CHECKLIST FOR A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT ACCESS INITIATIVE

Future-Ready Education Video: Student-Centered Learning

Providing student access is a huge undertaking, but it doesn’t need to be a headache. From your first stakeholder meeting to putting devices in student hands, here’s what your district needs to know to ensure a smooth integration.

ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION FOR LEARNING WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

It takes an entire community working toward the same goal to make any technology initiative successful. Make sure that everyone with a stake in the project — administrators, teachers, curriculum planners, IT staff, special education teachers, students, parents and community business leaders — are involved from the beginning of the discussion.

Create a shared vision of learning to help everyone understand what is possible for students. A critical output is a statement or statements defining the vision, with clearly defined learning objectives and measurements. Strong leadership and involvement from all stakeholders are essential to ensure that all needs are met and to build support and a shared sense of urgency for change.

A good place to start is to host a district-wide “Visioning Day/Learning Summit” to create a sense of urgency around what learning should look like to align with the needs of today’s students, and what your district needs to do to be successful. With any new endeavor, the first question to ask is, “Why are we providing access?” A day designed with a process of self-reflection is a great way to discover the unique needs of your district and how to overcome any challenges. For a visioning day/learning summit to be successful, active participation is required from everyone involved in education.

Host parent meetings and community forums to outline the plan, address questions, and gather feedback. Gather input from community business leaders to find out what skills and dispositions are important for students to have when they graduate. Provide a number of options for the community to learn more about the initiative and to be a part of defining success.

These discussions are your opportunity to manage objectives and address issues before the project gets underway. Getting these individuals on board from the start — and then keeping them active as participants — will go a long way toward ensuring a smooth rollout process. When students are involved, the teachers and administrators are amazed at the new depth that the initiative develops.

Mindset Shift
- Establish a shared vision with community stakeholders
- Empower student voice
- Invest in professional learning

Learning Shift
- Define the learning model
- Create a common language
- Create a digital content strategy
- Invest in professional learning

Technology Change
- Select devices that support your learning goals
- Get your infrastructure and policies in order
- Build a phased deployment system
- Invest in professional learning

Technology change often occurs while a district is looking to shift mindset and transform teaching practice. It takes time and planning for these changes to take root. Investing the time upfront to define the vision and learning model is critical, because these activities will guide all that follows and lay the foundation for success.
EMPOWER STUDENT VOICE AND CHOICE

Students should be an authentic partner in education and participate in designing their educational experience. Not only do students have a unique perspective on teaching and learning, but when they have a voice and ownership in how they learn and how they show mastery of their learning, they are more engaged and invested in their educational success. Make sure that students have a voice in every step of the process, from visioning to deployment and ongoing support.

DEFINE THE LEARNING MODEL

Define the learning model that will put the vision into practice. Traditional learning environments were designed for the industrial age, when there was a scarcity of information and students had to go to school to get information from teachers, books, and libraries. Today, we live in a world of information abundance. Students need to be curators of knowledge, not only understanding how to acquire knowledge, but also how to use it in meaningful ways. To succeed in college or a career, they must master new skills including communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. They also need to develop dispositions that will contribute to fulfilling their potential.

The modern learning model should be designed to reflect this reality. Districts need to identify the essential characteristics of the learner and graduate and then build them into a district-specific learning model. As noted above, it needs to go beyond content knowledge and recognize the essential skills and dispositions of a successful learner. It should be experiential, empowering student voice and choice, and should embrace failure as a critical step in learning.

Consider how to empower students to co-design personalized learning experiences with their teachers. They should have a say in how they will apply a range of learning resources, tools and products to show mastery of learning through an ongoing process of inquiry, research and open communication. Ensure that students maintain a high degree of control over the time, place, path and pace of their education.

Empower teachers to design this personalized learning experience based on their knowledge of each individual student. A strong professional learning framework and ready access to student data and an array of personalization tools are essential to support this process. In a modern learning model, teachers are no longer chief content experts, but rather facilitators of student learning and designers of the learning environment.

CREATE A COMMON LANGUAGE

Establish a language for everyone to use that reflects the district’s vision, core values and learning model. Students should be an integral part of the definition process. This common language will help facilitate effective communication and establish a shared framework to define and assess effective teaching within the learning model, as well as the associated integration of technology.

The current ideas of teaching and learning need to be defined in light of the new learning model. For many, “teaching” means providing information to the students with activities to assimilate that information. With new learning models in place, teaching will need to be redefined by your school community. Identifying models and examples of what this new learning looks like helps to form your common language.

INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Put a strong professional learning framework in place that supports your vision, learning model and desired outcomes before giving technology to students. Talk to teachers, explain what the initiative will look like and understand what they need to support the new learning practices.

Use this feedback to develop a personalized professional learning plan that gives teachers the support they need to shape the mindset, teaching practices and technology aptitude that can support the desired models of learning. Your professional learning should showcase the types of learning processes desired in the classroom. Post-integration, provide sustained professional learning opportunities, which includes development days, follow-up and collegial support.

Encourage teachers to take risks and experiment with using new learning strategies and technologies. Start with a small group of teachers who are eager to make this shift. As these early adopters gain experience and become comfortable with the new approach and integrating technology into learning, they will become models for their peers and will play a critical role in enabling ongoing and progressively expanding waves of success. Establish professional learning communities for educators to share and learn from their experiences.
INTEGRATE DIGITAL LITERACY INTO THE DISTRICT LITERACY PLAN

Today, more than ever, the importance of digital literacy is front and center in society. With most adults and students having access to the internet, the opportunity for everyone to learn is amazing, but with that opportunity comes the need for a new set of skills that most people have not yet mastered. This highlights the sense of urgency that we must have as we give students access and shift the learning model to be more student-centered. It is important for districts to address the digital literacy of students and staff, because both groups need to understand that their online behaviors and communications have permanency and repercussions.

They also need to understand that not all news is created equal. The internet is a place where anyone can publish and social networks have only now begun to help users understand that something that they are about to click on may not be reputable or factual. We can’t continue to just use the web filter to create safe places in schools, because most of the internet use and use of social spaces will happen outside of school. We should encourage students to take ownership of their learning and lead discussions with other classmates around how to safely navigate the web. Some districts have had teachers and students collaborate to produce a digital citizenship code of conduct and a curriculum to support digital literacy. Including parents in this aspect is essential to ensuring that new skills and practices are applied whenever the students are engaging with the digital world. Hosting parent nights around digital literacy topics with student presenters is always a great way to help parents learn these very important digital literacy skills.

CREATE A DIGITAL CONTENT STRATEGY

Districts should develop a digital content strategy that meets the educational goals established. It’s a good idea to start with the learning model and identify the digital resources and tools that will be needed. Consider the essential skills and strategies needed for students to be successful and how these will be demonstrated with the tools and resources being provided. Next, take an inventory of what is currently being used (and will continue to be used), and then add new tools as needed. It is often helpful to visit other schools to see models of instruction to help formulate a clearer concept of what will be needed.

Productivity and creativity tools are central elements in this discussion, because they are essential to empowering students to be producers, not just consumers. Consider the needs of the core curriculum and which subject-specific tools may be required. Do students need expanded digital opportunities for art, music, graphic design, or engineering?

Also, decide how these tools and digital resources will be accessed. Via the cloud? Installed directly on devices? Behind the district firewall? Are the tools and content optimized for touch?

SELECT DEVICES THAT SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Since ultimately it will be students using and learning with these devices, consider how, exactly, they will be using them. Will students need something truly mobile for take-home assignments? What about a device optimized for touch? Will they need access to Java and Flash to use existing software? Which applications are available given the chosen operating system, and how much will they cost?

Evaluate how content will be stored — either natively, on the device itself, or in the cloud. While some assignments may not require an internet connection, programs with an at-home component should consider surveying parents to determine if off-campus bandwidth is sufficient and devise a plan to grant students internet access outside of class.

A key consideration is where and how long student work will be stored. If you intend to shift to digital portfolios, will they be in the cloud or will you store them locally? What software will you use and will it integrate seamlessly with other resources for learning? How will students take these portfolios with them once they graduate?

Students with special needs may also require different accommodations, typically related to device accessibility. Many operating systems have accessibility features baked in, which can be supplemented with third-party applications like screen readers.

Assess how devices work with necessary peripherals. Keyboards, projectors, printers, document cameras, interactive whiteboards, and even some scientific lab equipment may be compatible with a variety of tablets and laptops, either via USB, WiFi, or other means. Be sure to reference the requirements for computer-based and online testing provided by your state’s Department of Education.

Most importantly, be sure that the devices you choose suit the objectives for each student group. The needs of high school students, for example, who frequently focus on prose writing, may not align directly to those of young learners. Adjust accordingly as needs change.
GET YOUR INFRASTRUCTURE AND POLICIES IN ORDER

Before any devices find their way into students’ hands, it’s important to ensure that your district’s infrastructure — in particular, the network, security and storage — can sustain the increased demand and meets compliance requirements. Bring in a team to assess the existing environment and determine what’s needed to get it ready for the rollout.

Talk with instructional designers to determine how the devices will be used for learning. Make sure you have the right firewall and security measures in place to support this use.

How will the devices be managed? With hundreds or even thousands of new devices pouring onto campus, an effective device management strategy is crucial for keeping devices secure and functional, without dramatically expanding IT’s workload and budget. All districts should have some way of authenticating devices accessing the network. If students need to access secure networks (as determined in prior steps), then compatibility with existing authentication infrastructure should be considered beforehand.

Besides new strain on your network and IT resources, there will likely be increased demand for storage space to house digital content and student work. And more and more of this work will be in the form of digital video and audio, which can take up even more space. Prepare by choosing a scalable solution that can grow as your needs increase.

Technical support is another important consideration. Having a plan in place to troubleshoot and resolve issues quickly will play an important role in teachers’ willingness to integrate technology into learning. Student technology internship programs can be a great way of providing authentic learning opportunities for students while easing the budget on IT resources.

And don’t forget your Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs). A number of security issues can arise with mobile rollouts, especially when cloud applications are used. Be sure you’re ready with policies that govern use. Common Sense Media offers guidelines and suggestions for crafting comprehensive AUPs to suit many needs.

BUILD A PHASED DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Pull together a team of students, teachers, instructional technologists, IT administrators and other key stakeholders to develop and lead a test run with the goal of scaling up later. These individuals will be key in developing the plan and milestones for the remainder of the project. They will also determine which schools should be involved in the first phase, and they can provide instrumental support on their campus when deployment is underway. Make sure there are feedback loops with specific time frames — including information related to teaching and learning, curriculum, resources, technology, and policy — built in at all levels to allow implementation to improve as it moves forward.

Make sure you have a fully developed deployment plan that details how students will get their devices and how you will provide training and support. As they are learning to use their new devices, they will need to know how to set up their email accounts, how to use the systems, and how they can personalize the devices to make them their own.

Students should play a key role throughout the deployment process. Student ambassador teams can help with the heavy lifting of devices and be involved in digital citizenship training, and they can act as co-facilitators with lead teachers in technology professional development.

Finally, establish support centers on each campus where students, teachers and administrators can get assistance on a variety of issues, including technical problems, functionality support (how to use the system and software), how to perform successful searches, citing sources in the digital world, and much more.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Joe Lee Johnson
STEAM Academy

Lee’s Summit Students Own Their Learning

Spartanburg 5 Enhances Student Learning

District Lessons: 6 Best Practices for Rolling Out Your 1:1 Program

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