securly

Hybrid Learning from A to Z

Introduction

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 93 percent of households with school-age children reported some form of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. And in a survey conducted by EdWeek Research Center, one-third of school districts said they plan to start the 2021-22 school year with some form of hybrid instruction.

Clearly, **hybrid learning** is here to stay.

So let's brush up on our hybrid learning ABCs, shall we? From aiding students with internet access, to zeroing in on how to help teachers get the most out of Zoom, this guide will help ensure you've dotted all your Is and crossed all your Ts as you build your hybrid learning strategy.

Table of contents

Access

It's difficult to talk about access without also discussing equity. **Future Ready Schools** shows that 16.9 million children aged 17 years or younger don't have at-home high-speed internet, and 3.6 million households are without a computer. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to deliver instruction remotely, the lack of device and internet access became front and center, particularly in rural and high-poverty areas. Districts scrambled to purchase devices (often waiting months due to supply-chain issues) and then had to figure out how to provide internet access outside of school. Districts purchased loaner hotspots, worked with the community to distribute wifi hotspots, placed access points outside, and even installed wifi routers on school buses. Other districts paid for discounted wired internet services for low-income families. Ensuring equitable access is critical for any school considering a hybrid learning approach. If students can't connect, they can't engage. Survey your schools and work with parents to better understand every student's home internet situation—then you can begin to put a plan in place to ensure every student can connect.

Bring your own device
(BYOD)

Sometimes called BYOT (where T is for Technology), the BYOD movement started as a seemingly lower-cost way for districts to quickly reach one-to-one without having to pay for every device. On the plus side, BYOD lets students use a familiar device. It also allows for anytime/anywhere learning, since the device will absolutely go back home. But BYOD can be problematic, potentially raising concerns around data protection and CIPA compliance. It can also introduce equity issues, with some students having brand new, top-of-the-line devices with large screens and others lacking access to a smartphone altogether. BYOD works best when the learning is self-directed and students have choices in how they demonstrate what they've learned. Just ask Jen LaMaster, assistant principal at **Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School** in Indianapolis, which has been BYOD since 2008. "Having students and faculty comfortable identifying academic needs, able to discern best tools, and comfortable with various options allowed us to transition remarkably well from in-person to fully online, to hybrid and back to online, back to hybrid, and fully in-person again," she says. "It was dizzying at times but our feedback from students, parents, and faculty has been overwhelmingly positive. We were prepared, and now we are even better thanks to the experience and new tools discovered by adults and students. At this point, BYOD is pretty much invisible in the educational process. Students discern the technology that best supports their academic needs—with adults around to lend some guardrails." Products like **Securly Home** and **Securly Filter** can help families keep children protected; **Securly Classroom** allows teachers to manage the devices and make sure students stay on track during lessons.
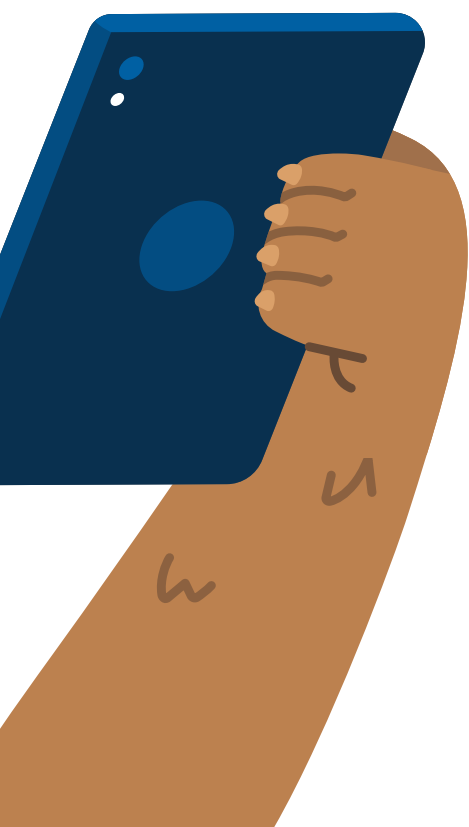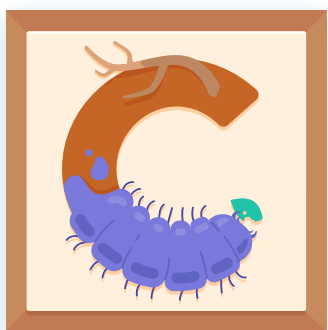
Cloud

Move over legacy environments and district data centers; cloud computing has taken over. Cloud storage offers districts a more secure way to back up data and improve productivity. By using cloud services instead of on-site servers, districts save money on infrastructure, maintenance, and space. Crucially, moving data from on-premise data centers to the cloud can free up the IT team to focus on other initiatives. Cloud-based applications let everyone work from wherever they need, with whatever devices they have, and across multiple platforms, which is essential to hybrid learning. Even better, most cloud vendors are experts at data privacy, so districts can be sure they are following the law. For example, all of Securly's solutions are cloud-based and SOC 2 Type 2-certified, meaning the products we deliver meet the highest, independently-verified standards for data privacy.

Data-Driven

For a few years now, schools and districts have been trying to establish a culture of data that will help them individualize learning, make more informed decisions, and improve their day-to-day operations. Collecting multiple types of data lets tech directors improve ROI on hardware and software and gives teachers the opportunity to refine their instructional practices. In a hybrid environment, data can be even more essential—helping districts see if students are using digital tools, whether students need additional academic support, and even which families are struggling to simply get online.
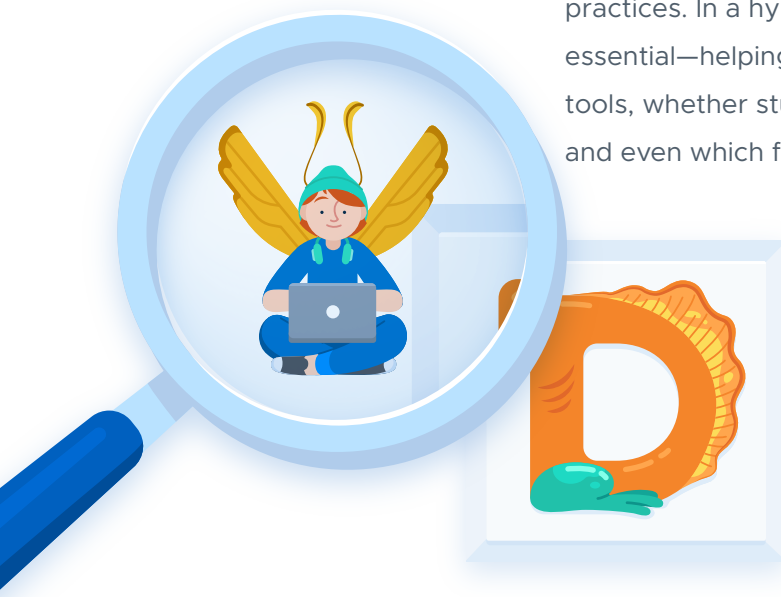
That last point was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic and led the Securly product team to pilot test new functionality, in partnership with the innovative minds at Innive, that detects the user's network quality and serves to admins crucial information about latency and connection stability to help identify students who may have technological barriers impacting their learning environment. San Francisco Unified School District is already pilot testing the new feature, in the hopes it can be rolled out platform-wide in a future release.

It can be helpful to establish a data leadership team that looks at the data to determine what's working and what's missing, especially when students are learning remotely. As with any new initiative, a data team will require professional development and ongoing support.
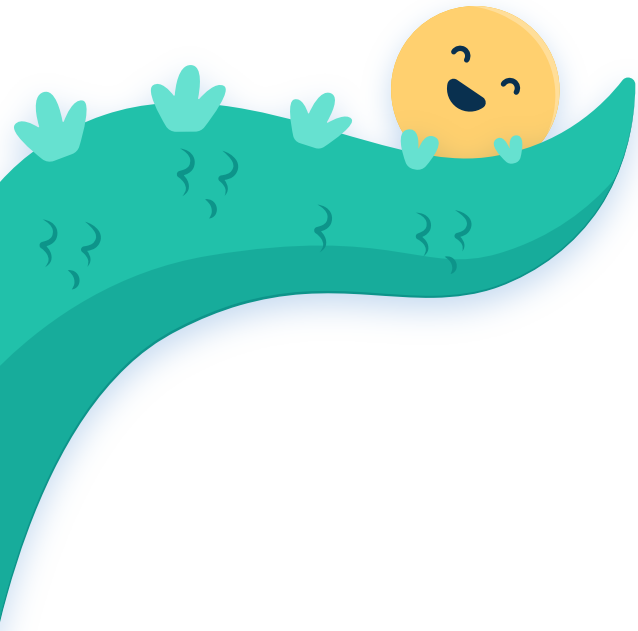
Engagement

Let's be honest: Keeping students engaged for in-person learning is already challenging. Making sure they are on track in a remote environment? Talk about a Herculean effort. First and foremost, teachers need to communicate with families and caregivers so that everyone is on the same page (pun intended). Having video "office hours" is also important.

Luckily, there are loads of ways teachers can make online lessons engaging, such as creating breakout rooms during video calls, doing icebreaker activities, and encouraging movement and mindfulness breaks throughout the day. One of the keys to engagement is making students feel connected; this needs to be intentional and can be done by having daily check-ins, asking students to share their experiences, and having one-on-one sessions with students to get to know them. Younger students can hold up pictures of emojis to show how they're feeling. Teachers can put students in pairs or small groups to work on projects, conduct peer reviews, or collaborate on a Google Doc. Last but not least, lots of teachers swear by having reflection time at the end of the class (or the end of the week). Whether in person or not, ask students to celebrate reaching their goals and then help them establish new ones.
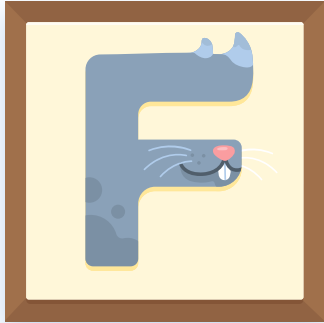
Funding

The December 2020 package, known as the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), offers $54.3 billion for school districts, largely delivered through Title I funding. Before December, the only K-12 funding came in the $2 trillion March 2020 CARES Act, of which $13.2 billion was allocated for schools. CRRSA includes $7 billion to expand broadband access, and the latest e-Rate changes include affordable access to high-speed broadband, robust connectivity for all libraries, more dollars for e-Rate-supported purchases, and simplifying the e-Rate application process. Read up on the e-Rate changes **here**. For more details on funding digital learning, visit the Office of Educational Technology's **website**; it has links for all kinds of grants, funding, and eligibility requirements for broadband infrastructure, devices, mobile hotspots, and data plans. Finally, don't miss CDW-G's **GetEdFunding** page, a vetted, of-the-moment database for grant seekers that houses thousands of funding opportunities.
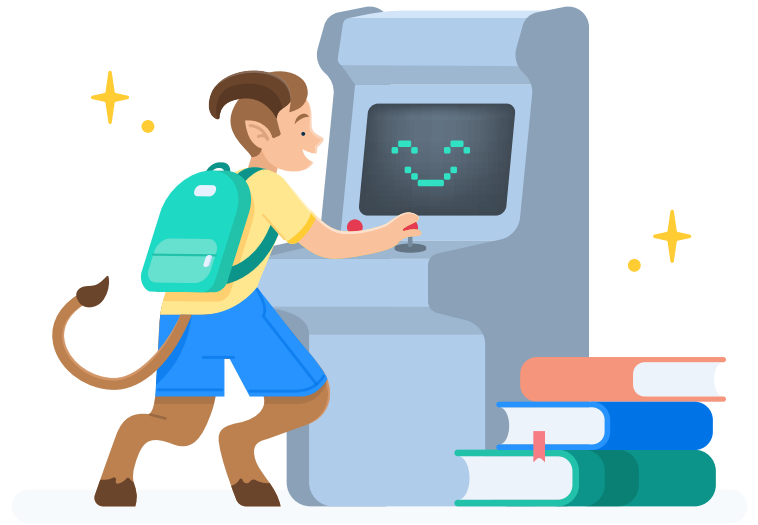
Gamification

First, a little clarification: Gamification is when game-like elements such as activities and rewards are added to non-game activities to increase engagement. Game-based learning uses games to teach content. Both gamification and game-based learning are effective ways to motivate students and keep them engaged, and both help to make learning fun! Some examples of gamification include earning points for completing tasks, playing educational games to improve skills, and competing with classmates toward a common goal. Whether teaching in person or remotely, teachers say gamification increases students' attention spans and promotes active learning. Some say it improves participation, helps students remember what they've learned, and can reduce anxiety or stress because students are enjoying themselves. However, if teachers aren't careful, students may become motivated by the reward itself. To combat this potential outcome, teachers need to prioritize intrinsic motivation (feeling positive about understanding new concepts) over extrinsic motivation (rewards and prizes). For example, a teacher might read an extra chapter of the class's favorite book, put together an online scavenger hunt, or do a distance-learning virtual field trip. Another way to add gamification into distance or hybrid lessons is to have competitions; the very popular **Kahoot**, which teachers use to test review and conduct pulse checks among students, has distance-learning tools for easier facilitation. Last but not least, teachers can **design learning badges** for students to earn.
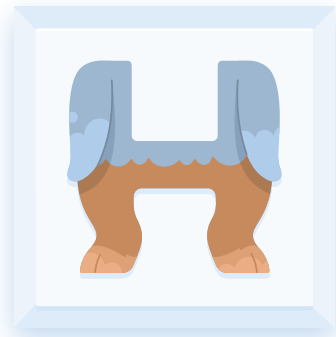
Hybrid

Hybrid learning uses online components to replace in-person learning. In many cases, teachers teach in-person and online simultaneously. For instance, students might learn from home two days a week and go into the school the other three days. Other scenarios involve some grade levels staying home while others go in. Blended learning is similar, but in a blended environment students use software and apps to augment or supplement their learning—not to replace the in-person lessons. Hybrid learning became necessary during the pandemic, but teachers were never trained to develop hybrid lesson plans, help students remotely, or troubleshoot when students have technical issues. And what about students who have weak or no wifi? No one knows how pandemic learning will alter the ways U.S. schools operate, but many educators believe that some form of hybrid learning will stick around.
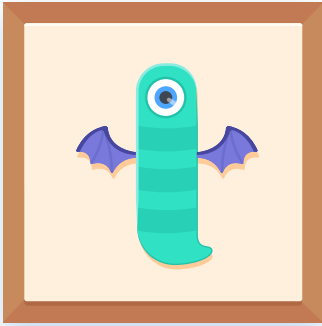
Interoperability

A former superintendent started a keynote by saying he was handed a list of 13 different passwords for 13 essential systems on his first day as superintendent for an 83,000-student district. Ridiculous, right? That's why interoperability—or the way technology tools communicate and share data with each other—is so important. As the variety and amount of systems and apps that districts rely on expands each year, interoperability becomes an even greater necessity. If the systems were developed with the same data protocols, it would be easy to share data. In lieu of this, entities like the **IMS Global Learning Consortium** create data standards to enable better digital learning experiences. Improving workflow between systems lets teachers and administrators do their jobs more easily and efficiently, such as transferring learning objectives, rubrics, and grades between learning management systems and student information systems. In distance or hybrid learning, interoperability ensures that all tools and platforms work seamlessly with each other. By eliminating the need for teachers to repeatedly enter login credentials or student data into multiple platforms, interoperability standards remove some of the tediousness from teacher's jobs.

Just-in-Time Teaching

Ever searched for a YouTube video to familiarize yourself with descaling the coffee maker while you were doing it? That's just-in-time teaching (JiTT), a strategy that allows learners to access the knowledge they need, whenever and wherever they need it. There are loads of ways teachers can employ JiTT in a distance- or hybrid-learning environment. For starters, students might read a book chapter or watch a video and then complete a digital assignment. The teacher would check the assignments before the next in-person class and use the students' answers to inform the lesson. With this method, the in-person lesson is timely, targeted, and comprehensive. Proponents of JiTT say that the teaching method allows teachers to help students connect the information they studied online into takeaways and recognize when and how to apply this knowledge. It also helps students become self-directed learners. Another way to practice JiTT is in professional development for teachers. Districts can ask their tech department to prepare online tutorials and short videos that teachers can use when they need to relearn a skill or solve a problem. Because it's JiTT, this is not the same as ongoing training for a software package; it's the kind of learning that's driven by a specific need or issue, one in which the learner controls the pace and decides what he or she needs to improve.
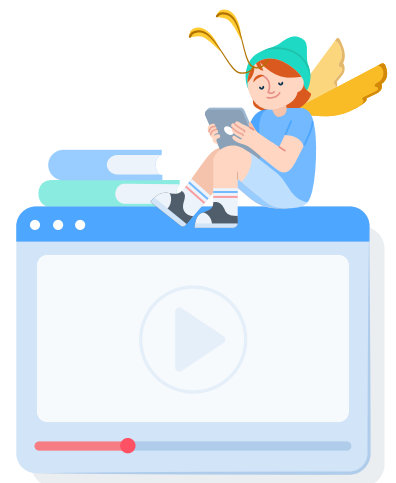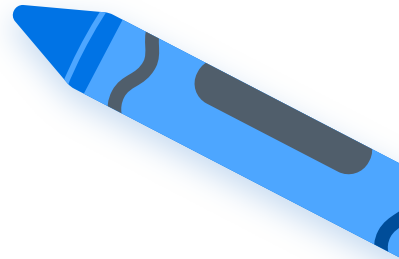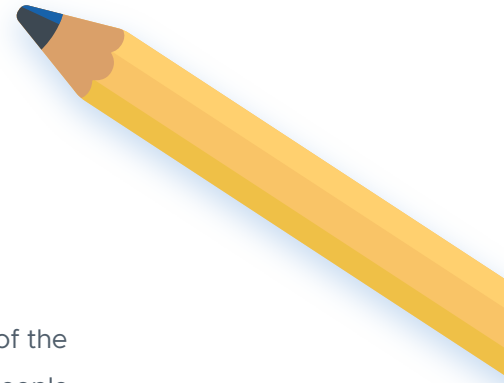
K-12

How will the K-12 landscape change as a result of the pandemic and distance/hybrid learning? Some people believe that all schools will continue to offer a fully virtual learning option. Others agree that technology will be used more broadly, particularly by teachers who had never used it and were forced to when schools were closed. Still others insist that schedules will be more flexible, especially at the high school level, to allow students to supplement in-person instruction with online classes. Parent-teacher conferences may take place via Zoom or other videoconferencing platforms; professional development and conferences will continue to offer pieces online. Here are some other evolutions that may be on the horizon for the world of K-12:

Education schools may include courses on distance learning tools and better prepare teachers for the 21st century and beyond

School supply lists may expand to include devices + internet access (school-provided if need be)

Students may enjoy more autonomy in terms of being able to decide how they demonstrate their learning

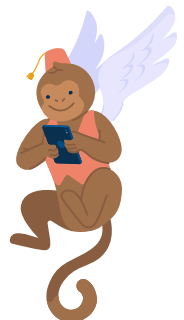Standardized tests may become a thing of the past

We may see a move away from one-size-fits-all instruction—training teachers how to make learning flexible, personalized, adaptive, and competency-based

Students could be allowed to create their own schedules

Schools may offer online classes to be taken on students' own time—no more 8am to 3pm

Learning Management System (LMS)

An LMS is a one-stop platform for teaching and learning that is used for creating and delivering educational content, recording grades, assessing and tracking students, and more. An LMS should integrate with the other programs your district uses so that users can import, export, and connect resources and data. Not too surprisingly, an LMS is exceptional for improving hybrid learning by helping teachers build community and keep students engaged and on track. On the community front, teachers of younger students can integrate apps like **Seesaw** to record themselves, leave messages for students, and connect families to student work. All teachers can use LMS discussion boards to encourage lively discussions or peer review and reflection. Maybe start and end the week with a video-recorded mindfulness minute? To use an LMS to keep hybrid students on track, teachers should make sure everything students need (rubrics, learning materials, assignments, feedback, etc.) is well-organized and easy to find. Whenever possible, try to recreate the in-person experience (think folders on the teacher's desk for handing in homework) in the LMS. When everyone has easy access to a single repository with all the necessary resources, it's easier to focus on the actual work.
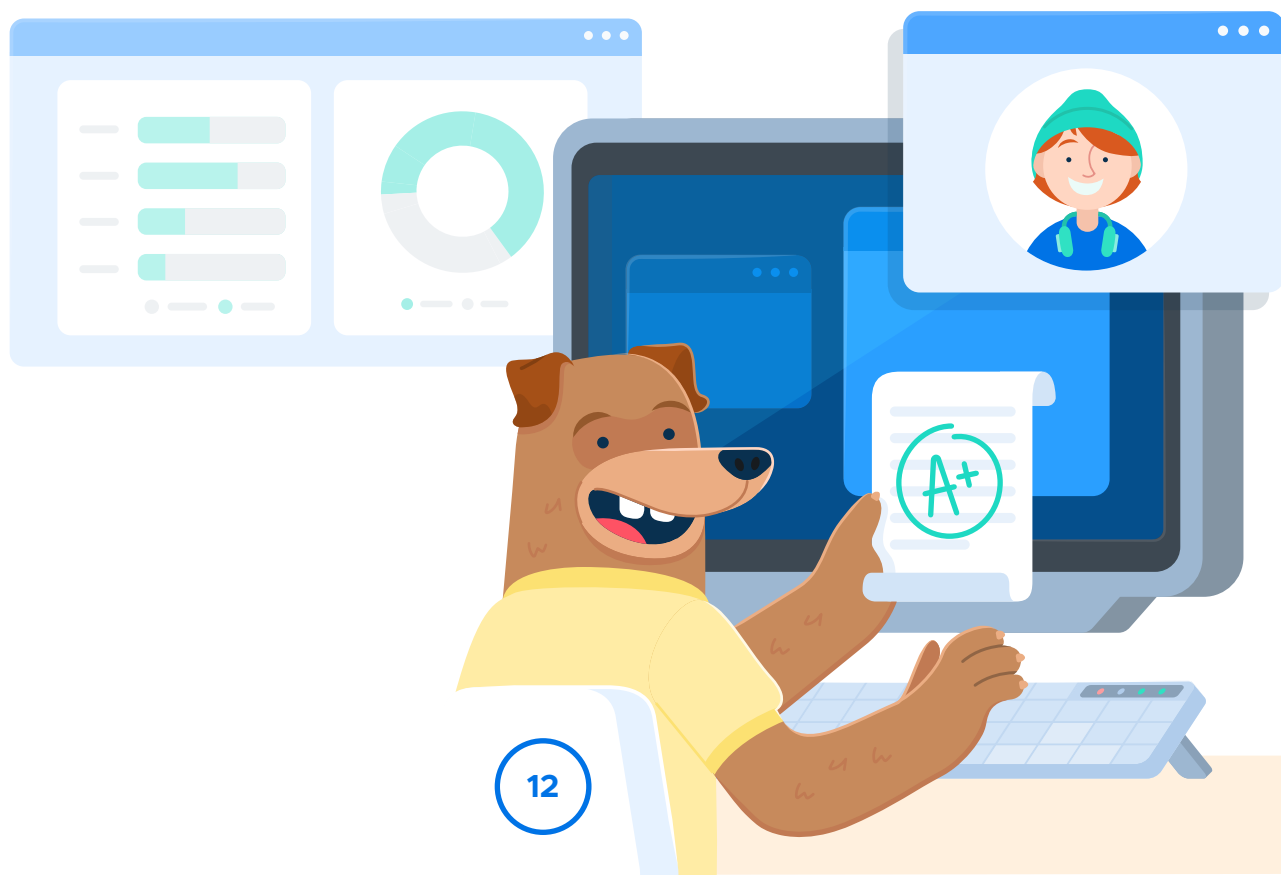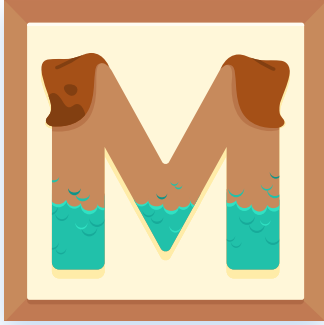
Mobile Device Management

A mobile device management (MDM) system allows technology directors to make sure students and teachers use their devices safely and productively. Most MDM systems offer single sign-on integration (see interoperability) and let the tech team install or remove apps, monitor devices, manage licenses, and ensure data privacy and security. School districts should choose an MDM that is easy to use, particularly as schools purchase more devices and allow students to do distance, remote, or hybrid learning. With cybersecurity incidents becoming more prevalent each year, a school's MDM must be secure. **Securly MDM**, a cloud-based device management solution for iPads and other Apple products, includes classroom device management tools to keep students on task. Designed specifically for K-12, this product is simple to use and provides added functionality for teachers.
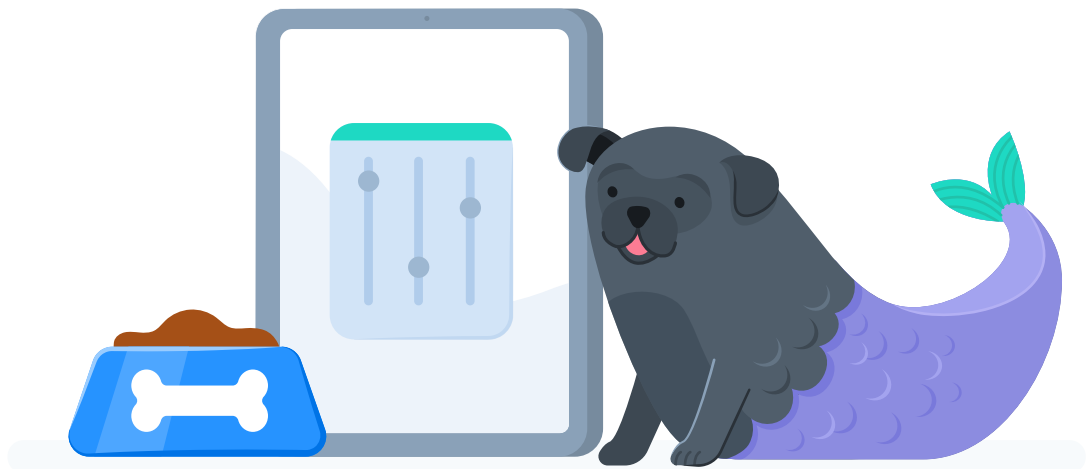
Network

School networks were designed for in-person learning. As we learned in A is for Access, districts attempted to extend network reach for distance and hybrid learning by adding access points to outdoor locations (including buses). Tech directors can also work with carriers to conduct bandwidth assessments and enhance network capability. Fortunately, some of the 2021 E-rate changes may be helpful, too, particularly the increase in per school minimums for Category 2 budgets—from $9,200 to $25,000 starting in 2021/2022. In February 2021, the FCC also sent out a proposal about a program that would provide discounts on residential internet service and "connected devices" for low-income families. Because hybrid learning requires students to watch videos and use other bandwidth-hogging resources, the network must be as robust as possible. As a result, many schools will have to invest in additional networking equipment to keep networks working reliably. Tech directors should ensure that maintenance is ongoing and everything is in order. The good news is that solutions providers like Securly are stepping up in this area. Securly Filter recently pilot-tested a new feature that would enable admins to remotely detect a device's network connection quality—helping schools pinpoint poor connections and take steps to get students up to speed.
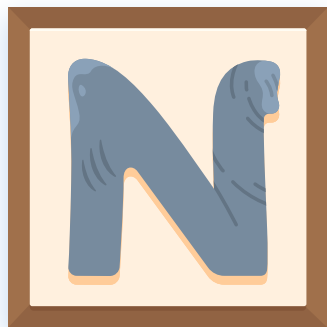
One-to-One

One-to-one (or 1:1) refers to the ratio of computing devices (laptops, tablets) to students. Henrico County Public Schools in Virginia was one of the first districts to launch a 1:1 laptop program in 2001; in 2002, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative handed out laptops to every middle school student and teacher in the state. One-to-one programs allow students to access the internet and digital materials to develop essential 21st-century skills including media literacy, collaboration, and many others. Just about every job a student may eventually have requires some sort of technology, and schools must help students to learn how to use technology. In a **COSN survey** conducted in late 2019 and early 2020, 49 percent of the more than 500 school districts reported having 1:1 programs. When the pandemic hit and schools had to close, 50 million K-12 public school students had to learn remotely from home, according to Common Sense Media. Of those 50 million, around 16 million lacked internet or devices to do school remotely. Districts scrambled to purchase devices and wifi hotspots, using CARES Act funding and other emergency funds, and by December 2020 had managed to close 20 to 40 percent of the K–12 connectivi-ty divide and 40 to 60 percent of the device divide. For a look at how various states addressed the issue, check out this Common Sense **report**. One-to-one learning has several benefits. The technology helps teachers differentiate instruction. They can deliver material at the appropriate level for each child and allow students to demonstrate learning in a variety of ways. Adaptive programs scale up or down as students require. With the right training, teachers can also make learning exciting by using video, animations, and other media.
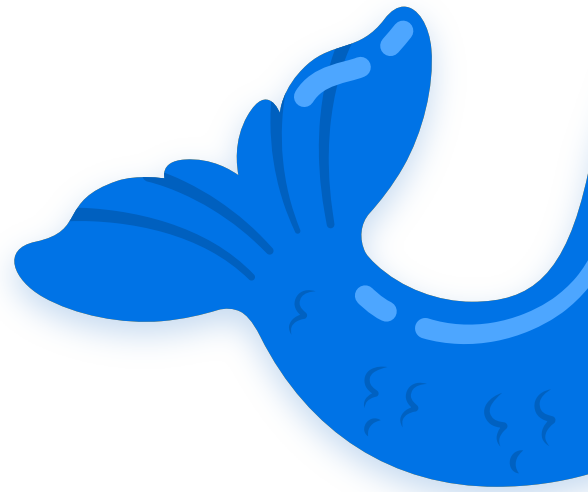
Parent Partnership

Parental and family involvement in K-12 becomes even more important when students are not in the classroom full time, with many parents having to make sure their children are engaged and having success. How can teachers help families support students in remote learning? Communication! Principals and district administrators should communicate in multiple formats to make sure everyone is in the loop. Teachers can describe what the students need to do and even provide checklists for families to see what needs to be done and how long it should take. When it comes to assignment details and deadlines, there is never too much communication. Teachers should also have office hours and make themselves as available as possible. Many educators suggest keeping lessons flexible to make it easier for students to complete. By helping families share the responsibility for learning and be active in their children's education, we are encouraging parents and caregivers to stay invested in their children's schooling. Innovative, easy-to-use apps products like Securly Home help parents stay in the loop and keep children protected by monitoring online activity on school-owned devices and letting parents balance online time with offline activities.

Quality Over Quantity

In the realm of distance learning, more is not necessarily better. Without face-to-face interaction, teachers may feel an urge to create additional materials and assignments to stem "learning loss." But foisting more busywork onto students will only serve to dampen their engagement, and won't magically lead to academic success. Developing a quality online learning environment takes time and careful thought, although we all feel a sense of urgency to do as much as possible as quickly as possible. One easy way to improve the quality of your remote instruction is to use technology to minimize the use of pencil-and-paper worksheets. As one parent of a 7th-grader said, "My son is in an advanced math class. He has to print out 10 pages of worksheets, complete the problems with a pencil, then scan the worksheets and upload them as a PDF to his Google Drive. The scanner won't link to his school-issued Chromebook, so guess who gets to do the scanning and uploading? There must be a better way to do this!" Here's one: **7 Strategies for Using Google to Digitize Your Worksheets**.

Resilience

Whether schools are offering remote or hybrid learning, it can be common for students and teachers to become frustrated when learning doesn't go as planned. Most teachers were never trained to teach in this way, and it's hard to learn how to use new tools AND to learn how to teach with them at the same time. To combat this, districts need to be sure teachers have all the tools they need and invest in targeted professional development. Many teachers prefer to learn on their own time and thrive when they are given the time to form professional learning communities in which they can collaborate, share tips, and learn from their colleagues. If possible, find professional development companies that conduct training via short videos that teachers can watch when they need to. Administrators should also allow teachers to adjust their methods as they see fit. Let the teachers be in charge. The IT team should also make sure devices are up to date, secure, and safe; tools like **Securly Filter** can help. Investing in single sign-on so that applications work well together and no one has to remember multiple passwords is another key to staying resilient. Lastly, we need to understand that children are adaptable and more resilient than we realize. They've rose to the challenge of the pandemic and gained all sorts of skills that they will use throughout their lives. Districts would be well served to reach out to community organizations and see how they can assist with students' emotional wellbeing. Above all, district leadership must remember to praise everyone and recognize and celebrate accomplishments.

Safety

Between online predators, pornography, and cyberbullying, there are many potential hazards that can come with hybrid learning. The good news is that most schools talk about cyber safety and digital literacy every year, teaching and re-teaching students to practice online etiquette and steer clear of danger. Schools can use online products such as **Securly Filter** to make sure students stay away from dangerous websites and **Securly Auditor** to scan emails, Google Drives, and OneDrive for cyberbullying, violence, and other dangers. **Securly Home** lets parents see their children's online activity, restrict online access when needed, and be notified if their children are bullied online or check out self-harm or other concerning content. In a student-safety roundtable for Tech & Learning magazine, Tom Walker, director of technology for Massac Unit #1 School District in Illinois, said: "For us, over the last few school years, [Securly's Auditor] has detected every school year 200-plus instances of potential self-harm or disturbing violence-related content, either through our devices and/or our networks. If it will save one student's life, then it's paid for itself over and over and over again."
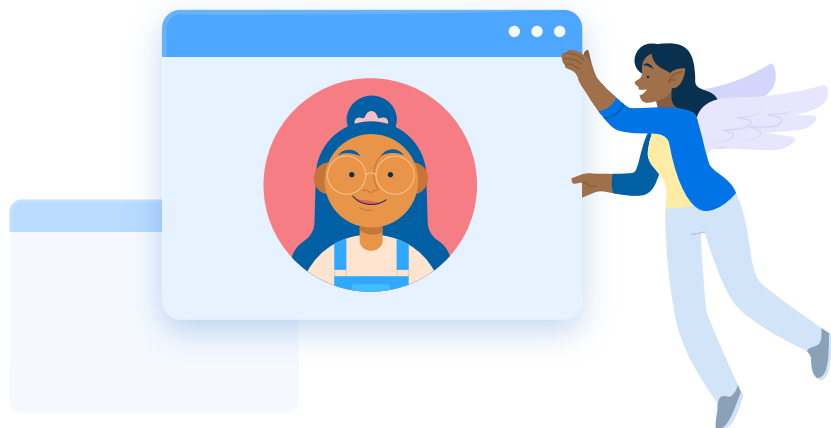
Training/Professional Development (PD)

In order to conduct distance or hybrid teaching, educators need training and professional development (PD) on how to adapt their methods. They need to learn about remote teaching strategies, tech platforms and tools, and how to troubleshoot basic internet issues. In addition to learning how to use the technology, teachers should also be trained in how to manage distance/hybrid classrooms, build relationships with students and families, foster a sense of community in the distance classroom, and how to focus on social-emotional growth. Additionally, training should include information on finding and curating quality digital content; digital assessment tools for quizzes and projects; and how to detect plagiarism. One innovative way that some districts conducted training during the pandemic was via micro-credentials, which link professional learning to practice by requiring teachers to demonstrate what they learn. According to an article in **District Administration**, Talladega County Schools in Alabama encouraged teachers to work at their own pace during COVID and pursue online micro-credentials in computational thinking. Here's what Brooke Morgan, the district's coordinator of innovative learning, told District Administration when asked about the effectiveness of the program:

> *"It has been difficult to do job-embedded PD with teachers because of the time constraints. Micro-credentials are a great avenue for teachers to work at their own pace and it has been a real advantage to be familiar with this type of professional learning during COVID."*
>
> **Brooke Morgan,**
> **District Coordinator of Innovative Learning** Talladega County Schools, Alabama

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is a framework to improve teaching and learning based on how people learn; it can be woven into any learning environment—even hybrid—and helps to ensure that all learners can participate. During the pandemic, we learned that many learning supports and interventions that worked in the classroom did not translate to a hybrid or distance environment. Developed in the 1990s by the **Center for Applied Special Technology** (CAST), UDL guidelines are lessons that help students engage, act, and express themselves through multiple ways. This **document** from CAST offers key questions for teachers to consider when planning lessons. Some of the ways teachers incorporate UDL in distance learning include giving students choices (e.g., letting students create videos or presentations or write an essay), recording a lesson for future playback, or offering materials at different reading levels. UDL-informed inclusive lessons benefit all students and make everyone feel like they belong.
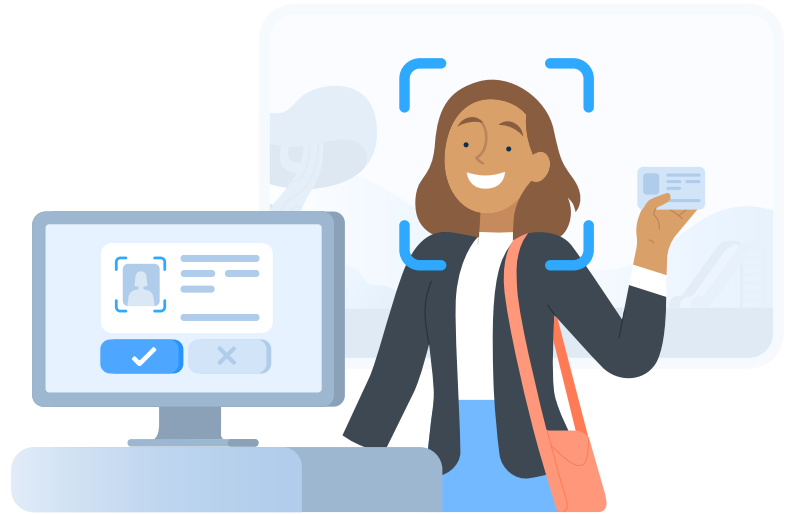
Visitor Management

School safety has always been important, and with hybrid learning—with students being in-person some days or weeks and off-campus the next—it has become even more necessary to keep track of where everyone is at all times. Schools need to safeguard students online and off, and a big part of that is having insight into campus guests and visitors. Pen and paper sign-in sheets and outdated registration systems have left the building to make way for easy-to-use visitor management systems that let schools maintain a digital record that includes the time, day, and reason for every visit. Securly's latest product, **Securly Visitor** (currently in beta) is a background-check, ID-printing application installed on an iPad at campus check-in locations that can check guests' information against sex offender lists, teacher-parent guardianship lists, etc. The app features a silent alarm that surreptitiously connects to authorities if someone dangerous is trying to check-in, providing even more security. Whichever method your district chooses, visitor management systems let you track who enters and exits the building, helping to keep everyone secure.

Whole Child Movement/Learning

The Whole Child movement encourages educators to focus on overall long-term development and success of children instead of just academic achievement. It includes a focus on children's health, lifestyle, physical and emotional development, social justice, and community involvement. In the distance learning setting, we must also look at access and equity, safety, and other factors. During the pandemic, some school districts implemented remote counseling to address mental health challenges and isolation; CASEL started a **CASEL Cares Initiative** with webinars and other resources. Another element of Whole Child is helping students to have more agency and independence, which can be more difficult in a remote situation. Some ways districts are doing this is by doing project-based or experiential learning. Teachers will have to continue to come up with creative ways to develop students in or out of the classroom. Products like **Securly 24**—a highly trained team of experts keeping watch around the clock for warning signs of bullying, self-harm, and violence in students' online activity—add another layer of protection to help schools safeguard students' mental and emotional well-being.

X Factor:
What does the future look like?

As the education world plans for the 2021-22 school year and beyond, how can we take advantage of the lessons we learned in 2020 and 2021 and apply them to improve education for all? Rather than rush to "return to normal," leaders would be better served by rethinking the ways school did not work pre-pandemic and trying some new methods. COVID-19 has brought distance learning to pretty much the entire world, with schools scrambling to offer professional development and get teachers and students on board. When Education Week surveyed teachers In the spring of 2020, more than eight out of 10 teachers said their ability to use distance-learning technology improved and that they believed this made them better, more innovative educators. Now that so many more students have participated in hybrid learning and the future will most likely continue to feature that type of instruction, many people think that schools will focus on how to do remote learning more effectively and that standards for remote learning will be developed. It will require a different type of teacher training, updated facilities, and new ways to think about time and place.

YouTube

Yes, YouTube can be used as an effective distance learning tool, as long as safety protocols are followed to ensure that students aren't being delivered inappropriate content. Securely offers a solution: You can **set up YouTube in restricted mode**, which will also give you greater flexibility in the administration of videos and channels to specific groups of students. Videos are exceptional for deepening understanding, reaching visual and auditory learners, and explaining complex concepts. Teachers can create their own channels and upload and organize videos into playlists specific to a certain subject. These videos can be set to "private" so they are accessible only to those who have the link. Invite students to create their own videos to demonstrate their understanding of the material and flex their creativity muscles. With distance learning, videos are best if they are short and easily digestible. **SchoolTube** is another option, with safety features built in. Created by educators, it provides districts with a complete COPPA- and ADA-compliant video platform for teachers and students to create, upload, and share their videos.
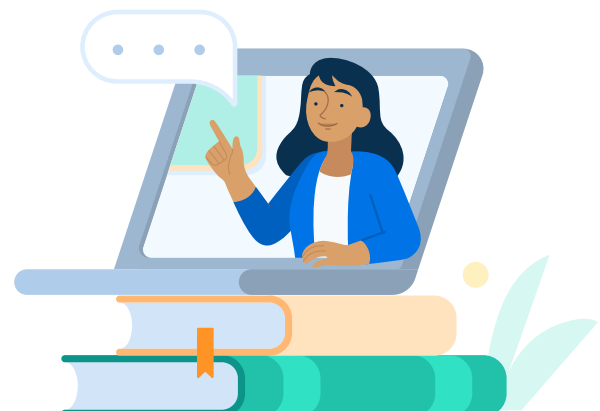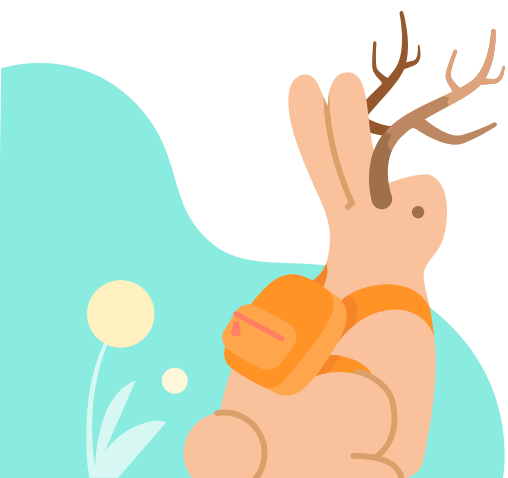
Zoomies & Roomies

If you haven't heard this tongue-in-cheek phrase, it refers to educators teaching students online (via Zoom, so "Zoomies") and in-person (classroom "Roomies") at the same time. It's not a shock to learn that keeping both groups with different needs up to speed, engaged, and on task is extremely difficult—to say the least. During the pandemic, schools resorted to this model to satisfy social-distancing or quarantine requirements. Others did it to try and maximize synchronous learning time. To make it work, teachers suggest focusing on classroom culture before you do anything else. They say that helping students feel like they belong and that they are valued will allow them to collaborate and take risks. Ways to do this include holding morning meetings, calling on both Zoomies and Roomies, and letting students take "brain breaks."

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