



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Dear Colleague:

American education has always evolved alongside innovation. From textbooks to personal computers, from the internet to artificial intelligence, each generation has introduced new tools with the potential to strengthen teaching and learning. Today, education technology has become an integral part of that tradition, helping schools personalize instruction, expand access to learning opportunities, support educators, reduce learning gaps, and prepare students for success in an increasingly technological economy.

At the same time, parents, educators, policymakers, and community leaders have raised concerns about the growing role of technology in children's lives. Questions surrounding student screen time, digital well-being, privacy, and the educational value of technology have become part of a broader national conversation.

These concerns deserve thoughtful consideration. They also require careful distinction.

The public policy debate should not be framed as a choice between technology and no technology, nor should every screen be viewed as serving the same purpose. Recreational technology and education technology should not be viewed as synonymous. While excessive recreational screen use has raised important concerns that deserve attention, education technology can strengthen teaching, deepen learning, and expand education opportunity when aligned with clear instructional goals and implemented effectively.

Research and experience have demonstrated that technology is a valuable instructional tool when it supports strong pedagogy and effective teaching practices. Digital platforms can increase access to rigorous coursework, support differentiated instruction, provide timely feedback through high-quality assessments, and broadly expand opportunities for students. The question before education leaders is not whether technology can support learning, but whether individual tools are selected, implemented, and evaluated in ways that advance specific education goals.

The question should not be whether teachers and students use technology.

The question should be whether the technology we ask teachers and students to use improves learning and students' academic outcomes.

That distinction should guide decisions made by states, school districts, educators, families, and education technology providers alike.

The U.S. Department of Education believes these decisions are best made by states and local communities, with input from parents and teachers. As states continue leading American education, the Department offers the following considerations to encourage balanced policymaking, responsible innovation, and a continued focus on student outcomes.

As attention to student screen time increases, schools should be increasingly intentional about the digital experiences they place in front of students, ensuring that technology use is purposeful, instructionally sound, and contributing to measurable student outcomes.

Technology should remain a tool in service of learning—not an end in itself.

Holding Educational Value Central

Much of today's public conversation has centered on student screen time. Those discussions reflect legitimate concerns and deserve thoughtful consideration. At the same time, education policymaking should focus on educational value rather than screen exposure alone.

Education technology has expanded learning opportunities in ways that would have been difficult—or impossible—to achieve a generation ago. Students in rural and geographically isolated communities can access tutoring, world language instruction, dual enrollment opportunities, and specialized career and technical education that may not otherwise be available in their local schools. Digital learning can also help schools address persistent staffing challenges by connecting students to qualified instructors and coursework across district and state boundaries.

Education technology has also transformed the ways educators measure and support student learning. Digital assessment tools can provide timely, reliable, and actionable information through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, enabling educators to identify learning needs earlier, monitor student progress more consistently, and adjust instruction to better meet individual student needs. When used thoughtfully, these tools also provide families with clearer and more timely information about their child's progress, strengthening the partnership between home and school.

Technology also increases access for students whose education needs require additional supports. Students with disabilities often rely on assistive technologies such as text-to-speech, speech-to-text, real-time captioning, and visual supports to access grade-level instruction. Virtual tutoring, adaptive instructional programs, and digital learning resources can provide individualized services, timely feedback, and additional instructional support that complements high-quality classroom teaching.

These examples illustrate why education technology should not be evaluated solely by the amount of time students spend using it. The same technology that can distract a student during recreational use can also connect a student in a rural community to advanced coursework, enable

a student with dyslexia to access complex text through assistive technology, or allow a homebound student to remain engaged in classroom learning.

The core question remains whether a given technology strengthens instruction, expands opportunity, and improves student learning.

Evidence and Continuous Improvement

States and school districts make significant annual investments in education technology. Like any instructional resource, those investments should be guided by evidence of effectiveness alongside considerations such as cost, usability, accessibility, interoperability, implementation support, and educator experience.

In her [Dear Colleague Letter](#) on the use of artificial intelligence in education, Secretary Linda McMahon outlined five principles for the responsible use of AI: education technologies should be educator-led, ethical, accessible, transparent, and protective of student data. These principles provide a strong foundation not only for artificial intelligence, but for educational technology more broadly.

Responsible design is essential, but it does not by itself ensure educational value. Responsible design is the floor. The effectiveness of any educational technology depends on the quality of the tool, the purpose for which it is used, and the conditions in which it is implemented. Not only do we need to know if the tool works, but if it works; why does it work, for whom does it work, and under what conditions.

Product demonstrations and vendor claims introduce new tools, but educators should test those claims and provide transparent feedback about effectiveness and appropriate use. External evidence from a third party, randomized controlled trials, implementation reviews, educator feedback, parent feedback, and local outcome data each contribute to informed decision-making and continuous improvement. Educators and leaders should expect as much from education technology providers.

Education technology providers, in turn, have an important role to play in strengthening confidence in their products. As states and school districts evaluate education technology, they should expect providers to:

- Publish rigorous, independent evaluations of product impact on student learning whenever feasible;
- Share implementation guidance grounded in effective classroom practice;
- Provide transparent information about product capabilities, limitations, and performance; and
- Continuously improve products using evidence from implementation and student outcomes.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reflects a longstanding federal commitment to evidence-based decision-making. As education technology becomes an increasingly integral component of teaching and learning, states and districts should draw upon this established evidence framework when making procurement and implementation decisions.

As procurement practices continue to evolve, states like Louisiana, Arkansas, Indiana, Michigan, and Texas are exploring contracting models that establish shared performance measures, standardize modern student data privacy protections, clarify expectations for implementation support, and align vendor partnerships with district goals. Early examples have focused primarily on tutoring services and, increasingly, education technology. These approaches emphasize collaboration, continuous improvement, and shared accountability rather than relying solely on product adoption or usage metrics.

Emerging [research](#) suggests these partnerships strengthen collaboration between districts and providers while reinforcing the importance of thoughtful contract design, clearly defined outcomes, and local capacity to support successful implementation. The Department encourages states interested in these approaches to continue monitoring evidence and adapting procurement practices to meet local priorities and student needs.

A Shared Responsibility

Building public confidence and trust in education technology requires collaboration among states, school districts, educators, families, researchers, and education technology providers.

States establish policy and procurement expectations. School districts create the conditions for successful implementation. Educators integrate technology into effective instruction. Families provide important partnership and feedback. Researchers contribute objective evidence about what works. Education technology providers develop and refine the tools that support teaching and learning.

Each partner has a distinct role, but all share responsibility for ensuring that education technology advances student learning. When every partner accepts responsibility for outcomes—not simply implementation—we strengthen public confidence while encouraging continued innovation.

Considerations for States and Education Technology Providers

As states continue leading decisions about education technology, the Department encourages policymakers and providers to consider the following:

States and school districts should:

- Distinguish between policies addressing recreational technology use and those governing instructional technology.

- Evaluate education technology based on demonstrated learning outcomes and instructional value rather than screen time alone.
- Incorporate evidence of effectiveness into procurement and renewal decisions, looking for products that have conducted RCTs and demonstrated positive outcomes.
- Establish processes for reviewing implementation and outcomes to ensure technology investments continue meeting instructional goals.
- Support professional learning that helps educators integrate technology effectively into instruction.

Education technology providers are encouraged to:

- Design products that support high-quality instruction and meaningful student engagement with teacher and parent input.
- Incorporate evidence of effectiveness and demonstrate success through independent evaluation, RCTs, and transparent reporting.
- Minimize unnecessary screen exposure while maximizing instructional value in design.
- Support educators with implementation resources and professional learning.
- Continuously improve products using evidence from classroom implementation, parent feedback, and student academic outcomes.

Conclusion

Technology will continue to shape education, the workforce, and civic life. Preparing students for that future requires thoughtful decisions about when, where, and how technology is used in support of learning.

The Department encourages states, school districts, educators, and education technology providers to keep student academic outcomes at the center of every decision. Technology should expand learning, strengthen instruction, and demonstrate educational value. By focusing on outcomes rather than inputs, states can continue fostering innovation while maintaining the confidence of parents, educators, and communities.

The Department looks forward to continuing its partnership with states as they work to ensure that education technology serves its highest purpose: improving outcomes for every student.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Baesler
Assistant Secretary
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