

# DIGITAL LEARNING

## — *Beyond the Pandemic* —

Recommendations for Mississippi District Leaders & Administrators

From the onset of COVID-19 through the present day, Mississippi's education leaders have confronted evolving challenges to the public education system. The efforts of state leaders as well as local educators, administrators, students, and families to meet these challenges are not only inspirational, but they offer important lessons for the future of digital learning and academic acceleration post-pandemic. The University of Mississippi conducted a research project to explore these efforts and develop recommendations to inform future education delivery policies, programs, and supports for students, families, and educators.

The major **themes** from the research are shown below:



Imperative to **Focus on Students Most Impacted**



Critical Role of **High-Quality Curriculum and Training**



Need and Potential for **Cross-Sector Collaboration**



Identification of **Ongoing Funding to Support Education, Technology, Connectivity, and Innovations**



Importance of **Effective Communication and Dissemination**



Support for continued and coordinated **Data Collection and Research**

High-level recommendations for educators drawing from these themes are as follows:

### **Promote High-Quality Digital Learning**

Support equitable digital learning programming and access, with consideration of conditions for success including:

- Participant screening criteria to communicate expectations and realities of the learning environment and set students up for success.
- Dedicated staffing to support digital learning.
- A plan for students with special needs or accommodations in virtual environments.
- Clear expectations for attendance, the balance between synchronous and asynchronous instruction, grading, and student and teacher schedules.
- High-quality curriculum and training that includes a focus on social and emotional learning.
- An assessment policy that allows for real-time education data but mitigates the potential for cheating.
- Support to ensure participating families consistently have adequate devices, connectivity, and assistance in navigating learning platforms.

- Clarity on opportunities for family engagement with teachers.
- A vision for program sustainability that is responsive to changing conditions and allows for adaptations.
- Ongoing data collection and review of virtual student engagement and learning outcomes, including analysis of all relevant subgroup populations.

### **Drive Learning Acceleration**

Focus on meeting students' individual academic needs by engaging in and sharing information about vetted state and local supports such as:

- Free online tutoring.
- Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) coaching initiatives, such as Digital Learning Coaches, to provide additional supports to teachers, students, and families in the areas of greatest need for learning acceleration.

Extend training opportunities to parents and families on how to facilitate effective homework strategies and utilization of digital resources.

Provide guidance and/or resources to before- and after-school child care providers and other community support organizations to better equip them to support homework and learning outside of school.

Maintain appropriate technology, connectivity, and training supports, including a focus on digital citizenship education and training for students and teachers.

Train all educators regarding the digital learning best practices included in the MDE Digital Learning Instructional Guide.

Continue and expand data collection efforts to understand which groups of students are most in need of support, including looking at trends by instructional delivery method, geography, demography, etc.

### **Continue to Support Technology Infrastructure & Training**

Expand upon successes and further the reach of effective education technology efforts through:

- Continued training on the use of technology accessibility tools.
- Adding guidance and best practices around professional learning opportunities, virtual home-school conferences, and other family supports to expand access.
- Adding a navigator component to family engagement efforts where adult mentors/guides are assigned to students and families to assist with effectively using technology to support education.

Mississippi education leaders can continue to pave the way to a successful future for all students by building on COVID-era innovations in digital learning. For more details on these suggested actions and the research behind them, please visit [msdigitallearning.olemiss.edu](https://msdigitallearning.olemiss.edu) to view the full project report and recommendations.