6 Ways the New National Education Technology Plan Could Help Close Achievement Gap

The role of teachers is changing along with the growing role of technology in classrooms, according to the plan.

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The latest update to the U.S. [National Education Technology Plan](http://tech.ed.gov/netp/) has big plans for addressing unequal access to the powerful technology changing schools today.

On Thursday, the U.S. Department of Education laid out a vision for the future of technology at schools. The new plan updates technology guidelines issued in 2010, but doesn’t change direction dramatically. Instead, the latest plan sets up a series of bold calls to action designed to ensure technology helps close the achievement gap. Among its recommendations are to:

* Redesign teacher preparation programs to shift from a single technology course to thoughtful use of technology throughout a teacher’s preparation. Develop minimum standards for higher education instructors’ technology proficiency.
* Ensure equitable access to technology and connectivity inside and outside of school, regardless of students’ backgrounds.
* Adopt high-quality openly licensed educational materials in place of traditional textbooks.
* Implement universal design principles for accessibility across all educational institutions and include these principles in teacher preparation programs.
* Improve technology-based assessments, with embedded delivery within instruction making possible near real-time feedback for educators.
* Establish a robust technology infrastructure that meets current connectivity goals and that can be augmented to meet future demand.

"The National Education Technology Plan is focused on technology as a tool to close equity gaps in our country by working to ensure all learners have access to high quality learning experiences, no matter where they live." U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said during a conference Thursday in Washington D.C.

Equity of access is something that Duncan has been focused on for a while. At the [Arizona State University/Global Silicon Valley Summit in April](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2015/04/department-education-spearheads-ed-tech-developers-guide), Duncan said the status quo in technology access is "unacceptable."

"If the technology revolution only happens for families that already have money and education, then it’s not really a revolution," Duncan said at the summit keynote.

Another focus of this year's plan addresses the changing role of educators as technology becomes more pervasive in classrooms. Instead of a stand-and-lecture role of teaching, the plan lays out a vision of teachers as “co-learners” in guided online environments, where they set the pace for students to learn.

"Although educators should not be expected to know everything there is to know in their disciplines, they should be expected to model how to leverage available tools to engage content with curiosity and a mindset bent on problem solving and how to be co-creators of knowledge," according to the plan.

The plan says teachers need better training to prepare them in their roles as co-learners. "Aside from wires and devices, a comprehensive learning infrastructure includes digital learning content and other resources as well as professional development for educators and education leaders,” according to the plan.

This call for better professional development was heard loud and clear at [ISTE 2015 this summer, where educators gathered to share](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2015/06/iste-2015-15-inspirational-quotes-educational-technology-leaders) their frustrations, knowledge and experience with others in their fight for better technology training.  It’s also been top of mind for [*EdTech* Connect IT](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/connect-it) blogger Eric Patnoudes.

“If there is one thing in this world I know to be true, it is that all of those technologies will have little to no impact on learning if teachers are not also provided with training and professional development to help them evolve from the conventional teaching practices of the 20th century,” Patnoudes wrote in a [Nov. 17 blog post](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2015/11/beyond-silver-bullet-making-1-1-matter).

Future Ready Celebrates One Year

A year ago, [President Barack Obama stood before a room full of district superintendents](http://www.edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2014/11/obama-we-need-yank-our-schools-21st-century), urging them to help “yank our schools into the 21st century when it comes to technology,” by signing the [Future Ready District Pledge](http://dashboard.futurereadyschools.org/pledge/). The event kicked off a series of regional summits throughout 2015 to help connect superintendents and other education leaders with resources to help lead the next generation of connected educators.

On Thursday, the department announced 16 new states launching Future Ready initiatives and five regional Future Ready summits in 2016 in Austin, Texas; Boston, Mass.; Madison, Wis.; Seattle, Wash.; and Tampa, Fla.

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