The four imperatives facing every school

And how schools are using technology to deal with them
Four imperatives facing every school

To say that technology is changing the education landscape is a bit of an understatement. It’s changing the way students learn. It’s changing what parents expect from schools. It’s changing how schools manage their own operations. And, crucially, it’s changing how schools protect their students.

More specifically, it’s helping schools meet four broad — but critical — imperatives:

• **It’s empowering them as educators**
  Ensuring all students have access to the best equipment and opportunities

• **It’s making their operations more efficient**
  Using limited resources in the most effective way

• **It’s securing their campuses**
  Keeping students and staff safe

• **And it’s making transportation more reliable and affordable**
  Maintaining a modern, efficient fleet

Each one of these imperatives is critical to every school. Though of course, different schools will have different ways. But all schools increasingly rely on technology to guide them.

So let’s take a look at how technology has helped schools across the country to manage and balance these four key areas of success.
How technology is empowering educators
How technology is empowering educators

The quality of your school’s education will always come down to the skill and expertise of your teachers.

But the right technology, used in the right way, can help your teachers engage students in more effective ways. In fact, 87 percent of teachers think that technology has had a positive impact on their ability to teach.¹

Here are some of the ways technology is empowering educators, helping them engage students more efficiently and teach them more effectively.

**Connected campus**

Many schools were built in a pre-internet world, with lots of heavy concrete and window coatings that can cause havoc for Wi-Fi signals.

As digital-only curricula become more common, Wi-Fi is a must-have for every area in your school. Dead spots mean disruption to the learning process and frustration for students and staff.

**How technology helps**

Empowered educators are getting around this by installing state-of-the-art high-speed Wi-Fi across their site and then checking its performance across every room, corridor and corner. In the areas that don’t get signal, they install wireless small cells — small boxes that generate a strong 4G signal. That means they can ensure the entire campus is supported at all times — both in-building and outdoors.

In fact, many schools are connecting their school buses too, letting students get an early start on their homework (or letting them get it done last minute on the way in — there’s no tech to stop students from being students).

¹ https://thejournal.com
How technology is empowering educators

Connected students

15 percent of students don’t have access to a reliable high-speed internet connection at home. And that rises to 35 percent for households earning under $30,000.²

This is leading to an increasingly difficult issue in modern education — the homework gap.

Students with a reliable connection at home can complete assignments without a second thought. But those without adequate internet access rely on the goodwill of friends and family or late nights at the library. That means the same homework takes them more time and effort and, through no fault of their own, they risk falling behind peers with better access.

Addressing the homework gap will be one of the key achievements of this generation of educators.

How technology helps

In addition to a high-speed campus connection, schools are starting to offer students library hot spot checkout. These are take-home internet connections that allow students to access the web from home. And they can be checked out in the same way as books.

They’re easy to use and prevent access to inappropriate or illegal sites.

² http://www.pewresearch.org
How technology is empowering educators

Powerful devices

Of course the best internet connection in the world means nothing if you don’t have the devices to actually connect to it.

Even today this is a huge problem — 25 percent of households earning under $30,000 don’t have access to a home computer, widens the homework gap even further.

How technology helps

Instead of a bring-your-own-device system, many schools are deciding to offer all students connected devices, like Google Chromebooks. These offer connectivity that pupils can use at school and at home. And they’re more durable than tablets — an essential consideration when they’re in the hands (and backpacks) of students.

That ensures pupils have access to the widest library of resources possible while allowing teachers to build interactive, compelling lessons and homework, secure in the knowledge that all students will be able to fully engage with them.

Some schools are even adding a built-in LTE connection to their Chromebooks, enabling internet access from anywhere (connecting in the same way a smartphone does).

It might not be needed for all students, but for some it can be life-changing.

The 1Million Project

Access to the right technology is vital in the modern world. But, as we’ve seen, the reality is, for many students, a reliable, high-speed internet connection is a luxury their families simply can’t afford.

We believe every student should have high-speed internet access. Because, these days, 70% of America’s school teachers assign homework online. Yet, more than 5 million families with school-aged children don’t have home internet connectivity. This is more than a Homework Gap — it’s an opportunity gap. So we’re extremely proud to support the 1Million Project Foundation — an organization that provides free, high-speed mobile connectivity to high school students across America.

And the 1Million Project is making a huge difference. In fact, 84% of students participating in a recent survey say the 1Million Project enabled them to complete more homework in comfortable, convenient, and safe places. And 82% say they are more confident in their ability to succeed in school. School administrators have noted marked increases in student success, with 91% observing improvement in students’ attitudes toward learning, and 90% responding that homework completion rates improved.

In less than two years, the 1Million Project Foundation has provided free connectivity to more than 220,000 high school students in nearly 1,900 high schools, nationwide. If you know high school students who don’t have high speed, reliable internet access at home, their school or district may be eligible to assist. Learn more about the 1Million Project Foundation here.
How technology is making school operations more efficient
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Every school has to make the most of the resources at their disposal. After all, every dollar saved is a dollar that could be put towards a child’s education.

Here’s how schools can use technology to operate more efficiently.

**Smarter buildings**

The cost to light, maintain, heat, cool and generally run a campus is always going to be one of your biggest budget items.

But technology can go a long way to making sure you’re using your facilities more efficiently.

**How technology helps**

Using modern smart sensors can help to eradicate waste from overall utilities costs.

For instance, schools often use smart sensors to automatically detect when rooms are empty and turn off the lights. Or they know when the school is warm enough and automatically reduce the heat.

It’s not just the buildings themselves, but also the tools inside. Smart sensors can be added to almost anything — boilers, kitchen equipment, AV resources and more.

Many maintenance people will cover more than one campus, so the ability to automatically detect when there’s a problem can save a lot of time and hassle. That means you don’t have to rely on staff to notice and report issues or rely on engineers making unnecessary site visits just to check that everything’s working. That translates into less down time and lower repair costs.
How technology is making school operations more efficient

Reduced paperwork

Paperwork is one of the biggest drains on your staff’s productivity. Not because the substance of that paperwork doesn’t matter, but because the process of generating, organizing, discovering and storing documents in paper form is unnecessarily labor-intensive.

There are compliance concerns too. Rules about what data is held, how it’s stored and who has access are stricter than ever — and constantly evolving. Making sure everything is handled correctly — and avoiding the costly fines for getting it wrong — is vital for any modern school.

And of course, the more paperwork you can cut, the more time your staff has to focus on other, more essential work.

How technology helps

Most paper forms can be replaced by a more modern mobile form, creating a digital record instead of a paper one. The result is that schools can generate, organize and store the record in one easy step, rather than several time-intensive ones.

It also improves the accuracy of your records by ensuring everyone uses the most up-to-date forms and mandating that all necessary fields are completed.

So when schools do things like take attendance, all that data is automatically collected and organized appropriately.

Transparent communication

Teachers, support staff, students and parents all need to know they’ll have access to information when they need it.

But you can only get so far if you’re relying on informal techniques like telephone trees.

How technology helps

Many schools rely on email lists to communicate with their stakeholders. But the problem is that not everyone checks their emails daily, so many people miss important news.

A more reliable method is to invest in a comprehensive messaging system — one that allows staff to contact everyone using email, voice or SMS depending on what the situation calls for.

After all, people might not check their emails, but 98 percent of text messages are read within 2 minutes.4

4. https://txtsignal.com
How tech secures campuses
How tech secures campuses

Schools need to do everything they can to reassure parents that they're protecting staff and students from accidents and emergencies.

Some of this will be about preparing for the worst. But it's mostly about making every part of the day safer and more secure for everyone.

Secure buildings
To provide a reassuring environment in which students can thrive, security has to start with your buildings. But even though you may not be able to do much to change the physical structures themselves, there's a lot you can do to bolster your security with the right technology.

How technology helps
Most schools already have a comprehensive system of cameras in place, but many are looking to enhance them further.

A good place to start is with smart sensors — devices that detect when doors and windows have been breached (both during school time and out of hours). This is an invaluable resource for the security in charge of protecting the campus, but also for maintenance staff to know when there's an issue that might need looking into.

Then, for after-school hours, there's the option for motion sensors that cover not only the buildings but the wider grounds, letting the appropriate people detect when someone is on campus when they really shouldn't be.
How tech secures campuses

Staff privacy

Teachers often use their personal devices for school communications, whether with other teachers or with parents.

This can be a safe, efficient way for people to communicate, but it does bring a number of problems, not least of which is teachers giving out their personal number to strangers.

How technology helps

Many schools are embracing systems that allow teachers to keep using their personal device — but protect their privacy by adding a second, school-controlled phone number to that device.

Teachers appreciate that they get to use the device they know and love, rather than juggling a second device, while also being able to share a work number that’s different from their personal number.

And schools appreciate that they can save substantial sums by not needing to invest in new phones for all members of staff. Instead, they just add a new number. Plus it helps them address any compliance requirements (like call recording) without infringing on a teacher’s private phone use.
How tech secures campuses

Reliable communication
Staff need a quick, easy and secure way to communicate, both for day-to-day incidents like students falling ill and during major events.

As we just saw, they can use their own devices. But what happens if there’s no signal? Or if lines are blocked because everyone in the area is trying to call their loved ones during an emergency?

How technology helps
Instead of relying solely on traditional cell phones, push-to-talk phones are a simple yet powerful tool in a school’s arsenal.

This allows instant communication with similar push-to-talk phones, as well as other smartphones, tablets and rugged devices. And, most importantly, it allows for group-chat functions, so if you have an ill child in a class who needs to be escorted out, staff can send a message to all available devices for a response, rather than manually calling each cell phone to find someone who is free.

And since it’s powered by Wi-Fi, rather than the data network, you know you should have a clear signal, no matter how many people are connected. You can even give different users different priority levels.
Major incident preparedness

Major incidents come in many different forms, but schools need to demonstrate that they have considered what might go wrong and put policies in place to tackle worst-case scenarios.

How technology helps

There are more situational awareness tools available to schools than ever before.

There are the campus-wide surveillance options, like cameras and smart sensors. The data from these can be used internally or access can be shared with first responders if it’s ever necessary to.

Then there are personal options to keep security staff safer.

You can offer body-worn cameras, giving another live feed to first responders, as well as a greater understanding of what happened once everyone is safe.

Then there are personal protection tools — like body armor with automatic injury detection. This issues immediate alerts about when and where the wearer was injured so first responders get invaluable intel to make the best calls and help those who need it most.

The hope is that these kinds of tools are never needed. But staff, students and parents all feel much more secure knowing they’re there — just in case.
04

How tech makes transportation more reliable and affordable
How tech makes transportation more reliable and affordable

A school’s responsibility doesn’t end at the school door. Every school has a fleet of different vehicles — like schools buses (yellow fleet) and staff cars (white fleet) — that they are responsible for keeping safe and secure.

These transportation options need to be affordable, too. That shouldn’t be overlooked, as it’s estimated school districts spend nearly $23 billion on student transportation alone each year.5

So how can you use technology to reduce those costs?

Intelligent telematics

Tracking how vehicles are used is an essential part of maintaining an efficient, cost-effective fleet.

But, short of sitting with every driver all the time, this has been all but impossible to record and learn from. Until now.

How technology helps

By fitting all vehicles with telematic solutions, you can get an accurate insight into how they’re used, and most importantly, how they can be used better.

For instance, it’s now possible to automatically keep an eye on things like fuel usage, miles driven and overall vehicle health (like fluid levels or estimated tire wear).

Additionally, you can track which drivers are most efficient behind the wheel and which best practices to roll out across the fleet, so you’re constantly learning and improving.

5. Urban Institute, 2017

Sprint Business The four imperatives facing every school
How tech makes transportation more reliable and affordable

**Safer transport**

Schools have a duty to care for students on-board school vehicles. The most important thing is that this keeps students safe. But it also comes with other advantages, like cutting liability (and associated costs) as well as protecting your investment in the vehicles by reducing likelihood of theft or damage.

**How technology helps**

There are many ways to make transportation safer. The first step is often to deploy on-board cameras. That shows school administrators what happens during day-to-day travel (so they can spot trouble-makers) and gives them evidence and clarity if something goes more seriously wrong.

Telematics solutions also have a big implication on safety. They can detect driver speed, as well as any erratic behavior to see when something might be awry. And over the long term, they can pick up on unsafe driver habits — so you can work with your drivers to correct small problems to help them be safer and more efficient on the road.

Next, there’s the ability to add location tracking to know where school buses (or vehicles in the white fleet) are at all times. There’s even a system to automatically detect when the bus deviates from the usual route, so administrators can contact the driver to determine the reason for the diversion — improving safety and help with regulatory compliance.

And as a vital step for parental peace of mind, there are tools to track where children are within the transportation system, including where they got on and where they got off the bus.
How tech makes transportation more reliable and affordable

Improved communications

Wherever your vehicles are, they should never be cut off from any assistance they might require.

Communication is important in all instances — and that doesn’t change just because someone is driving. The key is to ensure that communication is handled in a safe, efficient and legal way.

How technology helps

Instead of relying on old-fashioned radio systems (or worse, encouraging cell phone usage while driving), a lot of schools are starting to use state-of-the-art push-to-talk systems across all vehicles. It allows the support person to see when it’s safe to call the driver and allows the driver to take necessary steps to answer.

Whether it’s reporting potential problems, sharing information or just getting some input on how to handle a situation, it makes everyone feel like they’re part of a supported team.
The power of connected schools

The four imperatives we’ve outlined in this guide matter to every school. You want to deliver a better quality of education, run your buildings more efficiently, secure your campuses and deliver safe, reliable transportation services.

Technology can help you improve all four. And the right technology can help you improve all four at the same time.

This means there are a number of ways that you could use different combinations of technologies to improve your school in the way that’s most relevant and important to you.
Let’s talk

We’re Sprint Government. And we’re helping schools across the country embrace new technology so they can give their students a better, safer and more efficient education. So if you’re trying to figure out how technology can improve your school, we’d love to help.

Get in touch today and let’s talk about what you need.

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