

# GameCHANGER

RETHINKING HOW TECHNOLOGY IS USED IN EDUCATION

## REMOTE LEARNING THAT WORKS

# How to Support Ed Tech with Relief Funding

IT can make a strong case for helping to prepare the district for whatever comes next in teaching and learning.

**TECHNOLOGY HAS KEPT SCHOOLS OPERATING** for the past year. In addition to an initial rush of purchasing tied to student devices, hotspots and new software licenses for web conferencing, there have also been several discussions around other areas of tech that might help serve districts as they maneuver through a changed education landscape, one of which includes focusing more on a digital curriculum.

The book on relief funding is entering its third chapter. K-12 received a dedicated allotment of \$54.3 billion in the December 2020 **Consolidated Appropriations Act** ESSER funding and another \$4 billion at the discretion of governors on top of **the initial CARES Act** funding passed by Congress earlier in the year. Now, even more could be on the way in 2021.

A hefty portion of the money is allocated for school payroll, enacting health and safety protocols and setting aside funds for addressing potential shortfalls as states map out their budgets for the upcoming fiscal year. But that still leaves pockets of funding where IT leaders could make a strong case for positioning the district to be prepared for whatever comes next in teaching and learning.

Among the areas that deserve attention:



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## Bolstering cybersecurity.

Remote learning has pushed the boundaries of the security perimeter out to every home, making network protection a major challenge. All those new student devices may be essential for learning, but they can also pose additional security risks as users seek digital resources online. And the use of cloud services has made that a greater area of concern.

## Becoming an ally in helping teachers address social-emotional learning (SEL).

While the first line of defense for connecting with and supporting students belongs to the teacher, tech can also play a role. Educators are seeking programs that deliver digital SEL lessons, videos, communication with students and virtual sessions with therapists and counselors, while also integrating these concepts into their daily curriculum. IT can help by vetting choices quickly in terms of security and data privacy.

## Supporting new options for professional development (PD).

Teachers want to deliver quality learning experiences for students, now more than ever. IT can work with lead teachers and curriculum directors to ensure district teachers are aware of the PD possibilities and equipping them with the technology to take advantage of opportunities to develop their skills in active learning.

## Reconfiguring standard tech for the classroom.

In addition to the standard interactive whiteboards and ultra-short throw projectors, teachers also need flexible gear that addresses the needs of both the students attending in-person learning and those learning from home. Teachers might require additional cameras and audio to capture the full scope of what's going on, while also enabling students to see their peers' faces. IT can facilitate evaluation with purchasing to make sure the products under consideration make sense for today's classrooms.

## Re-engineering how basic instructional needs are met

With social distancing a priority, it's time to consider the



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use of printers closer to home. That might mean equipping each teacher with a printer or setting up a "printer pod" to serve several classrooms in the same vicinity. These approaches can help to reduce the number of teachers and staff congregating to access the device. In the same way that the main office multifunction machine may be overseen by IT, distributed printers can also be managed centrally via the network.

All of these areas require the support of an effective IT organization that recognizes the many ways tech is continuing to reshape education. The strategic use of CARES Act relief funding can lead to the continuance (and improvements) of teaching and learning – which is what the congressional investment was meant to do in the first place.



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# 5 Ways Schools Can Address Learning Loss

While emergency needs are forcing districts to reconsider scheduling and instructional models, great ideas are bubbling up to help students strengthen their connections to school and learning opportunities. And yes, some of these ideas could have a lasting impact.

**MULTIPLE STUDIES THIS YEAR**, including a **widely-broadcast one from McKinsey**, have measured the probable learning loss that's going on during the pandemic across K-12, especially in math and particularly among low-income students and Black and Hispanic students. As a result, learning loss is becoming priority one for schools. A number of initiatives are underway to address the disconnect that students are experiencing with school and learning when they're not in physical classrooms.

### 1 Augment teaching with tutoring.

On a large scale, the **National Student Support Accelerator**, launched by the **Annenberg Institute at Brown University**, envisions a network of tutoring organizations to deliver online "high-impact tutoring" one-on-one or in small groups, to augment students' classroom experiences. The accelerator also intends to help schools set up their own tutoring programs.

## 2 Team up for summer learning.

Up to now summer learning opportunities have been partnerships set up by schools working with dedicated libraries, community-based nonprofits and parks and recreation departments, all of which could face serious budget shrinkage in coming months. Schools and local governments could invest some of their CARES Act relief funding in supporting programs that can adapt their practices in engaging kids. For example, rather than heading to schools to deliver its programming, a South Carolina STEM learning organization, **Engaging Creative Minds**, made “create kits” available to students – including running scavenger hunts – to enable their campers to take part in online and in-person activities.

## 3 Get creative with the school schedule.

District Management Group, an advisory that works with school leaders to improve educational practices, **identified** several ways to accomplish “rapid make-up of lost instruction.” Among District Management Group’s ideas:

- Modify the schedule in the first few months of the school year to accommodate longer blocks and give students the extra time they need to get up to speed on the critical subjects.
- Offer six-week “catch-up” classes that will help students master certain competencies before they’re immersed in new content.
- Use staff attrition to build up the corps of English language arts and math teachers, who can serve as intervention specialists, working with the students who need extra attention.

## 4 Adopt adaptive.

More software programs are now powered by machine learning to adapt to students’ individual learning gaps. As WeAreTeachers recently **explained**, adaptive software programs can “assess students, assign particular skills and monitor student progress.” When the teacher isn’t available, students can work on their own, and the program can steer them to lessons that will have impact for their levels of understanding and mastery.

## 5 Use the personal touch.

Teachers are also reaching out to their students in non-digital



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formats to encourage them to do work outside of class. A kindergarten teacher in New York, for example, created her own **Flat Stanley project**, encouraging her students to write about their weekly adventures on stamped postcards she provided and then mail them back to her. An elementary teacher in a high-poverty district is using her in-class printer to produce materials that she can distribute to families to give their students “technology breaks.”

Learning loss has traditionally been linked to the summer break when students were outside of school. Now, like so many other aspects of life, that’s no longer the case. Districts and school leaders, teachers, families and communities are willing to try new ways of keeping students engaged and learning, whether they’re in school or out. The adoption of different practices, new schedules and nimble teaching models amidst the pandemic could end up having positive benefits far into the future.



## REMOTE LEARNING THAT WORKS

# What the Return to School Looks Like

How will we know we're returning to normal again? It's all a matter of watching for the signals.

**ONE SIGNAL OF A RETURN TO NORMALCY** in life looks like this: More kids will head off to school each day than stay home to do their learning, without families fearing what they might bring home or take into the classroom.

Another signal will be a return to the use of print-based learning. Schools will see a mix of printed materials and digital activities and a combination of those will be important.

But the use of paper will also come with caveats. The need to individualize instruction quickly is going to be something teachers have to grapple with because everybody will be working on a different learning trajectory. At the same time, teachers will need a way to give every student what they need when they need it, while also limiting the number of materials being passed back and forth.

Similarly, teachers and aides won't want to leave the classroom, or if they do, they'll want to be able to look into the classroom, to make sure students are on task. That means the tendency to plant a lone multifunction print-copy-scan machine in the mail and supply room will expand to include placement of small, single function laser printers right in the teachers' classrooms – or close by for "pod" usage – for short-run work.

Doing so will help avoid the crowding situation where several teachers and administrators may be using and touching the same device. This approach will not only simplify the job of creating customized learning packets to send home with the kids, but it will also help to limit access to the device and ensure proper physical distancing measures are in place.



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In the meantime, remote learning will not go away. There's going to be a lot more hybrid and blended learning. Teachers will ask what that mean in terms of providing instructional materials and resources: What's best provided in a digital format? What's best provided on paper? How do you want student work coming back? How do you want to support families? As a result, there will always be a role for some print, some digital.



## REMOTE LEARNING THAT WORKS

# How to Choose the Right Pod Printers

Now might be the time for schools to reconsider their reliance on a single large printer that's centrally based and draws a crowd. Here's how to choose a safer, less expensive, and more efficient alternative.

**IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT PRINTER** for the classroom isn't the same as choosing one for home use. According to print experts Jim Cropper, Director of Sales, Education, and Tom Pollard, Manager of Sales, Education, at Brother International Corporation, the hunt for the right printer starts with functionality and print volume.

For instance, said Cropper, if the teacher wants to "make copies or scan documents to a Google Classroom or a cloud service, as well as actively print, then we're definitely going to recommend an all-in-one printer" that combines multiple functions into a "small footprint."

Then it's time to assess print volume. On the high end, Cropper and Pollard estimated, teachers with a class size of about 25

students might use as many as 75 sheets a day or 13,500 sheets in a nine-month school year. That continuous high level of operation would call for a business-class single-function laser printer, either monochrome or color.

At that point in the assessment process, the mistake too many districts may make, said Pollard, is looking only at the acquisition price of the hardware. What they need to do is "consider the total cost of ownership (TCO)," he said. "They don't take into consideration the cost of the consumable supplies. And that's where the budget gets gobbled up." Choosing the right printer model may cost a bit more "for the hardware upfront, but you pay significantly less on the consumable supplies on the back end."





Another common mistake is relying only on the procurement office to choose devices without input from the IT organization. The purchasing department “often focuses more heavily on the paper and supplies and may not consult directly with the IT person for insight,” said Cropper. “They’re trying to keep the cost down on the hardware, when they really should be focusing on the overall TCO – the hardware, supplies, services, and support.”

## Getting More for Your Money

IT will understand the value of special programs that can have a big impact on TCO. For example, Brother runs a Value Print Program that offers significant discounts on Brother Genuine supplies and upgrades the warranty on the device. Brother devices include a one-year limited warranty. By committing to purchasing and using Brother Genuine ink and toner for a three-year period, Brother adds an extra two years of limited warranty coverage, making for a total of three years.

That sometimes includes a next business day priority exchange service, “which means if the device fails in the field, we swap it free of charge,” Pollard explained. Brother covers the cost of returning the printer and delivering the replacement model. Priority exchange is included for Brother major accounts and for customers who purchase an extended limited warranty.

The advantages of that approach, he added, is that it’s “contactless” and there’s very little interruption of service.

## The Magic of Print Management

Once the printers are in place, an easy way to help reduce print costs is to implement a print management application. Third-party applications such as PaperCut can help users manage printers through a single online console, while also offering a number of added benefits:

- They enable the tracking, charging and billing of copying, printing, faxing and scanning.
- They help ensure security and data privacy.
- They allow IT to monitor the printer fleet within schools, to optimize the environment and make sure toner is available when it’s needed.
- They can help districts curtail waste, by making print consumption visible through tracking and reporting to those doing the printing.



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- They enable quotas, charging and cost allocations. Administrators can bill and account by user, department, cost-center, and project.

## The Biggest Benefit: Giving Teachers What They Need

However, both Pollard and Cropper emphasized that the biggest advantage of selecting and placing printers at the point of usage – in or near the classrooms themselves – offers an immeasurable value.

“Schools want teachers and kids to have what they need when they need it to take advantage of instruction,” said Pollard. “So, anything they can do to help save money they will do – but not at the expense of quality instruction or equity.”