



Technology & Schools: Coronavirus, Remote Learning, and Beyond

Thank you to those who joined us for this event, which took place on Thursday, June 11, 2020. Below, you can read the reporter wrap-up our journalists wrote for you.

On Thursday, June 11, 2020, Education Week hosted an online summit to examine how the massive school closures caused by the coronavirus and the rapid transition to remote learning across the country is re-shaping the role and use of technology in schools now and for years to come. During this virtual event, Education Week writers and editors and their expert guests staffed “discussion rooms” that tackled a set of issues that are very much top-of-mind for teachers, principals, and district leaders, who are arguably working under the most difficult circumstances ever.

Here are takeaways we have distilled from those discussions with you, the Education Week readers.



Teaching and learning in the new ed-tech landscape. Big disruption or business as usual?

- **Moderator: David Rauf**, Staff Writer, Education Week
- The rush to get schools up and running with remote learning during the coronavirus school closures prompted districts across the country to scramble to purchase huge numbers of digital devices for their schools. The result, in the span of just a month this spring, there was a significant increase in the percentage of school district leaders who said they provided each

student with a digital learning device, from 44 to 52 percent of district leaders saying they do so for elementary students, 68 to 84 percent for middle school kids, and 68 to 88 percent for high schoolers, according to an EdWeek Research Center survey. What impact will this rapid and massive shift toward 1-to-1 computing environments have on teaching and learning?

▸ **Guests:**

- **Sarah Porisch**, Director of Technology, Brainerd Public Schools, Brainerd, Minn.
- **Mark Racine**, Chief Information Officer, Boston Public Schools
- **Patti Salzmann**, Chief Academic Officer, Division of Academics and School Leadership, San Antonio Independent School District

Key Takeaways

- *There should be a special synergy between a district's chief technology and chief academic officer to make sure tech and curriculum are aligned. Patti Salzmann, chief academic officer for the San Antonio Independent School District, said she tries to connect daily with the head of her district's tech department, even if it is only for a few minutes. She said there is so much overlap now between instruction and tech that "we need each other and have made a commitment toward this idea of shared responsibility."*
- *How to best measure student engagement and take attendance in an online learning environment are difficult tasks that will require ongoing conversations about what works and what does not work, and more opportunities to share lessons learned.*
- *The crush of ed-tech vendor pitches remains a challenge for district tech officials to keep up with. "Ultimately," says Mark Racine, chief information officer for Boston Public Schools, if you can't convince teachers of the usefulness of a product, then "you can't sell to me!"*
- *Districts are experimenting and finding success with an array of apps for K-2 distance learning (Class Dojo, Seesaw, Screencastify, Raz-Kids, for example).*

Resources

- [How COVID-19 Is Shaping Tech Use. What That Means When Schools Reopen](#)
- [CAOs and CTOs Ramp Up on Collaboration](#)
- [Schools Find Creative Ways to Update Contact Info for Missing Students](#)
- [Survey: K-12 Superintendents Not Impressed by Vendors' COVID Marketing Approaches](#)



The big tech equity challenges schools are up against. Can they fix them?

▸ **Moderator: Mark Lieberman**, Staff Writer, Education Week

▸ Schools have made significant progress in improving access to technology for all students, thanks in large part to the federal e-rate program and other efforts to expand WiFi access. But the coronavirus school closures exposed huge equity gaps around access to technology at home. In districts with the lowest percentages of students from low-income families, just 1 in 5 leaders reported in late March that a lack of basic technology is a “major” problem, compared with nearly two-thirds of leaders in districts where the highest percentages of students are from low-income families, according a survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center. That puts school districts, states, and the federal government in the difficult position of figuring out how to bridge those gaps.

▸ **Guests:**

- **Richard E. Ferdig**, Summit Professor of Learning Technologies and Professor of Instructional Technology, Kent State University

- **Antonio Romayor**, Chief Technology Officer, El Centro Elementary School District, El Centro, Calif.

- **Lisa Spencer**, Executive Director, Instructional Technology & Support, Prince George's County Public Schools, Upper Marlboro, Md.

Key Takeaways:

- *Educators are extremely concerned about students who either cannot afford or cannot access broadband service in their area, and the equity gap that results from unequal opportunity to learn remotely. Some available stopgap solutions to those challenges are cost-prohibitive in some cases, and daunting even for someone with a firm grasp on the complexities.*

- *As more businesses across the country inch towards reopening, schools may have to contend with serving or supporting entire families, not just students, in the fall. It is possible that remote learning will work better for students whose families can afford childcare or have a strong enough Internet connection to sustain multiple simultaneous users. And that raises big equity issues.*

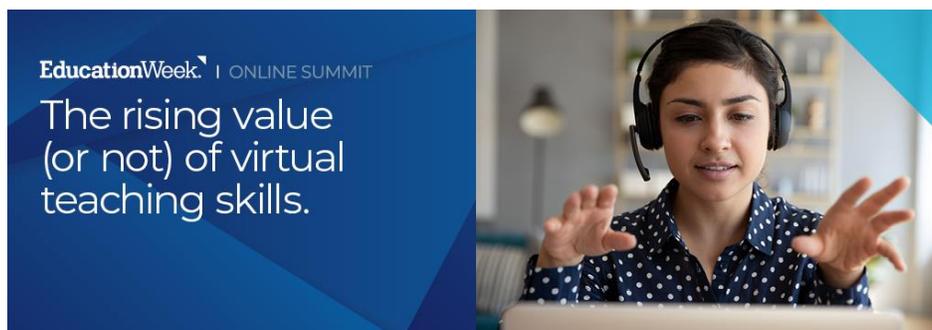
- *Schools will have to get creative to meet the technological demands of remote learning in the fall. Ferdig suggested schools investigate low-cost and open-source “OER” materials. Others*

expressed the need for tech tools with a low barrier to entry for students as well as teachers who might lack the technical skills to navigate a complex platform.

- *One educator mentioned that students from families that can afford personal digital devices alongside school-provided devices might get more dynamic opportunities to learn than students who work only on school-provided devices, which have fewer capabilities and might require tech support out of the home if they're malfunctioning.*

Resources:

- [Like It or Not, K-12 Schools Are Doing a Digital Leapfrog During COVID-19](#)
- [Coronavirus Pushes Schools Closer to a Computer for Every Student](#)
- [How Districts Are Helping Teachers Get Better at Tech Under Coronavirus](#)
- [How Statewide LMS Options Could Help Schools Strengthen Remote Learning](#)



The rising value (or not) of virtual teaching skills.

► **Moderator:**

► **Sarah Schwartz**, Staff Writer, Education Week

► The scramble to put together remote learning programs during the coronavirus school closures forced teachers across the country, most of whom had never taught a virtual class before, to jump online and figure out how to do it very quickly. It was messy and frustrating for many, but along the way they developed virtual teaching skills they never needed before. Will those skills be much more highly regarded not just while school buildings are closed but once they reopen too, and well into the future? Or, some experts suggest that once students and teachers return to their school buildings, there could be a backlash against raising the value of virtual teaching skills, because many teachers developed very negative feelings about remote teaching during the school closures. What virtual teaching skills have educators learned that will serve them well in the months and years ahead?

► **Guests:**

- **Brandi Argentar**, Science Teacher and Technology Coach, Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Ill.

- **Betty Chandy**, Director for Online Learning, Catalyst@Penn GSE, a center for educational innovation, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

- **Laura Haddad**, English Teacher and Technology Coach, Glastonbury High School, Glastonbury, Conn.

Key Takeaways:

- *Teachers have improved and expanded their tech skills this year, but it has been a slow process. The teachers who have been most successful, participants said, are those who realized the transition would take a lot of work and preparation—they could not just move their in-person classes online. With teachers who were less comfortable making the shift to begin with, having a guide (like a building tech coach, or a tech-savvy colleague) to break things down is important. "BABY steps," said Laura Haddad, an English teacher and technology coach at Glastonbury High School in Connecticut. "Make one small goal at a time."*

- *Teachers are looking to improve further, because they think their classes will be at least partially online next year, as well. The coronavirus may force schools to start the year online in the fall or use a blended instruction model. So, teachers are looking for more guidance on parts of online instruction that have been tricky this year, like reaching English-language learners and students with special needs, giving summative assessments, and virtual classroom management.*

- *Teachers are worried about starting from scratch to build relationships online. When schools closed this spring, teachers had already been with their students in the classroom for several months. But they will not have that connection if schools start online in the fall. "How do we build trust and relationships in a fully online space?" asked Betty Chandy, director for Online Learning, Catalyst@Penn GSE, a center for educational innovation in the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. "Ice-breaker activities in the initial days followed by constant efforts to get children to interact with the teacher and each other? What might that look like?"*

Resources:

- [It Was a Bumpy Ride, But Virtual Schooling During the Coronavirus Boosted Teachers' Tech Skills](#)
- [Stumped by How to Best Serve Students With At-Home Learning? Follow the Evidence \(Opinion\)](#)
- [Teachers Get Tips on Remote Instruction Strategies in Online 'Open Mic' Sessions](#)
- [Shifting Science Instruction to the Coronavirus: New Activities, Units](#)



Too much screen time. Should we be worried?

▸ **Moderator:** Sarah D. Sparks, Assistant Editor, Education Week

▸ As millions of students nationwide participated in remote learning programs during the coronavirus school closures, a massive research analysis sounded another note of caution about the effects of exposing children, particularly younger ones, to significantly more screen time. The meta-analysis in the journal JAMA Pediatrics found that while high-quality educational screen content is associated with better language skills, more overall time on screens each day, regardless of its quality, is linked to lower language development. Those findings are important for educators to consider while students are learning remotely, but also if students return to schools in the fall where access to digital learning devices for all ages will likely be much higher than it was before the school closures.

▸ **Guest:**

• **Jenny Radesky**, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Medical School, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, University of Michigan

Key Takeaways:

• *The American Academy of Pediatrics released guidelines on screen time in 2016, but co-author of the guidelines Jenny Radesky cautioned that it's important for educators and parents to think through different developmental needs rather than just looking for a time limit.*

• *Younger grades: "The youngest learners are most likely to be distracted by the "salient" features of digital media—the visual and sound effects, and not comprehend as much of the underlying learning materials," said Radesky, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Michigan. "Or, the cognitive load of understanding everything through a screen makes their learning less efficient. They are more likely to need an adult to scaffold them to understand the content and integrate it into knowledge."*

• *Older grades: A child of 9 or 10 is capable of basic self-reflection on their response to technology. "Teachers have a HUGE role to play in helping elementary school, middle school, and high school children be aware of their own distractibility when doing work on a computer/online. Talk about it during group meetings, ask kids what "rabbit holes" they went down and wasted time on. We learn from these experiences!" Remote learning can provide opportunities to practice making a plan to work on a single task for a set amount of time and then take a set break on or offline.*

• *"Parents are much more receptive to behavior change ideas when they come from a parent-to-parent discussion," Radesky said. "Screen time is such a touchy topic, and it's easy for parents to feel judged.*

They like hearing tips and strategies that have worked for other parents, particularly given the stress that everyone is under!”

- *Although digital remote learning has become ubiquitous, participants suggested several ways to promote screen-free remote lessons, including audiobooks, and projects in which students select books they already have at home.*

Resources:

- [COVID-19 Forces the Question: Should the Youngest Learners Have Devices?](#)
- [Why Principals Worry About How Mobile Devices Affect Students' Social Skills, Attention Spans](#)
- [Screen Time Up as Reading Scores Drop. Is There a Link?](#)
- [How to Decrease Screen Time for Students](#)



What technology steps schools need to take now to get ready for next year.

▸ **Moderator:** Sean Cavanagh, Managing Editor, EdWeek Market Brief

▸ There is still quite a bit of confusion about what the next school year will look like as far as the use of educational technology. This discussion will examine the steps schools are taking to get tech ready for the 2020-21 academic year, based on three scenarios: 1) Buildings reopen and stay open 2) Buildings are still closed 3) Buildings reopen but then must close again. What should the preparation for these three different scenarios look like for the use of educational technology? And what might get in the way of making this a smooth transition?

▸ **Guest:**

- **Keith R. Krueger**, CEO, the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)
- **Steven Langford**, Chief Information Officer, Beaverton School District, Beaverton, Ore.
- **Tom Ryan**, Chief Information & Strategy Officer, Santa Fe Public School District, N.M.

Key Takeaways:

- *Despite hopes that federal emergency relief – through the CARES Act – will provide a lifeline to school districts, some K-12 leaders say that money is already falling well short of their needs. A district technology official said that CARES Act money will make up for just 10 percent of what they have been forced to cut from budgets during COVID-19. The federal aid “has already been expended multiple times at this point,” he said.*

• *The COVID-19 crisis has forced many teachers to become more comfortable with technology in a way that is likely to carry over when the crisis passes. Teachers' new knowledge of, and familiarity with, tech platforms are likely to help them not only in distance-learning environments, but also with approaches such as screencasting and "flipping the classroom," that will apply in brick-and-mortar settings. The current remote-learning focus also seems to be opening new doors for more teacher collaboration via video-conferencing and other means.*

• *Many districts are struggling to figure out ways to run career-and-technical education programs during COVID-19. Lots of these programs rely heavily on having in-person equipment and delivery of instruction, and so the move to remote learning has been a huge challenge. One district is trying to overcome this by providing CTE teachers with online programs or software that are aligned to industry credentials, and by searching for platforms that will allow students to remote-in to CTE programs.*

• *It can be a struggle for districts to regulate the videoconference aspect of remote learning. The challenges include encouraging families to create a distraction-free environment at home. In addition, teachers may not know how to respond if an inappropriate image from the student's home environment is shown on screen. Some students and families may be embarrassed by their home environments, in a way that disrupts learning. Districts need best practices for how to manage their videoconference technologies and help families with these issues.*

• *The massive shift to remote learning has exposed the need for districts to provide much more PD for teachers about technology's role in improving instruction. Teachers need help not only understanding best practices, but also figuring out ways to engage students. And classroom educators are not the only ones needing PD; school principals also need help figuring out ways to support teachers whose traditional instructional approaches have been upended.*

Resources:

- [***A Simple Idea to Make a COVID-19 Bailout for Schools More Equitable***](#)
- [***It Was a Bumpy Ride, But Virtual Schooling During the Coronavirus Boosted Teachers' Tech Skills***](#)
- [***Coronavirus, Economic Crisis Cloud Resurgence of Career Tech Ed.***](#)
- [***The K-12 Educator's Guide to Safe and Effective Videoconferencing***](#)



Teachers, technology, and professional development. What's missing?

▸ **Moderator: Kevin Bushweller**, Assistant Managing Editor, Education Week

▸ The coronavirus school closures showed that while many teachers are quick learners when it comes to mastering new technologies, many others struggle to figure out how to use technologies to enhance student learning. This was the case before the coronavirus, but the wide disparities in skill levels became especially noticeable as schools made the wholesale shift to remote teaching. What lessons were learned during this difficult stretch about what might work better in training teachers how to use technology more effectively to improve student learning?

▸ **Guest:**

- **Amy Campbell**, 2019-2020 Washington State Teacher of the Year, and Special Education Teacher, Helen Baller Elementary School, Camas, Wash.

- **Mike Flynn**, Director, Mathematics Leadership Programs, Mount Holyoke College

- **Melinda George**, Chief Policy Officer, Learning Forward

Key Takeaways:

- *Learning how to help parents master new technologies is now more important than ever. Washington State Teacher of the Year Amy Campbell pointed out that for families who had little or no technology in their homes, it was a very steep learning curve that started with skills as basic as logging on to a computer. If teachers do not help parents work through those challenges, their students could be in jeopardy of not having access to the learning materials they need.*

- *Education schools are struggling with remote learning just like everyone else. As it is, many education school professors are doing remote learning for the first time themselves, and trying to figure out lessons learned they can pass along to pre-service teachers, says Mike Flynn, the director of Mathematics Leadership Programs at Mount Holyoke College. Complicating matters is that many student teachers were not able to finish their student-teacher experiences, meaning schools will have to put in place meaningful mentoring programs for new hires in the fall.*

- *Schools should use the summer as a PD opportunity for teachers, says Melinda George, the chief policy officer for Learning Forward. As schools face the uncertainty of what the 2020-21 academic year will look like, many school districts are using the summer months to offer opportunities for teachers to learn from each other about how to use technology more effectively to deliver instruction, whether students are attending classes in person or learning remotely. George says schools should put a particular emphasis on PD for teachers that helps them increase student engagement, which dropped significantly during the COVID-19 school building closures.*

- *Take the elements of high-quality PD and make them available in an online world, says George. That means expanding virtual coaching and mentoring and building more online, facilitated professional learning communities, or PLCs. It also means creating more meaningful opportunities for educators to try new things without fear of failure, giving them the space and time to take those risks, and connecting them with colleagues to share lessons learned.*

Resources:

- [How Did COVID-19 Change Your Teaching, for Better or Worse? See Teachers' Responses](#)
- [How Districts Are Helping Teachers Get Better at Tech Under Coronavirus](#)
- [How COVID-19 Is Shaping Tech Use. What That Means When Schools Reopen](#)

- [How Technology, Coronavirus Will Change Teaching by 2025](#)

For more information about the [“2020 Tech Counts” special report](#), read the entire report [here](#).

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