

Measuring Success:

How Will We Know When We Get There?



Backgrounder Brief

It has been over twenty years and billions of dollars spent for educational technology since the first computers were put into schools, and we are hearing increased demands for evidence that these investments have been worthwhile. But “proving” that educational technology is worth the investment is a complex challenge for educators. The good news is that there are now some major research studies pointing to the effectiveness of technology use in schools.

As technologies have evolved and as educators’ experience with and understanding of how technologies can impact teaching and learning have expanded, the quality of the research questions being asked has also evolved. We have gone from merely asking questions such as “does computer-assisted instruction improve student test scores” and “is use of technology cost-effective” to broader questions pertaining to how use of technology tools helps prepare students to succeed in today’s world of work and how technology can work in conjunction with instructional design, learning, effective teaching practices, school culture and other elements to positively impact student learning. Studies have broadened to include technology as but one component contributing towards student achievement and teacher preparedness and productivity.

Another common question you hear in discussions of educational technology has to do with whether it is cost-effective. Again, this is reasonable to ask—but it is not, in isolation, the right question. Don’t confuse or let others cause you to confuse accountability with cost-effectiveness. This is an apples and oranges discussion, and it tends to imply assessment of technology use itself as opposed to the skills and knowledge students are acquiring as they use technology. Rather, keep the focus on the learner and on how new technologies and your schools’ use of technology are contributing to learning goals.

The bottom line is: *evaluation should be planned at the beginning and not tacked on at the end.* Assessment is a planning tool as well as a way to collect and interpret find-





ings and document technology's impact on the classroom. And assessment must focus on learning goals—supporting existing ones and allowing for additional desired goals impacted by access to technology.

Decide where you want to go—where you, your teachers, your parents, and your community want the focus for teaching and learning. The more clear you are in defining your goals and your plan, the better equipped you will be to know how well you have succeeded in meeting your goals.

In planning for success,

- Involve all stakeholders in the planning process.
- Make your plan about students and their learning goals—not about technology.
- Ensure that accountability is shared.
- Adjust your technology plan as necessary over time.
- Share your success stories—and your challenges.

Many studies point to the integral role of the teacher in creating an effective, technology-based learning environment, and researchers have identified some characteristics of exemplary computer-using teachers. In the final analysis, they should be accountable for demonstrating how they have used technologies to which they had access to help students develop skills and competencies needed for the world they will encounter following their schooling: defining and analyzing problems, gathering and analyzing information, collaborating and working with others to solve problems, and communicating what they have learned.

Yes, teachers need to be held accountable for technology use to support student learning, *but* this accountability must be matched with provisions of time, location, support, and access to technology resources. You, the school technology leader, are accountable for ensuring these elements.

You *can* achieve results with appropriate planning for and use of technology. Your assessment must start with a vision and a plan that are articulated to all stakeholders from the outset. Success hinges not only on your plan, but also on your leadership in guiding and supporting the plan. Focus on student learning and define the goals and expectations of your plan. Shape the plan to address your teachers, students, parents, and community.

- Where do you want to be? Use this question to define your vision and plan.
- Where are you now? Take a critical look at the value and results gained from technology use to date. What has worked? What has not? What is missing?
- How do you get to where you want to be? Identify the steps needed to get you to your goal.

Keep your focus on the importance of assessment to refine and grow your plan over time—always keeping your eye on the importance of assessing instructional goals and student achievement and measuring the evidence of how technology supports both.

And a final thought from *Reinventing Government*, by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler...

What gets measured, gets done.

**If you don't measure results,
you can't tell success from failure.**

If you can't recognize failure, you can't correct it.

If you can't see success, you can't reward it.

If you can't see success, you can't learn from it.

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This Backgrounder Brief is an executive summary of *Measuring Success: How Will We Know When We Get There?*, a component of CoSN's Essential Leadership Skills series. CoSN, a national non-profit organization, is the premier voice in education technology leadership. CoSN's mission is to advance the K-12 education community's capacity to effectively use technology to improve teaching and learning through advocacy, policy and leadership development.

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