Harnessing the Power of Technology to Accelerate Student Achievement
A Call to Action to Leverage Existing Policies and Programs
10 Principles for the Institutionalization of Effective Education Technology

Introduction

The pandemic brought existing digital disparities in low-income communities into sharp focus. Despite million-dollar contracts School Districts signed with technology companies using pandemic relief funding, many of the Schools which suffered the most learning loss continue to struggle. These Schools are concentrated in low-income communities and are under-performing academically.

As the State of California continues to address budget shortfalls, it must also find ways to use existing educational resources and programs to address persistent digital inequities, leverage prior technology investments to ensure they are used effectively, and allocate existing funds to assist the most-needy Schools. These challenges are not solely about technology—they are about the opportunity to leverage technology innovations to drive performance for the most disadvantaged Students in California. This will require strong Leaders—policymakers and executives in the private, philanthropic, and non-profit sectors—to join forces in an innovative partnership.

As a launch-pad for policymakers and stakeholders to consider strategies to optimize existing resources, the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) proposes the following 10 Principles for guiding investments that focus on harnessing the power of technology to counter learning loss and improve academic achievement. This document is a "Call to Action" to align and leverage existing resources to harness the power of technology to support student performance.

10 Principles to Guide Public Technology Investments in Title I California Schools

These 10 Principles are intended to be the foundation for policy deliberations among Legislators, California Department of Education (CDE), State Board of Education (SBE), and key stakeholders as to how existing programs and resources can be leveraged to harness the power of technology to improve and accelerate student academic achievement. Implementation of the 10 Principles will ensure equitable access to technology and educational opportunities for low-income students in some of the most challenged Schools in California. They are directed towards all California Title I Schools, especially those that have been designated by CDE as meeting Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). The CDE awards grants to a geographically-diverse group of Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and prioritizes Schools that serve a high proportion of low-income Students, which are the most impacted by the Digital Divide. It must be underscored that unprecedented collaboration is required to ensure that all Students in under-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods have the opportunity to succeed.

- **Integration:** Effective use of technology to improve and accelerate student academic performance requires integration of best practices into existing school-improvement initiatives that are tailored to each District and School. Technology is not an "add-on" or an additional burden for Administrators and Teachers, but rather a powerful tool to augmentation all school curricula and activities with Teachers, Students, and Parents. Integration generally is more successful with the support of "catalyst investments" that provide resources to build capacity.

- **Leadership:** High-performing Schools require a dedicated, focused School Leadership Team to lead instruction and support full engagement by all members of the school community to support and improve student academic achievement. Successful integration of the use of technology to accelerate student academic achievement must begin with the establishment and facilitation of regular meetings of the School Leadership Team which sets goals, adopts metrics, and facilitates continuous assessment for transparency and accountability.

- **Capacity Building:** High-need Schools benefit significantly from purposeful capacity-building investments to establish a culture for high-performance by developing shared leadership skills and comprehensive plans to effectively manage and employ technology investments. Schools need assistance and a catalyst to move away from siloed approaches to inter-related systems and integrated technology implementation with well-defined goals for Students and Parents.

- **Digital Devices**: Every student must have a suitable digital computing device to use at School and to take home to help close the Digital Divide, extend the learning day, and promote educational continuity. Students and their Parents (and/or other caregivers) also require opportunities to obtain the critical digital and media literacy skills. The cost of computing devices can be covered by adjustments in the current allocation of funds for textbooks.

- **Internet Access:** All low-income households—especially Parents with Students—in California must have access to lower-cost affordable home Internet service through public subsidies such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and/or Lifeline or their successor programs, and/or affordable offer subscription plans from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) for eligible households. ISPs should collaborate with Districts and Schools to promote these affordable offers to eligible households and provide assistance as needed, especially if an ISP is a paid vendor for a District.

- **Professional Learning and Coaching:** All Teachers should have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities and embedded coaching to help them incorporate technology into effective classroom practices and lessons. They also need opportunities for cross-site networking, which could be established as a Learning Community. Teachers and all staff also need professional learning to help build a family-friendly school culture and engage caregivers as valuable learning partners in culturally-competent ways.

- **Parent Engagement:** Parents and caregivers need to know about affordable Internet offers in their areas and have opportunities to gain and/or improve their digital literacy skills to learn about the technology used in their child's education, including learning management systems, tutoring programs, and communication applications. Schools should provide ongoing Parent Training with standards performance metrics for proficiency.

- **Learning Academies:** Building capacity is greatly accelerated by bringing together School Leadership Teams from several Schools and Districts in Learning Academies (or "Learning Communities" and "Communities of Practice") to share experiences and lessons learned. Learning Academies are ideally conducted at least annually and can be helpful with focused quarterly convenings. Learning Academies reinforce best practices and foster peer coaching and accountability for improving student academic performance.

- **Accountability:** School Leadership Teams must lead continuous assessment and share evaluation results with the entire school community—Teachers, Students, Parents—to provide feedback to inform ongoing implementation. Evaluation is an essential feedback loop for effective Leaders. This should include information on the percentage of Teachers provided Professional Learning for integrating technology into lessons and communicating with Parents, Students with computing devices and home Internet access, number and percentage of Parents (and other caregivers) trained, and percentage of Parents using the School portal (number registered and frequency). Districts should compile and compare evaluation results from their Schools and publish an annual "Report Card" for accountability and transparency.

- **Transparency**: The State Board of Education, in consultation and collaboration with the California Department of Education, should require Districts to report on the technology environment at their Schools as part of the California Education Dashboard section on basic services and conditions. This should include information on the total dollars allocated for technology acquisition as well as textbooks, number and percentage of Teachers provided professional learning to integrate technology into lessons, number and percentage of Students with computing devices in the classroom and allowed to take home, number and percentage of Students with home Internet access, number and percentage of Parents trained with verification of proficiency, and data on Parents using the School portals. and the associated uses and training provided to all Teachers and Parents (and other caregivers). Data on the percent of parent portal enrollment and frequency of use at each School also would enable State leaders to monitor progress in harnessing the power of technology. The State Board of Education should submit an annual "Report Card" to the Legislature and Governor detailing progress in integrating technology into teaching, learning, and parent engagement consistent with these 10 Principles with an analysis of associated improvement in student academic performance.

Opportunities for Aligning and Leveraging Existing Policies and Programs

As a starting place to harness technology to drive improved student academic achievement in under-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods, the following are recommendations that do not require any additional General Fund dollars, but align and leverage existing resources to close both the Digital Divide and Achievement Gap:

- Declare that a computing device that can navigate the Internet is as essential to learning today as textbooks and that all computing devices purchased with State funds shall be allowed to be taken home by students pursuant to guidelines established by the California Department of Education and/or State Board of Education to protect the investment of public funds.

- Require Title I Districts and Schools (at least grades 6+) to: (1) Provide appropriate computing devices for use at school and at home; and (2) Deliver training to parents about how to use the computing devices to support their child's learning, including informing them about affordable Internet service offers. (The School2Home performance objective for Parent Engagement and Education is that at least 80% of the parents are trained—many Schools achieve more than 90%--some have reached 100%.)

- Request the State Board of Education to develop guidelines to incorporate best practices into Local Accountability Plans (LCAPs) to optimize the use of technology to improve student academic performance. Require LCAPs to delineate strategies and include an implementation plan to optimize the use of technology to improve student academic performance.

- Direct the California Collaborative for Education Excellence (CCEE) to use a portion of its existing legislative budget allocation to convene a "learning community" among a cross-section of interested School Districts to implement School2Home 10 Core Components (or equivalent) and report results in academic performance to further inform LCAPs. Encourage the Legislature, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Governor to engage and recruit philanthropic foundations to help fund this effort by CCEE.

- Amend the existing authorization and funding allocation for the Community Schools Program to require grantees to incorporate strategies and best practices to optimize the use of technology to improve student academic performance. The Community Schools Program needs to have a focus on improved outcomes for students and their families, and not just be a source of additional funding for wrap-around services without accountability for outcomes.