear in the classroom. Statements of vision and system strategies are important, but the bottom line depends on how teachers and learners experience the change. Here’s how advanced systems describe what they are looking for in next-gen classrooms.

The New Tech Network Classroom Walkthrough Tool is connected to their School Success Rubric, a key resource for defining school progress and outcomes. COO Tim Presiado said the rubric “reflects both our organization’s values and research-supported educational priorities to ensure that all students graduate prepared for college, careers, and civic life.” The rubric is used as a coaching and reflecting tool for New Tech Network schools.

### Classroom Walkthrough Tool

| Connected | Students have positive relations with adults and peers  
| Students feel emotionally safe  
| Students feel empowered and empower others |
| --- | --- |
| Engaged | Students are excited about their work and how it relates to others  
| Students are innovative and creative in their work  
| Students form working relationships with adults |
| Challenged | Students are working on complex tasks  
| Students are required to actively explore and apply new learning |
| Knowledge | Students demonstrate mastery of knowledge of standards  
| Students easily make connections among discipline areas  
| Students use knowledge to solve problems |
| Skills | Students can organize ideas in written and oral communication  
| Students can effectively collaborate on complex tasks  
| Students show mastery of other college-and career-ready skills |
| Attributes | Students have confidence and help build the capacity in others  
| Students exchange ideas and push personal development  
| Students accept responsibility for their actions |

Source: New Tech Network
In April 2016, Raise Your Hand Texas—a blended learning initiative—selected five school district grantees. Heather Staker, co-author of “Blended,” developed the $5 million grant program and “look for” rubric, a portion of which is shown below. According to Christensen Institute theory, the two main things students want from school are to feel successful and have fun with friends. All students feel motivation, but only to complete the jobs that matter to them. The full Raise Your Hand rubric considers vision, leadership team, teacher experience, physical environment, culture, planning, and budgeting.

“Technology is utilized so that the teacher is more available to connect with students individually and provide support to those who specifically need it.”
- Marc Collins, Math Teacher and GradPoint Administrator at Hawaii Technology Academy.
No state has a better blended learning partner than Rhode Island’s [Highlander Institute](https://www.highlanderinstitute.org). When the Getting Smart team visited last year, we received classroom walkthrough rubrics to help provide feedback on progress. The classroom rubric aligns with the [Personalized Learning Progression](https://www.highlanderinstitute.org/learning_progression) below. The Highlander classroom rubric scores (from 1: doesn’t appear present, to 4: a great deal of evidence) student-centered learning, culture, formative assessment, differentiation, demonstration of learning, leveraging technology, and physical space.

### Personalized Learning Progression

#### Traditional Instruction
- Teacher-centered instruction is delivered to the whole class at the same time
- Students progress through similar content at the same pace

#### Macro Differentiation
- Target instruction is delivered to smaller groups and individuals at various times in the day
- Students progress through leveled content in high, medium, and low groups using benchmarking & summative data (RTI model)

#### Micro Differentiation
- Individualized online instruction is supported by tutoring, check-ins, conferencing, and coaching
- Students progress both online and offline individually and at their own pace
- Students experience 24/7 learning in and out of the classroom
- Lessons always have a next step designed to build on skills, so students are never “finished.”

#### Fully Personalized
- Completely student-driven instruction is achieved by an individualized curriculum where CCSS are acquired through personalized projects that build essential 21st century skills and are designed based on student interests
- Mastery is demonstrated through performance-based assessments and higher order thinking applications
- Peer to peer coaching and evaluation drive instruction and grouping
- Students are able to experience real-world learning challenges.

To maintain this level, districts must support a culture of continuous individualization and redesign organizational structures to accommodate for individual student pathways.

To move up a level, districts must support personalized content and delivery for each student by offering students voice and choice around what and how they learn.

To move up a level, districts must begin using formative assessment systems across skill and subject areas to differentiate content and pricing.

To move up a level, districts must begin leveraging data to develop small group instructional plans within larger content blocks.

Source: Highlander Institute
Education Elements has a five-part walkthrough rubric that includes pedagogical shifts and skills that blended learning requires, ways in which leaders can support teachers, and methods for aligning professional development. EdElements also developed a classroom walkthrough tool that ties to this rubric and is available for download.

### Blended Rubric Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DOMAIN I. Blended Learning Culture:</strong> Develop a culture that values students opportunity to learn and problem-solve independently</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand A.</strong> Invest stakeholders (students, parents, fellow staff) in the value of using a blended learning environment to achieve personalized goals</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand B.</strong> Develop students’ digital ethics and respect of digital property</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand C.</strong> Provide students opportunities to develop and master their personalized academic goals</td>
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<th><strong>DOMAIN II. Blended Learning Management:</strong> Create systems and routines that maintain an effective blended learning environment</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand A.</strong> Develop routines for efficiently guiding students through digital and non-digital work time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand B.</strong> Empower students to efficiently address technology related challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand C.</strong> Train students to effectively navigate digital tools and use digital tools purposefully</td>
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<th><strong>DOMAIN III. Blended Instructional Planning + Delivery:</strong> Integrate digital curricula and flexible grouping environments to support student-centered instruction independently</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand A.</strong> Use digital content to support the delivery of differentiated learning paths (grade level, remediation, or enrichment)</td>
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<td><strong>Strand B.</strong> Incorporate all learning modalities and opportunities for higher order thinking across digital and non-digital content</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand C.</strong> Implement targeted and flexible learning environments based on individual or small group</td>
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<th><strong>DOMAIN IV. Blended Assessment + Analysis:</strong> Measure and analyze student’s academic performance using multiple offline and online data sources</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand A.</strong> Administer teacher-created and third-party assessments to accurately measure student proficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand B.</strong> Utilize digital tools as an integral part of student assessment to streamline data collection and deepen analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand C.</strong> Analyze data from multiple sources, both online and offline to identify students’ individual learning needs</td>
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<th><strong>DOMAIN V. Blended Technology:</strong> Adopt technology solutions that improve the effectiveness of a blended learning environment</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand A.</strong> Acquire the technical knowledge and skills required to successfully adopt and implement education technology solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strand B.</strong> Continuously learn about, reflect on, and evaluate the effectiveness of current education technology solutions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education Elements
The **TNTP Core Teaching Rubric** is used to describe and assess teacher performance across four areas: student achievement, essential content, academic ownership, and demonstration of learning. Each performance area has an essential question and description of teacher skills and behaviors that contribute to student outcomes.

A growing number of school districts have well-developed walkthrough rubrics. **Lake County Schools** in Florida has developed a comprehensive definition of personalization as: “creating the environment where learners drive their own learning and connect learning with their own interests and aspirations.” It includes:

» become active participants in the design of learning, and identify goals and objectives for their own learning plans;

» develop the skills to use appropriate technology and resources;

» build networks of peers, experts and teachers for support;

» demonstrate mastery of content in a competency-based system;

» monitor the progress of their learning; and

» redefine learning activities and goals based on individual learner needs.

Digital learning isn't limited to innovative classrooms or schools with large budgets to spend on iPads and other technology. Peabody Learning Academy is an alternative school that has helped decrease the district’s dropout rate by more than 5 percent! The academy, located inside a local mall, remains dedicated to helping students graduate ready for both college and careers by using digital courses. Read more.

Many New England schools coached by **Great Schools Partnership** use **iWalkthrough**, a secure electronic customizable classroom observation tool intended to make the collection and subsequent analysis of data about how students experience learning a regular component of the school’s ongoing, collaborative, school-wide reflection and action planning. Their database includes more than 120,000 classroom observations which inform analysis sessions at least twice-yearly.

Maine’s **Casco Bay High School** has been recognized by **Getting Smart** and **Competency Works** as one of the nation’s best high schools for promoting Deeper Learning. The school’s clear pedagogical vision is incorporated into a Learning Walk Tool (below), regularly used by faculty, leaders, and guests. If used by a team of three, one guest will observe students, another observes teachers, while the third documents the trip with photographs. Feedback gets summarized and provided to teachers within 48 hours.
## Learning Walk Tool for Deeper Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will <strong>students</strong> be doing?</th>
<th>What will <strong>teachers</strong> be doing?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEARNING TARGETS</strong> &lt;br&gt;Students explain what the target of the lesson is.*</td>
<td><strong>Teachers post high-quality targets in a visible, consistent place.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teachers explicitly use the target throughout the lesson: returning to the target for reflection during class and/or in lesson debrief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students say that the layout, displays and use of space enhance their learning.</td>
<td>The teacher creates displays that support &amp; focus student learning (e.g. guiding questions, examples/models of work, word walls, lesson agenda).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPPORTUNITY TO GRAPPLE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students tackle a novel or challenging problem, passage, task.&lt;br&gt;Students stick with it during the allotted time, even if “the grapple” is really hard.</td>
<td>Teachers assign tasks that allow students to struggle productively, as individuals and a class.&lt;br&gt;Teachers explicitly and implicitly communicate a growth mindset to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LESSON STRUCTURE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students clearly state what they are supposed to do during this part of the lesson.</td>
<td><strong>Teachers facilitate each part of the lesson intentionally: structures used are appropriate for the intended learning.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENGAGEMENT OF HEAD AND HEART</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students are applying, analyzing, evaluating and/or creating during the lesson.&lt;br&gt;All students are engaged in productive and purposeful work throughout the class period.</td>
<td>Teachers use classroom tasks, prompts, or questions that require students to apply, analyze, evaluate and/or create.&lt;br&gt;Teachers provide structure during each lesson phase so that all students are accountable for doing the thinking and the work.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EVIDENCE BASED ARGUMENTS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students find, consider and draw on specific evidence to justify their thinking.&lt;br&gt;Students draw conclusions and construct arguments from texts’ evidence rather than filtering for evidence confirming existing opinions.</td>
<td>Teachers use discussion protocols, graphic organizers, task cards (not a CBHS term...yet) or questions that require students to consider evidence before drawing final conclusions and to identify evidence when making an argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SYNTHESIS/TRACKING PROGRESS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students self-assess where they are with learning targets.&lt;br&gt;Students can communicate what they need to work on next to bring them closer to the target.</td>
<td>Teachers use quick-check self-assessment strategies or other “checks for understanding” during the lesson.&lt;br&gt;Teachers provide learning options in response to checks for understanding. (ex: opt-in mini-lesson) Teachers provide time to review learning targets and develop next steps.</td>
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* = Indicators in **bold italic** are ones we expect to see in every classroom

Source: [Casco Bay High School](#)
Thoughtful Approach to Purchasing and Evaluating EdTech

As mentioned above, the technology does not equate to high-quality digital learning. When planning for an EdTech purchase, your vision for learning, goals, and desired outcomes should be determined before purchasing any devices, platforms, or curriculum. The authors of the Smart Series Guide to EdTech Procurement lay out 12 keys to smart purchasing to help schools and district leaders think through the decision-making and planning process required for the shift to digital learning. Houston ISD is a great example of a thoughtful and planned approach to EdTech purchasing.

In 2013, Houston ISD Superintendent, Terry Grier, and his new Chief Technology Information Officer, Lenny Schad, led a charge to provide laptops to high school students in 18 schools in order to transform what and how they teach. Schad and Grier were determined to break the perception that big districts can’t make the digital shift. “We have an opportunity to show people,” said Schad. He understands that the shift to digital isn’t about if... it’s about when. After doing research and seeing what other districts had picked, HISD landed on leased Windows laptops that included dedicated onsite support, loss and damage protection and phone/online support.

While many other districts went with tablets, Schad and his team found value in having a keyboard, especially for high school students. While tablets can be great for consuming information, laptops and Web appliances prove best for producing.

Schad spent time identifying and observing early adopters and incorporating lessons into purchasing and rollout. The HISD process was featured in the Guide To EdTech Procurement and served as the basis for other districts, including El Paso ISD.

“In a rush to implement, schools and districts can make under-informed purchasing decisions; they pay too much, get too little and then discover that things don’t work well together. Following a smart buying process ensures that schools get the most out of blended learning plans.” Smart EdTech Requires Smart Buying Infographic

See this snapshot from The Learning Accelerator for details on Houston’s procurement process.
Earlier we called the Houston approach an enterprise model—where schools all use the same device, curriculum, platform and basic model.

In contrast, Santa Ana USD allowed schools to select devices aligned with their school model. This we called a portfolio model—one that accepts or encourages unique approaches. Both prove viable approaches for aligning technology to a set of goals and a school-level model.

**Recommendations**

We’re living through a profound shift in human development—a shift from print to digital, from cohort to individual, from year-end test to continuous feedback, and from students’ days being organized by time to students’ days getting structured by learning needs. It’s a shift from passive learning (teach it, turn it in, and test it) to active learning (playlists, projects, presentation, publications, and portfolios.)

Technology is a powerful tool for enabling personalized learning experiences that ultimately boost student learning outcomes. Schools and districts can realize this true potential of technology by establishing a shared vision for powerful learning, empowering teachers and leaders, creating innovative digital learning models, and being thoughtful about EdTech purchases.

1. **Aim for Coherence**

Coherence leading to quality should be the goal. Regardless of the strategy or model, schools, and districts should:

» design everything in the system to support teachers and students;

» identify and support teacher leaders;

» create role and goal clarity for district staff members and partners;

» deliver equitable levels of quality to every zip code;

» meet schools where they are and tailor their support based on challenges and results; and

» embrace innovation.
2. 10 Signals You’re on the Path to Digital Learning Success

There are a number of EdTech signposts on the path to a successful digital learning implementation that can help teachers and leaders to evaluate whether they are headed in the right direction.  

1. Provide 1:1 take-home, production-capable devices for all grade 5-12 students.

2. Develop your own device policies/practices.

3. Integrate learning platforms that help teachers manage content, assignments, and assessments.

4. Foster/create/encourage experiences and technology promoting deeper learning; students don’t just consume but they also produce and present.

5. Build a robust broadband infrastructure.

6. Create cohesion between face-to-face and online. Teachers use data to drive coherent learner experiences.

7. Implement blended and personalized learning for educators.


10. Implement formal review and replacement cycles.

Have you found yourself in the middle of an EdTech mess? **Click here** to find strategies to help work your way out.

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3. Prioritize Professional Learning

While digital learning creates a big opportunity for students, it also enables personalized learning for educators. In “Improving Conditions and Careers,” the authors discuss the opportunities digital learning can create for teachers including collaboration time and growth, new teacher-leadership roles, flexible schedules, and greater opportunities for career advancement.

Thanks to blended and online learning, schools can now extend the reach of great teachers to impact more students than just those within the classroom walls, and teachers have begun to feel empowered. Teachers also have better learning opportunities and take advantage of personalized, blended, and competency-based professional development. As we look to teachers to instruct in new and innovative ways, it is important that we offer them the opportunity to learn in those same ways.

Engaging teachers in collaborative lesson authoring has proven to be valuable professional learning in many school districts including Grand Prairie and Laredo, Texas. A framework like Literacy Design Collaborative and their design space Core Tools build teacher capacity around new standards while encouraging student writing across the curriculum.

School districts and networks should all adopt or adapt updated classroom observation tools and support teachers learning online, in teams, and while creating new resources.

For more on the importance of providing teachers and leaders with next-gen professional development, see: “Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning” and “Preparing Leaders for Deeper Learning.”

Rethinking Educator Professional Development with Micro-credentials.” Tom Vander Ark, Jennifer Kabaker, Director of Educator Micro-credentials at Digital Promise, and Jason Lange, Bloomboard CEO, talk specifics about what micro-credentials look like, how research can support personalization of teacher development and why this will impact the future of professional development.
Conclusion

Always Come Back to Learning Goals

The *Blended Learning Implementation Guide*—a collaboration from ExcelinEd, Digital Learning Now, The Learning Accelerator and Getting Smart—is now in its third iteration. The guide offers recommendations for developing and implementing an effective plan to adopt a blended learning model focused on accelerating student learning for college and career readiness. The authors describe the importance of situating the shift to digital learning inside broader aims for teaching and learning:

> “Without a plan for making these broader instructional shifts, we will miss this once-in-a-generation opportunity for systemic improvement that could meaningfully and sustainably address educational equity. If leaders focus instead only on meeting the minimum requirements, schools will suffer from instructional disruptions to accommodate testing rotations, destructive gaps in student learning experiences between instructional environments and testing environments, missed opportunities to take full advantage of online formative and diagnostic assessments to personalize instruction and the continued inefficiencies that result from the purchase of outdated equipment and materials.”

Continue Your Learning

Along with the many resources mentioned in this paper, check out this valuable resource library. Here, you can learn more about innovative models for online and blended learning and access a wealth of practical, actionable guidance from expert and practitioner thought leaders.

If you’ve begun the shift to digital learning without having deeper, broader conversations, then it’s time to pause, regroup, and define your exact goals. Once you’ve done that, you’re well on the path to realizing the full potential of digital learning.

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