

# ISTELive 21: How Schools Can Confidently Create a Strategy for a Digital World

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While technology played a key role in education over the past 18 months, it's not a panacea, Al Kingsley, CEO of NetSupport, warned a room of virtual attendees during a Saturday session at [ISTELive](#), the online gathering of the [International Society for Technology in Education](#).

During his session, "[Shaping your School Digital Strategy – Hints and Tips](#)," Kingsley outlined how to confidently create an effective digital strategy, including pointers for "bringing people along for the journey" rather than dragging them along.

Kingsley has nearly 30 years of experience in educational technology and online safety, and sits on several educational boards and trusts in the United Kingdom.

The author of "My Secret #EdTech Diary: Looking at Educational Technology Through a Wider Lens" kicked off the session by stressing that the first part of an effective strategy does not involve spending money.

Instead, he encouraged educators to play to one of their greatest strengths — their ability to reflect not just on lessons learned, but on what tech they already have.

"How many schools and districts over the past 18 months to 2 years ago had a sense of all the tools being used, what was deployed and how effectively were they being used?" he asked.

Looking back to understand the answers to these questions can help build up confidence and further expand impact, he said.

Kingsley shared that most school districts have just over 1,000 pieces of ed tech, and added that district leaders should take advantage of existing tech that can [track, monitor and manage, from a central point, all IT assets](#) and endpoints across a school district.



“Get a voice from all the key stakeholders around the table to help build the aspirations, identify the challenges and pressures and identify the opportunities that exist to co-produce our digital strategy.”

Al Kingsley, CEO, NetSupport

Knowing what ed tech tools are being used and how often can help teachers and students better maximize these tools with the added benefit of saving time and money and increasing security, he said.

“We want to make sure that the technology that’s been hard earned is actually available and usable to teachers and students. But also, the most important strand for successful adoption is confidence, and confidence comes from that reassurance that when you open the [Chromebooks](#), open the laptops and begin a lesson, that the right tools will be deployed on them and that they’ll be reliable and robust, and you’ll be able to utilize them through your lessons.”

## Building a Dream Team with the Right Stakeholders

While it may seem logical to focus on what is available in the budget, Kingsley cautions that this is a short-sighted view. Yes, it is important to be realistic about capacity. But, he says, leaders need to also think about long-term impact and sustainability.

By focusing on money, “we might meet some short-term issues and pressures. However, what we really want to do is get a voice from all the key stakeholders around the table to help build the aspirations, identify the challenges and pressures and identify the opportunities that exist to co-produce our digital strategy.

That dream team should include a cross section of representatives from administration, finance, trustees and governors, special education, network management and administration, senior leadership, training and others — and at the heart of that team should be teachers and students.

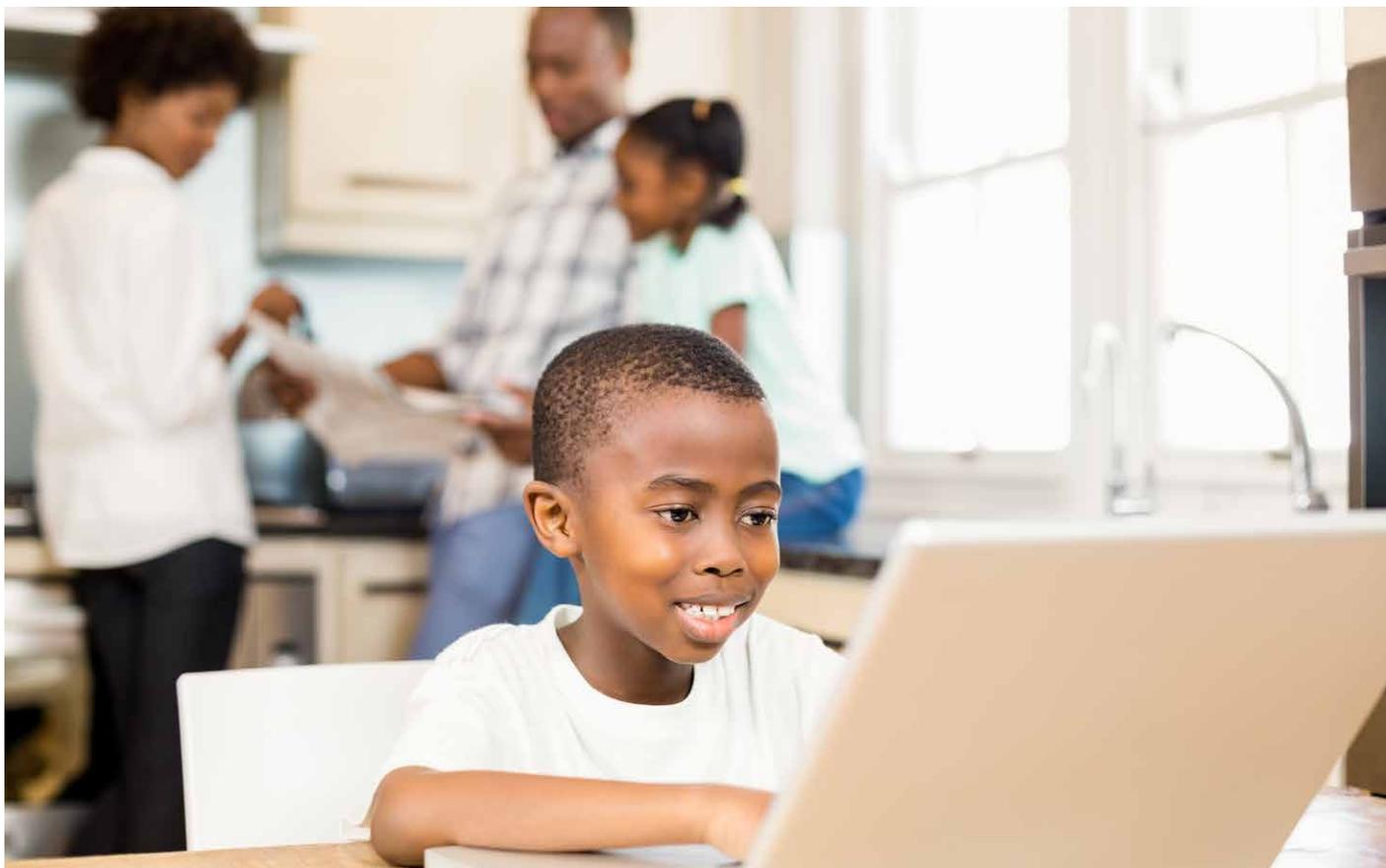
## Confident Educators Use Ed Tech Tools Consistently

When it comes to getting educators to consistently use ed tech tools, Kingsley said, “confidence is king.”

He stressed that consistent, [ongoing training of educators was key](#) to helping schools quickly adapt and use ed tech tools. One way to do this, he said, is to identify “flag bearers” — those early adopters who are excited about tech and who are willing to teach their colleagues. Some districts have ed tech clubs where colleagues share what they’ve learned with each other, he said.

For those concerned about the amount of time in-person training would require, he recommended creating online resources and documentation that staff could access on their own schedule.

He also shared Canadian teacher and ed tech consultant Sylvia Duckworth’s illustration of “The 4 Stages of Teacher Confidence in the Use of Technology,” which uses the SAMR model of substitution, augmentation, modification and redefinition. SAMR depicts increased confidence in technology use, starting



with phase 1, where the teacher is shown drowning and trying to survive, then moving up the mountain to phase 4, [where the teacher exhibits digital literacy](#) and innovation.

### **Communication as the Foundation of Digital Strategy**

Kingsley pointed out that due to rapid deployment of solutions from Microsoft and Google, teachers are no longer siloed all day in their classrooms and are now participating in communication that's greater and different than before. Without communication as its foundation, a district's digital strategy is essentially ineffective, Kingsley said. He noted that, in years past, communication was often an afterthought.

However, he believes that in this age of increased technological integration, it is important to have greater communication between leadership and staff, between schools and students, and between schools and parents. Appropriate communication about the right technology can not only save time and other resources but also can ensure students' well-being, especially those with special needs.

### **Technology Redefines the Previously Inconceivable**

Kingsley shared that, even though some may have struggled to adapt to new technologies during the pandemic, technology allowed schools to accomplish things that were previously inconceivable. He encouraged attendees to think of these as building blocks and to embrace the positive outcomes as they returned to their classrooms in person. He noted that while synchronous and asynchronous learning may have been required at a particular point in time, it gave teachers skills that they can build upon moving forward. Prerecorded video, in particular, can allow students to study for exams, providing flexibility for both the teacher and the students.

Another benefit: [Monitoring tools](#) can allow schools to appropriately address students' worrisome online behaviors sooner.

Kingsley also encouraged districts to seek evidence of a tool's effectiveness from research and case studies, and recommended that they ask vendors for a trial period before committing to purchase of any product.

### **Ed Tech Is Not the Primary Solution**

Kingsley also discussed the need for each district to have its own unique vision. He encouraged districts to use their strengths and skills to inform their vision.

"Here's the shocker: Ed tech is not the solution," Kingsley emphasized before adding that technology has "the ability to support and empower those key strands of teaching, pedagogy, communication, well-being and engagement. ... There's plenty of research that shows that where it is used appropriately and effectively, it can empower teachers and students to greater levels."

Districts will know that their digital strategy is effective when it is "not a part of the daily discussion, but is an integral part of the school day. It's discussed when appropriate but not forced into each and every setting. When teachers have confidence in the tools to try something different, middle leaders are empowered to innovate with technology, and IT managers at the heart of digital discussion are informed of the outcomes and students become confident digital citizens."