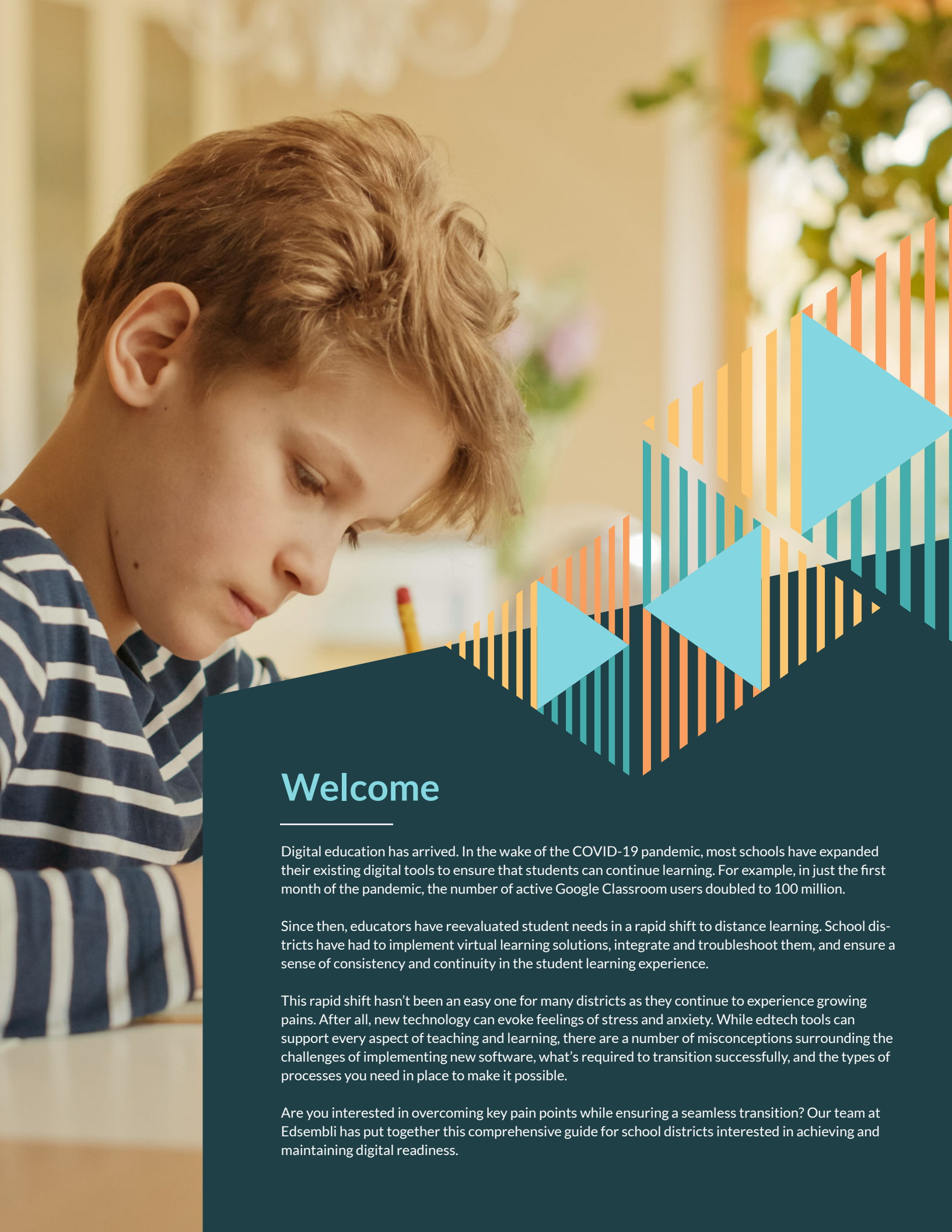# edsembli

Modernizing Education:

How to Achieve Success in Digital Education

Welcome

Digital education has arrived. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, most schools have expanded their existing digital tools to ensure that students can continue learning. For example, in just the first month of the pandemic, the number of active Google Classroom users doubled to 100 million.

Since then, educators have reevaluated student needs in a rapid shift to distance learning. School districts have had to implement virtual learning solutions, integrate and troubleshoot them, and ensure a sense of consistency and continuity in the student learning experience.

This rapid shift hasn't been an easy one for many districts as they continue to experience growing pains. After all, new technology can evoke feelings of stress and anxiety. While edtech tools can support every aspect of teaching and learning, there are a number of misconceptions surrounding the challenges of implementing new software, what's required to transition successfully, and the types of processes you need in place to make it possible.

Are you interested in overcoming key pain points while ensuring a seamless transition? Our team at Edsembli has put together this comprehensive guide for school districts interested in achieving and maintaining digital readiness.

About Edsembli

Edsembli was purpose-built for education by education. The Edsembli ecosystem leverages cloud technology to streamline all aspects of education management, including HR, finance, and student management processes across school districts.

What Is Education Management Software?

The goal of education management software is to govern key processes related to education while creating a smooth experience for teachers, students, and administrators.

Education management is complex. Successful technology integration is more than just getting new laptops—it's about finding the right tools that can address sector-specific needs while making sure data flows seamlessly and securely across your organization.

When it comes to technology in schools, a one-size-fits-all approach is never enough. For example, while a district might choose Google Classroom to create its online classroom experience, other apps are required to cover other processes such as student management, employee management, payroll and timesheet tracking, purchasing, and more.

Having the right tools in place allows districts to streamline day-to-day operations while ensuring accuracy, consistency, and compliance across all of these essential departments. The more you can streamline the flow of data between these departments, the more efficient your transition to a digital environment can be.

What Are the Advantages of Digital Education?

While digital education will never replace the traditional in-school experience, technology has infinitely expanded the possibilities within teaching and learning.

As the needs of modern education continue to evolve, many school districts have adopted digital education platforms to simplify the complexities of education. These platforms have made education more accessible than ever, giving teachers powerful tools to create engaging lessons, improving communication between administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and providing a platform that allows teachers to properly assess engagement metrics.

Here are a few of the benefits of school management software:

- **Improve accessibility.** Digital learning platforms can be accessed from anywhere at any time, allowing students to work at their own pace while keeping educators connected.
- **Reduce administrative burden.** Go paperless while spending less time on manual tasks with automation. Some platforms connect students, parents, and finance, allowing for built-in payments and communications.
- **Build a community.** The right tools allow you to unify your staff, processes, and students, so you can resolve critical issues faster while driving key insights across departments.
- **Deliver a personalized learning experience.** Keep students engaged with self-paced learning that accommodates diverse learning styles. Track student progress and engagement using key metrics.

The Essentials: Building a Solid Foundation for Digital Education

Every change can feel both exciting and ominous. While the right digital education platform can unify every department and team across your organization, the process of implementing new technology can be a daunting experience.

Successful adoption of new software requires a multi-pronged approach that targets your people, processes, and existing technologies. While most school districts can make the transition to digital, there are certain measures you must take to ensure both a seamless and sustainable transition.

Building the right foundation for digital education is the ultimate form of guaranteeing education continuity as it provides management, teachers, and administrators with access to forward-thinking platforms built upon agile infrastructure that can quickly adapt to new trends.

What other areas are essential to implementing a successful digital education program? Here are seven essential aspects we believe are part of a solid foundation that's built for long-term success.

1 Stay Equipped With the Right Devices

Replacing aging classroom technology doesn't just improve the learning and teaching experience—it significantly reduces the amount of time and money departments spend grappling with maintenance requests. However, many school districts struggle with the question of when to replace outdated tech.

Because new tech is expensive, districts often make the mistake of shying away from upfront costs, resulting in incompatible devices at different points in their life cycles. Disparate tools can make it nearly impossible for IT teams to solve problems quickly. And while slowing down replacements may look good on paper, older equipment costs more in upkeep, staff resources, and user downtime.

According to a May 2020 report by the Consortium for School Networking, only 7% of school districts rely on devices that are all newer than five years old. By proactively replacing devices before they begin breaking, districts can keep up with instructional needs while preventing bloated maintenance budgets and potential security vulnerabilities.

We recommend updating your device fleet based on the following timelines:

- Laptops. Four to five years based on the standard rate of wear and tear.
- Desktops. Six to seven years following the Windows release cycle.
- Tablets. Maximum three years (most manufacturers will no longer support tablets past this point).

One of the keys to a steady and successful refresh cycle is a robust inventory management system to keep track of expensive assets while making sure devices remain accessible to students, educators, and administrators alike.

2 Introduce a Baseline Experience

When teachers are all using different devices, operating systems, and applications, it becomes remarkably challenging for IT departments to keep tech solutions running smoothly, making it more likely for some staff to give up and revert back to pen and paper.

Numerous solutions also makes it difficult to maintain compliance. Up to 85% of organizations are unknowingly violating license compliance policies. Establishing a standard set of tools and devices that are supported and documented across your organization paves the way for higher adoption rates as well as reduced risk of non-compliance.

When it comes to new technology, choice leads to information silos. By not only refreshing but also standardizing hardware and software, colleagues are able to share their knowledge while IT departments are able to act faster.

For instance, you may choose a specific learning management system and a set class of laptops and smart devices to become the core standard across your organization. Creating consistent and familiar processes is important. Embracing a single platform for workflows, unified communications, class experience, finances, student information management, and more means you benefit significantly from shared knowledge and quick integration.

3 Choose the Right Technology

Technology that comes with a steep learning curve, little to no integration, or poor visibility can cause more friction than it's worth. On the flip side, the right platform can make all the difference, introducing any number of efficiencies.

Here are a few of the key factors you should consider when deciding on a digital education management platform:

- **Functionality and useability.** The needs of modern education are complex. Adopting a platform that's tailored to education's needs gives you the advanced functionality required to address the day-to-day challenges faced by school districts while creating a better user experience.

- **Visibility.** Visibility represents one of the major challenges in education that can be solved with the right technology. A robust education management platform gives you instant access to privileged information while generating comprehensive insights across core processes.

- **Data security.** Keeping your data protected from costly breaches begins with a platform provider that supports data security and residency. It's a good idea to look past marketing materials and examine a vendor's privacy policies first-hand—what measures are in place to keep your data secure?

- **Support.** Unlike traditional on-premises systems, many digital education platform providers offer 24/7/365 customer support, minimizing downtime while eliminating the need for costly repairs or maintenance procedures.

One key aspect of overseeing the successful adoption of new technology is to build and maintain a reliable content library that can be shared between users. Making sure resources are readily accessible saves time while minimizing any friction that might cause staff members to give up. Remember: your people and processes are the main players in implementation—keep your staff supported by allowing them to support themselves.

④ Embrace the Cloud

A common misconception among educational institutions is that a cloud-based digital solution restricts access to data while forcing institutions to forfeit a degree of control over day-to-day operations. In reality, the cloud is what gives digital education platforms the best-in-class functionality and flexibility required to meet the needs of modern education.

Transitioning to the cloud means your infrastructure is always modern and built upon the best technology. That means lower costs for individual schools as it eliminates the need to maintain and support legacy infrastructure.

What about control over your data? While storing data in the cloud takes it out of your hands physically, database snapshots and APIs allow instant access to all the information you need across departments. Moreover, unlike traditional on-premises systems, digital education platform providers shoulder the majority of your IT burden with around-the-clock technical support.

Transitioning to the cloud is more than just a step in the right direction—it positions your school district to better adapt to future change while eliminating the need to maintain aging local infrastructure.

⑤ Don't Forget Integrations

In today's era of digital transformation, technology solutions are constantly evolving. Integrations are what allow you to keep up with new third-party apps that will boost the functionality of your current systems.

Integrations don't simply meet the needs of a single department—they serve multiple functions and can drive value across many categories. In many cases, they allow data to flow between essential applications, ensuring that data is always accessible and accurate.

It's impossible to build an app that does everything. While choosing the right tools is essential, the needs of modern education are always changing—and future-proofing your digital ecosystem means choosing platforms that are able to connect in different ways.

Integrations are also critical for keeping your data visible, consistent, and accurate across your ecosystem. This is because integrations facilitate data sharing, allowing you to gain instant access to the privileged information you need when you need it while making sure all records are updated simultaneously.

⑥ Focus on Employee Buy-In

Implementing new software takes commitment. The best way to spark change among all members of your organization is to be transparent from the beginning. Start by advocating the need for change—illuminate the gaps in your current systems, set new performance goals, and allow your staff to appreciate the need for a new solution.

Highlighting the benefits of a new system can show your people exactly what benefits it can offer, such as improved visibility, less time spent on manual processes, and easier reporting and compliance. By recognizing how the new software can enable your staff to do their jobs better, it convinces them that change—and the effort required to make it happen—is vital.

When introducing new software, make sure all levels of staff are on board, especially the higher-ups. It starts from the top—if your staff see senior management buy in, they will be more committed to using the new tool.

Of course, transparency means being totally honest—acknowledge that with any change comes some hiccups. Help your staff understand that there will be some flexibility during the transition process and that a strong support system will be available to alleviate any pain points regarding implementation.

⑦ Improve and Ensure Connectivity

One of the goals of education, and of education management software, is to provide value to all students. However, true accessibility faces a number of barriers, whether it be cost, lack of expertise, or other obstacles. And yet, accessibility can no longer be viewed as a nice-to-have.

Accessibility is one of the most important aspects of digital education. Without access to the right devices, resources, or internet connectivity, school districts cannot provide an equal opportunity for education across all students and educators.

Equal access involves a number of moving parts, including the design of learning materials, distribution of devices, digital tools, platforms, as well as high-speed internet access. While accessibility poses a major challenge in rural areas, creating an equitable and accessible learning environment gives students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders the opportunity to make learning possible.

Key Digital Learning Challenges and How to Solve Them

In the past year, school district leaders have faced uncharted territory. Many districts have struggled to align standards with a digital environment. All educators have had to reevaluate what it means to deliver a learning experience.

No transition to new technology comes without some hiccups. When it comes to digital learning, it's important to take a proactive approach toward common pain points.

1 Employees Feel Overwhelmed

Introducing new software can feel stressful for teachers who are struggling to adopt a digital curriculum. Not knowing where documents live, how to navigate new functionality, and who to ask for help can drop engagement dramatically while leaving students feeling confused.

One of the easiest ways to support your staff is to assemble a steering committee. Identify team members who have a solid understanding of new technology, and who can help other team members work through common challenges.

By picking out change champions, each staff member has a role model who can relate to their concerns while offering help when needed. This also works to create a sense of community within a district and its individual schools. You can turn tech-savvy early adopters into a powerful voice that encourages other faculty members to embrace and learn new technology.

2 Teachers Are Using Non-Supported Apps

Making sure all staff members are using the new software is easier said than done. Without the right user training and support, it's easy for employees to rely on non-supported apps—or even pen and paper—when met with any sign of trouble.

The best way to keep teachers and students on the same page is to create a unified experience based on standardized tech as well as effective user training. A shared content library allows teachers to improve on each other's experiences.

New software can make staff members feel as though they've been driven into a corner. One way to make sure your people voice their concerns is to ask for feedback. Engage your staff by inviting them to share their thoughts, concerns, and questions. Giving your employees a voice brings them into the implementation process and encourages them to explore the benefits of new software.

3

Devices Often Fail

Many school districts make the mistake of maintaining devices that vary in age, make, and model in an effort to reduce new expenditures. However, as devices age, the likelihood of hardware failure increases dramatically. And because remote learning relies so heavily on devices, declining performance has a significant impact on the learning experience.

As school districts expand their technology services to accommodate distance learning, a steady, reliable refresh cycle has become more important than ever. By replacing and standardizing outdated technology, districts can maximize productivity while eliminating the cost of expensive repairs and maintenance.

It's important to map out your device refresh policies, so you can ensure both staff and students have access to devices that IT support teams are familiar with. This can greatly improve the effectiveness of support while decreasing friction for end-users.

4

Students Aren't Engaged

Learning involves building a relationship between an educator and their students. The introduction of virtual learning has forced teachers to establish new norms and habitual practices that keep students engaged.

However, keeping students motivated and excited about learning has become significantly more difficult. In a digital world filled with distractions, the onus falls on educators to develop an effective plan for distance learning that overcomes the challenge of having to absorb material in a new, virtual environment.

Here are a few tips that'll help bring your digital curriculum to life:

- **Personalize your course plan.** In the absence of face-to-face contact, it's more important than ever to make sure your curriculum captures the individual student. This can mean anything from giving students the freedom to mark up digital readings to a robust reporting system that can be used by students, teachers, and administrators alike.

- **Establish a consistent schedule.** Classrooms run on schedules. When working or learning from home, both students and teachers require structure and predictability. A consistent routine allows students to feel in control of what a classroom experience will look and sound like while giving teachers enough time to prepare for their next lesson.

- **Track student engagement.** While most districts have postponed any high-stakes testing this year, grades aren't the only numbers to watch. The number of digital interactions, such as logins and participation, tell an important story. Reviewing this type of data can tell teachers when to check up or reach out to students.

In a virtual setting, the connection between students and teachers is what empowers learning. Making time for one-on-one check ins, virtual office hours, and small group instruction can help students feel supported.

Measures of Success: How Do You Know If Your Solution Is Working?

Introducing new software can be frustrating, anxiety-provoking, and overwhelming. One way to mitigate these feelings is to know how to recognize your successes. However, setting unrealistic measures of success will only amplify any existing pressures.

Change is a process. With any digital transformation, a learning curve is to be expected. Keep in mind that realistic benchmarks are based on your district's size, complexity, and other factors. Here are a few outcomes our experts at Edsembli recommend keeping in mind:

- Support tickets. Contrary to what you might think, a lull in tickets means something is wrong—it could indicate little to no engagement, or that your systems are overloaded. A steady stream of tickets shouldn't be seen as a negative—it means that your systems are working, people are troubleshooting issues, and serving the needs of your organization.

- Manual printing tasks. In a truly digital ecosystem, the need to print anything disappears, along with expensive printers, photocopiers, and fax machines. One way to measure your digital standing is by looking at the flow of printing-related tasks.

- User adoption rates. User adoption can be measured among both staff and students—how frequently are students logging on? Are they engaging with digital content in meaningful ways (before and after class)?

- Feedback. Likewise, feedback should be collected from students, teachers, and administrators. Have there been any functional changes in teaching, learning, or education management? Are student skills improving? Do administrators complete certain tasks faster?

Making Success a Reality

While celebrating your successes is important, it's even more important to make sure your staff are involved from the get-go. Keeping staff informed of the entire roll-out process ensures true buy-in while letting them visualize the path, follow through, and feel accomplished.

We recommend preparing a formal implementation plan that can be shared with staff. Change champions can then update their colleagues regarding key milestones as well as new resources.

The Future of Digital Education

Change can be scary, but reaching certain milestones of success can be exciting, fulfilling, and well worth the effort. While digital learning was once contained within the field of imagination, virtual technologies have found their way into the classroom—and are here to stay. But how will they change?

What's Next for Digital Education?

By 2025, the edtech industry is expected to grow to $404 billion from $163 billion in 2019. Here's how we envision the next steps for digital learning.

Early adopters of digital education will be in the best position to capitalize on new technology, education trends, and position their districts as forward-thinking leaders in this space.

So, what transformative outcomes are on the horizon when it comes to digital education?

01
Bringing Virtual Reality Into the Classroom

As digital education strategies continue to evolve, we may be looking at virtual field trips and other forms of interactive learning that will allow students to connect with new material in creative, fun, and thought-provoking ways.

02
Closing the Digital Divide

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a tectonic shift in all aspects of society, including education, with nearly 1.6 billion students affected worldwide. While digital learning became the norm, not all students had equal access to a reliable internet connection. The pandemic highlighted the need to ensure full access to digital tech, especially in areas that are rural, impoverished, or tribal lands.

03
Introducing Flexibility

Digital platforms offer flexibility where there was none. For example, teachers who have been injured might consider teaching from their homes. Technology offers a much-needed avenue to support staff while cutting down commutes, improving productivity, and boosting employee satisfaction.

04
Embracing New Technologies

One of the major themes we're seeing among educators, students, and parents alike is a stronger recognition of the value of technology in not only supporting education, but expanding its possibilities.

05
The Rise of the Virtual School

10 years ago, the idea of a virtual school would have shocked many. In 2021, that concept seems far more doable. In modern education, we may see the creation of fully virtual schools. These schools will provide an alternative form of learning that allows teachers and students to connect digitally, work through assignments in a flexible environment, and empower students to learn on their terms. However, the success of virtual schools will require modernized IT infrastructure and a shift in public opinion when it comes to the traditional learning experience.

Keep the Focus on Education and Experiences With Edsembli

The sudden closures caused by COVID-19 have demonstrated just how important virtual learning is. Add to that the millions of dollars school districts and individual schools have invested into modernizing IT infrastructure, deploying virtual learning, and training their staff—and it's clear that digital education is here to stay.

The biggest challenges many districts face is just getting started. Deploying a successful digital education environment is no easy task. There are many considerations, from the platforms you will use, training your staff, how you will support your digital education solutions, and much more.

The real winners in digital education will be the districts that learn how to create an integrated experience—one where data flows seamlessly, functionality is a catalyst for learning, and measuring success is easy.

Edsembli offers a fully-integrated platform that targets critical processes in education management. The Edsembli ecosystem was designed to keep school districts agile, efficient, and compliant by leveraging cutting-edge cloud technology to address the needs of modern education.

Are you interested in a robust, cloud-based digital education platform that was designed to improve outcomes at all levels of education? Book your demo with an Edsembli education specialist today.

Empowered staff, student, and parent experiences start with Edsembli

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