

EDUCATION DISRUPTION BRINGS SCHOOL DIGITAL STRATEGIES INTO FOCUS

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Education Disruption Brings School Digital Strategies Into Focus

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Innovation

With education thrown into disarray by the pandemic, the challenge of providing teaching and learning for K-12 students has been — and continues to be — immense.

Even before the virus made such an impact, many schools had already realized that a growing array of apps and solutions — that they sometimes only used for a short time before abandoning for the next best thing — was not the way to achieve meaningful, technology-enhanced teaching and learning experiences for their students. These were the schools that had defined (or were in the process of defining) a sustainable, pedagogy-driven, whole-school digital strategy for the longer term.

It is, of course, no surprise that they could move more easily to an online learning model than others that had not yet reached this point. But even they were not entirely prepared for it to continue for an extended period and are now looking at how they can change their strategies to support the new demands of providing education.

Putting the pieces together

High-quality lesson content is paramount, and dedicated teachers across the country have gone all out to plan and shape their lessons for online delivery. But it is not just a matter of switching on the webcam and broadcasting them to students. Online learning is a complex beast that brings with it the need for enhanced communication alongside effective collaboration — not just with students, but with parents, colleagues, school leaders and counselors.

Balancing all these things is crucial if this model of learning is to succeed. So, it is vital that a school has the infrastructure, training and support from the whole school community in place to ensure it has flexible communication and collaboration tools included in its digital strategy, as well as the mechanisms to deliver learning.

The best communication apps will help to increase productivity, visibility and collaboration, rather than create more friction by cluttering inboxes. Cloud solutions can aid collaboration between

colleagues, whether by facilitating the shared creating and editing of documents or through the use of comms and collaborative apps such as Slack, Teams or Trello.

Digital strategy

When creating your digital strategy, my recommendation is to, first, step back, reflect and be totally honest about what your school's priorities are so you can see which areas need the most attention.

Thanks to Covid-19, there are even more points to add to your checklist now, such as digital equity challenges, blended learning CPD for staff, finding the “right” learning tools that tick the boxes for pedagogy and online safety, and agreeing on effective tools for remote assessment — alongside contingency plans for when staff and students do not have connectivity. Even though the last point is not strictly “digital,” it must factor into your strategy in the interests of students who are disadvantaged by circumstance, not by

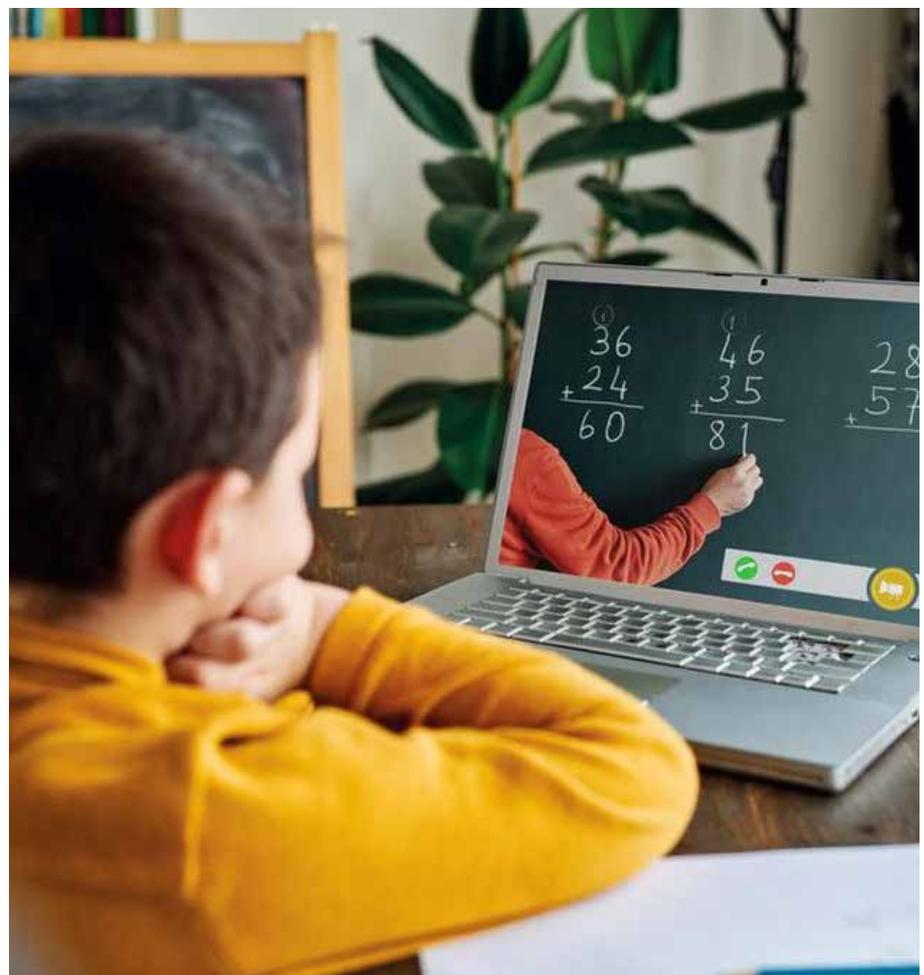
ability or choice.

Ensuring your school has the infrastructure to support varied learning scenarios is more important than ever due to the increased requirement for accessible tech both locally and remotely, alongside the capability to have devices deployed remotely so students and teachers can connect with each other, no matter where they are.

Continuity is key

With communication and collaboration as pillars of a good strategy, you also gain an added benefit: continuity. It shouldn't matter if your children are on campus or studying from home; providing that real sense of continuity can really help with progression and help make the key transition to learning at home a little easier (a situation that seems increasingly likely over the coming months).

It goes without saying that the complete classroom experience cannot be replicated





in a remote setting. However, it does not mean that schools should not try to get as close as they can by implementing education technology that supports both classroom and home learning. Cloud-based teaching platforms can help to facilitate broader learning experiences. These solutions can help with things such as:

- Ensuring online safety by controlling web and application use with “allowed” and “restricted” lists. This removes the temptation of distractions and keeps students shielded from unsuitable content.
- Keeping students on task by helping staff view their screens, control apps they use, view websites they visit, and even know what they type and who they collaborate with.

- Capturing valuable feedback with chat and instant messaging, using quick surveys to capture insights into students’ understanding, and responding to students swiftly when support is needed, both in-class and remotely.

If teachers and children are used to using these kinds of tools in school, switching to remote learning when required is not likely to cause the same level of disruption.

New times, new challenges

The current situation means that schools need to be agile in their approach and response. But acting fast should not mean that the fundamentals of strategic planning are forgotten; it is essential that the considered and lasting approach to tech remains. I have seen firsthand how well-considered tech strategies that are

built on strong pedagogical principles and underpinned by strong infrastructure can support learning for many years.

Education is a sharing profession, and schools are posting details of their own digital strategy experiences and what they have learned on social media. I would advise readers looking for inspiration to find some in those shared experiences.

By adopting a strategic approach to educational technology, schools can stand themselves in good stead for a post-Covid-19 world. If there is a positive to be gained from these times, then let’s use this glimpse of the changing educational environment to help us be wise about how we plan, structure and use technology in our schools so that we can deliver effective teaching and learning that fits with the future.