

DIGITAL LEARNING

— *Beyond the Pandemic* —

Recommendations for Mississippi State Leaders

From the onset of COVID-19 through the present day, Mississippi leaders have confronted evolving challenges to the state's 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:

Create a State Advisory Task Force & Regional Acceleration Hubs

- Establish a State Advisory Task Force to Advance Education, including students, families, educators, and local and state leaders, drawing from existing cohorts (Mississippi Department of Education Advisory Councils, Digital Learning Coaches, Technical Advisory Committee), to analyze data on pandemic recovery and explore sustained funding for best practices.
- Support Regional Acceleration Hubs for collaboration by geographical locations to promote coordination of resources from community organizations, government, philanthropy, advocacy, business, and other groups and extend the reach of services.

Promote High-Quality Digital Learning

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

- Support equitable digital learning programming and access statewide.
- Continue to review and approve district-run virtual options annually.
- Continue to provide and potentially expand student access to virtual programming on an 'a la carte' basis, potentially utilizing Regional Acceleration Hubs.

- Support separate staffing for virtual and in-person instruction.
- Expand high-quality digital instructional materials and training.
- Utilize some in-person assessments for virtual programming.

Drive Learning Acceleration

- Focus on meeting students' individual academic needs through vetted supports such as tutoring and coaching coupled with guidance and resources for community providers, appropriate technology support, and ongoing data collection.
- Utilize Regional Acceleration Hubs to coordinate and share information about these offerings.

Continue to Support Technology Infrastructure & Training

- Support district procurement, implementation, and effective use of learning management systems and education technology tools.
- Expand upon successes and further the reach of effective efforts statewide through technology training, evaluations of digital learning resources and supports, consistent tracking of device usage and connectivity, and a statewide technology replacement plan.
- Create an intergovernmental working group of leaders from relevant state agencies focused on internet access to share data, resources, and strategies with families. Coordinate information-sharing through Regional Acceleration Hubs.

Conduct Ongoing Research to Drive Informed Strategies

- Continue to document and analyze the impact of the pandemic on student learning and identify evidence-based interventions.
- Create a longitudinal study of PK-12 student cohorts comparing annual progress through at least 2026 with consistent reporting methods to ensure comparable data across districts.
- Study the effectiveness of state-approved virtual programs by student population and outcomes.
- Measure student usage of digital applications and their impact on student success, including qualitative research to examine districts' instructional approaches over time.
- Make as much data publicly available as possible so that independent entities can do their own analyses and use the information to make strategic decisions.
- Tap the State Advisory Task Force to Advance Education to collectively examine the data and its implications for state and district actions and to inform any needs for updating data collection.

Mississippi 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** to view the full project report and recommendations.