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**BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT**

This toolkit describes the role of businesses and the community to support learning in the digital age to help ensure that students are college and career ready. Technology is not an afterthought for any business--all professions are expected to understand and implement technology tools and resources from clerks to mechanics to artist to engineers to physicians. As schools move towards digital learning environments, it is necessary to foster business and community support to advance the transition and ensure that students are career and college ready. Specifically, educators can share with local businesses and the community some of the benefits of learning in a digital environment, while also addressing some specific areas of interest for businesses and the community. National and local business organizations may also want to share this toolkit with their members to explain the importance of moving towards digital learning to ensure that students have the appropriate workforce skills. This resource includes a communications packet with sample documents that are customizable for you to use as you support businesses and the community.

**LEARNING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

Technology is an essential component of learning today. With digital applications, tools and resources, students can create content, interact with experts, collaborate with peers and participate in simulation activities. Personalized experiences put students at the center of learning and empowers students to take control of their own learning through flexibility and choice. The [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)](https://www.ed.gov/essa) acknowledges technology’s role in revolutionizing learning and includes definitions for digital learning and blended learning, and references technology throughout the legislation. In the [Non-Regulatory Guidance Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essassaegrantguid10212016.pdf) publication provides an overview of activities LEAs may consider as they prepare for implementation of the effective use of technology (ESEA Section 4109). Specific activities include: supporting high-quality professional development for educators, school leaders, and administrators to personalize learning and improve academic achievement; building technological capacity and infrastructure; carrying out innovative blended learning projects; providing students in rural, remote, and underserved areas with the resources to benefit from high-quality digital learning opportunities; and delivering specialized or rigorous academic courses and curricula using technology, including digital learning technologies. Similarly, the [National Education Technology Plan (NETP)](https://tech.ed.gov/files/2017/01/NETP17.pdf) calls for a “revolutionary transformation rather than evolutionary tinkering” in education and recognizes that we must leverage technology to provide engaging and powerful learning experiences for all students. Technology offers all students – urban, rural, low-income, ESL, special needs, high achieving – the opportunity to engage in dynamic learning activities. Education leaders at the federal, state, and local level have the opportunity to provide leadership to ensure that all students have personalized, engaging learning experiences.

**ROLE TO SUPPORT LEARNING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

As schools move towards digital learning environments, it is necessary to foster business and community relationship to advance the transition. Current business and workforce requirements require the use of technology tools and resources from clerks to mechanics to artist to engineers to physicians – all professions are expected to understand and implement technology tools and resources. Districts and schools can partner with businesses and the community to ensure that students are acquiring the necessary workforce skills and that they are prepared for college and a career.

**KEY AREAS FOR BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY**

This section highlights some of the key areas of interest for businesses and community organizations during the transition to learning in the digital age. They include collaborative leadership, community partnerships and the homework gap.

**Collaborative Leadership**

**As a local business owner, how can I work with local schools to help ensure that high school graduates have the workforce skills necessary for our industry?**

As schools move towards digital learning environments, it is necessary to foster leadership beyond district and school leaders to support the transition. Business and community leaders can provide industry expertise, as well as articulate the needs of the community—students that are career ready and responsible digital citizens. For example, in Cache County, Utah, there is a high demand for robotics technicians. Local businesses approached the school district to establish a robotics class because they needed employees that could repair and program the robots on a day-to-day basis. After the initial meeting industry leaders met with all of the surrounding school districts to discuss the robotics program. The school districts worked together to develop the Robots STEM Academy and created degree opportunities for students. The Robotics STEM Academy leverages UETN gigabit broadband connection, to access UETN’s collaborative distance education technology, and provides face-to-face instruction. Students learn about drone technology, build their own small robots, and program the large industrial robots via eight different locations that connect through the [Bridgerland Applied Technology Center](http://www.batc.edu/stem). This example highlights how collaboration can result in better preparing students with the skills necessary for the workforce.

**Learn more about collaborative leadership**

[2017 National Education Technology Plan Update (NETP)](https://tech.ed.gov/files/2017/01/NETP17.pdf)

[Communication Strategies to Create Personalized Learning Buy-In in Baltimore](https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-03-02-how-baltimore-cps-used-communications-strategies-to-create-personalized-learning-buy-in)



**Community Partnerships**

**I’m interested in partnership with a local school. What types of community partnerships are available?**

Business and community leaders should work with local school boards and district leaders to develop strong relationships to ensure that all stakeholders are vested in successful schools. Through strategic engagement, business and community leaders can generate public and parental support for student learning in the digital age, as well as college and career readiness. In Richland District Two, South Carolina is committed to ensuring that technology is available to all students outside of the classroom. Most students have their own devices through BYOD or laptop loans from the school, but not all students have internet access at home. The district used mapping data to determine which families lacked home internet access. Richland Two partnered with a local internet provider to offer internet hot spot devices to families with filtered internet broadband. When providing the devices to the family, the district explained that it was not only for students to complete homework, but also for the entire household to use to access community resources.

**Learn more about community partnerships**

[The Power of Partnerships](http://knowledgeworks.org/worldoflearning/2016/11/school-partnerships/)

[Partnerships for Progress](https://tech.ed.gov/stories/mentor/)

[Digital Learning Day](http://www.digitallearningday.org/)



**Homework Gap**

**As a local business, how can I work with the district/school to encourage students to patron on our business to access free wireless for homework assignments?**

The “homework gap” – the gap between students whose internet connections at home are slow or non-existent—and those who have home connections with adequate speed is an increasingly important issue. As schools implement digital learning and teachers require students to have internet access outside of school, the digital divide is increasing. The [Aspen Institute blog post](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/the-homework-gap/) cites that as many as 7 in 10 teachers assign homework that requires access to the internet. Currently, one in three households do not subscribe to broadband service and 52% of low and moderate-income families report that internet access is too slow. This problem is disproportionately common in rural and underserved communities.

Without home internet access, 35% of students go to school early or stay late; 24% of students use the public library; and 19% of students go to fast food restaurants or cafes to use the internet. Local businesses and libraries can support out of school access for students. Local restaurants can offer free Wi-Fi hot spots and encourage students to patron their business without imposing a time limit on how long students can work there. Regional and local libraries are another option for providing free internet access outside of school--helping to address the “homework gap”. The [2015 ALA Digital Inclusion Survey](http://www.ala.org/research/digitalinclusion) found that the majority of public libraries provide technology access and training:

* 97.5% offer public Wi-Fi
* 98.0% offer technology training
* 89.5% offer access to e-books
* 96.5% offer online homework assistance
* 95.6% offer online job resources

**Learn how some schools are addressing the homework gap**

[Broadband Imperative II](http://www.setda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/SETDA-Broadband-ImperativeII-Full-Document-Sept-8-2016.pdf)

[Building Robust Infrastructure as a Tool for Equity](https://medium.com/%40OfficeofEdTech/building-robust-infrastructure-as-a-tool-for-equity-7170a3cd8fda)

[Digital Equity Action Toolkit](http://www.cosn.org/focus-areas/leadership-vision/digital-equity-action-agenda)

[FCC Lifeline Program](https://www.fcc.gov/general/lifeline-program-low-income-consumers)

**DIGITAL LEARNING IN ACTION**



**BATC Stem Academy**

This short video discusses the creation of the STEM Academy in Utah.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oafnh2wbLZs>

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**Preparing Globally Competitive Graduates**

S. Dallas Dance Ph.D, superintendent of Baltimore County Public School District, presents Preparing Globally Competitive Graduates. He also discusses how access to technology promotes equity and student engagement. <https://youtu.be/NkVsto7uI2E>

**COMMUNICATION PACKET**

The communication packet includes customizable templates. Partners can add logos, examples or other resources to help engage stakeholders and support this topic. Users are encouraged to leverage these resources to support your work in engaging businesses and the community by providing them with the resources needed to create an ecosystem of support and learning inside and outside of school walls.

* Newsletter/website snapshot
* Presentation slides to support conversations with stakeholders
* Social media promotion examples
* Press outreach
* Outreach email