

The Digital Learning Imperative: How Technology and Teaching Meet Today's Education Challenges

The Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance) is committed to ensuring that *all* students, including low-income students and students of color, achieve their potential. Far too many public schools have not been able to change quickly enough to meet the needs of students, parents, and employers. More than 1 million children still drop out of school every year, and millions more graduate from high school without the skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace. Even with record unemployment, the economy struggles as employers cite a lack of skilled applicants for vacant jobs. The needle still moves too slowly on increasing equity. All the while, the world continues to change quickly and the U.S. education system lacks the agility to keep pace. Without significant changes to the entire teaching and learning system, the nation will continue to realize only incremental progress without reaching the major goals of eliminating achievement gaps and ensuring that all students have the skills to succeed in life.

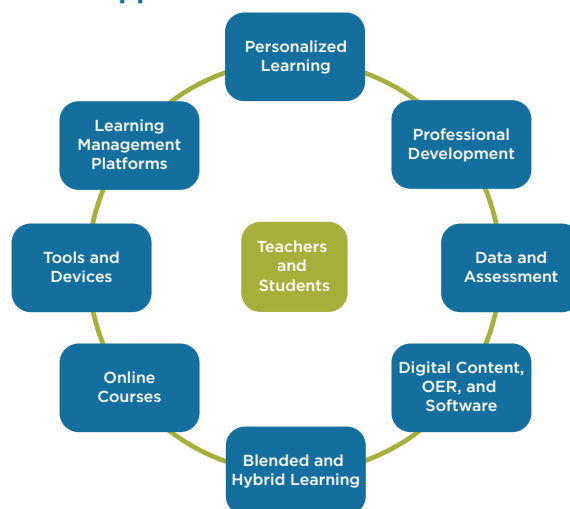
Key Challenges

Tomorrow's Needs:	Students are not being prepared to be competitive in a rapidly changing world, and the nation's schools are not changing fast enough to keep up.
Today's Budgets:	Schools have been riding a funding roller coaster for most of the last decade and cannot expect major new funding sources anytime soon.
Teaching:	Many students do not have access to the best teachers, the best teaching strategies, and enriching learning experiences.

URGENT CALL TO ACTION AND THE NEED TO PLAN SYSTEMICALLY

The nation is at a critical juncture. There is a moral and economic imperative to change the way teachers teach and students learn in the United States. All children should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, possessing the deeper learning skills they need in order to compete in today's rapidly changing economy. Piecemeal, incremental action is taking place in some states to move toward more digital textbooks or 1:1 laptop/device programs. But without well-thought-out policies that consider quality, the importance of teaching, and the experience of the student, these fragmented efforts will produce no better results than reform efforts of the past decades. Effective digital media combined with powerful teaching, rich content, and engaged students has the potential to take learning in the United States to a much higher level. States, school districts, and programs focused on improving student learning need to engage in a collaborative, crosscutting process that looks at how digital learning can help provide all students with experiences that prepare them for college and a career.

Facets of Digital Learning Support Teachers and Students



THE THREE Ts: TEACHING, TIME, AND TECHNOLOGY

Culture Shift in Teaching

To meet more rigorous standards and prepare students for college and a career requires a culture shift from a teacher-centric culture to a learner-centered environment with an intense focus on the student, whether in face-to-face, blended, or virtual learning environments. Transitioning teachers from a passive role of primarily disseminating knowledge to being actively

involved in the student's discovery and application of information creates a powerful learning experience for students. As many are finding, a flipped classroom model—in which students watch or listen to the lecture on video or podcast at home—provides teachers with the ability to take on the role of facilitator in the classroom and guide students in discussions, instead of lecturing. Rather than taking the place of the teacher, these digital learning models take advantage of the abilities of teachers as professionals.

Using Time Differently in the Classroom and Beyond

Traditionally, education models are designed around seat time, which often limits flexibility in teaching and learning. Blended learning and online learning provide alternative options for students, including the ability to advance at their own pace instead of having to complete courses in a set period of time. Digital learning opportunities can positively affect school budgets and teaching practices by shifting the makeup of classes and approaches to learning. The use of time must be addressed in district and state policies, including the abolition of the Carnegie unit as the means to fund schools.



Technology Boosts the Efficient Use of Fiscal and Human Resources by

- using data and assessment;
- participating in online and blended programs of sustained professional training for educators;
- utilizing digital content;
- communicating more effectively with parents and students; and
- collaborating with other districts and schools.

Effective Use of Technology: Fiscal and Human Resources

Times are tough. States, districts, and schools are facing budget uncertainty while simultaneously having to respond to increasing demands for greater educational outcomes. Districts and schools wrestling with meeting the needs of students in these tough budget times must rethink how they use their fiscal and human resources. While technology implementation can require an outlay of up-front and ongoing costs, digital learning and technology can also provide more efficient use of human and fiscal resources, increase the productivity of teachers and administrators, and, most importantly, create conditions that raise student academic outcomes.

FEDERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the regulatory and administrative guidance process, the federal government can also support and help the implementation of effective digital learning by states, districts, and schools in the following ways:

1. **Infusing technology throughout education programs.**
2. **Providing a dedicated technology program to ensure leadership and innovation.**
3. **Encouraging states to implement the “10 Elements of High-Quality Digital Learning.”**
4. **Building on the National Education Technology Plan and National Broadband Plan models and recommendations in new education legislation.**

The nation's students cannot wait. All schools—public, private, charter, or virtual—have a responsibility to provide students with enriching and engaging learning experiences and to prepare them for the rapidly changing job market that awaits them. All schools must find ways to reach all students, especially those most at risk, by providing personalized learning experiences. The technology exists, and many students are already digital natives. At this critical moment, policymakers and education leaders have an obligation to take learning to the next level by maximizing the opportunities that digital learning and technology offer for all students.

This document is a summary of the full report, which was written by Terri Duggan Schwartzbeck, a senior policy associate for the Alliance for Excellent Education, and Mary Ann Wolf, PhD, a digital learning and technology consultant for the Alliance for Excellent Education.

The full report and its sources are available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/DigitalLearningImperative.pdf>. Support for the *Digital Learning Imperative* was provided in part by Carnegie Corporation of New York and AT&T Foundation. Opinions expressed are those of the Alliance and do not necessarily reflect the views of either foundation.