

Embracing ed tech tools can help level the playing field for all students

TEACHER VOICES

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The shift to remote learning to stem the coronavirus pandemic revealed enormous disparities among students in terms of access to Wi-Fi and digital devices, as well as the ability to learn the technology needed to complete class assignments.

But despite these inequalities there are ways teachers can help level the playing field for students during this time. The first and most obvious is providing each student with Chromebooks and hotspots, which is what my district, and many others, have now done.

The other main solution is ensuring students have support at all times. Along with synchronous learning — when the teacher and students are all in a live online session at the same time — a good proportion of remote learning is made up of asynchronous lessons, when students work on a project on their own or view a prerecorded video. During the latter, the teacher may not be available to respond to their questions right away. And many parents are working and aren't able to provide hours of sustained attention to their child's schoolwork during the day.

Instead, teachers can provide this support with tools that help students while they are learning on their own as well as provide ways for them to collaborate and connect with one another.

One tool I use often is [Screencastify](#), an extension that can be added to the Google Chrome browser. It enables me to record video messages for my students. Video conferencing apps such as [Zoom](#) or [Google Meet](#) are helpful in connecting students as if they were all in the same classroom, but with Screencastify, students and their parents are able to watch and re-watch my videos as needed. Then, when the workday is over and their child is completing an assignment, the parent can refer to the video for help if needed.

[Read&Write](#), another extension for Google Chrome, can help foster independence by enabling students to find help on their own. It is extremely useful in supporting students when they don't have a parent or teacher on hand. For example, a student can click on a word and hear it read aloud or highlight text to hear a definition to improve reading comprehension or writing.

Equally important are tools that offer students the opportunity to create, collaborate, communicate and think critically while explaining their reasoning and listening to others' ideas and responses. For this, I have found [Flipgrid](#), a video message board to prompt discussions, and [ed creations](#), an interactive whiteboard, both very valuable.

With Flipgrid, I can pose a question to my students, and they can videotape their responses to a shared workspace that all their classmates can view, as well as respond to each other. I use ed creations to check for understanding. For example, at the end of a math concept I have students write their own problems and solve them. Ed creations allows students to show their thinking on a whiteboard and record their process step-by-step, making it easy to quickly spot and fix small misconceptions.

These tools have helped me increase meaningful discourse among my students at different English learner levels and also can help teachers support a child with learning disabilities. They allow me to give my students the one-on-one attention that can be difficult during a full-class Zoom session and have made all the difference in our virtual learning environment.

At the end of the day, keep it simple and keep encouraging students to reflect and monitor their progress, strengths and weaknesses. No matter what tools work best for you, the easiest way to ensure every student is on the same page is to support them using easy to understand technology and maintaining a strong home-to-school connection.

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