

# Accommodating for Differing Levels of Technology

Millions of students in the U.S. endure some type of technology inequity, such as limited access to devices, software, or reliable internet connectivity. This reality presents many challenges in blended and online learning. To reduce problems and provide the most equitable learning experience possible, it is important to implement accommodations for differing levels of technology. To achieve this goal, teachers must establish and foster communication with students and families to build strategic plans that support all students. Maintaining positive, consistent, and accessible communication and being flexible about instruction and assignments is foundational to promoting equity and inclusion.

1. What technology resources have been provided to my students?
2. How does out-of-school WiFi access impact blended and online learning?
3. How can strategic communication and planning impact technology resource challenges?



to Consider

In blended and online learning, teachers and students heavily rely on technology. However, not all families have equal access to necessary devices, software, and Internet connectivity. It is important to be aware of each student's individual circumstances and accommodate for differing levels of technology. The most essential step to providing equitable learning experiences is establishing and maintaining strategic communication with students and their families. The communication between teachers and families must be frequent since circumstances can change anytime during the school year. Providing information about free local support for Internet connectivity, such as WiFi hotspots in the community and companies offering free Internet access, is one way to help families facing inequitable digital access.

After establishing communication with students and families, create a strategic plan to accommodate differing levels of technology. Teachers need to be prepared to make accommodations, be flexible, and educate students and families about troubleshooting strategies. There will be instances in which families have unequal access to technology, and it is essential to design alternative learning scenarios for students to have equitable learning experiences. Materials that will be used in online environments need to be accessible for students who cannot connect to the Internet. In blended learning, when face-to-face, provide students with printable versions of the material; hard copies of textbooks and workbooks; USB drives or DVDs with video and audio media, instructions, and assignments, so students can have access to them in class and at home. In online learning, when teachers are not able to meet face-to-face with students, necessary physical materials can be picked up at the school by parents or mailed home. Plan strategies to make up for student absences during synchronous sessions when they are not able to participate due to Internet issues. Unreliable internet during synchronous calls is often the culprit and turning off the video feed or joining the session through audio calls might help the live session run more smoothly. Asynchronous activities with flexible deadlines and recorded videos might be the best alternative for students who have difficulty joining synchronous sessions.

The use of offline features through productivity platforms, such as Google Workspace and Microsoft Office 365, is a viable option for students who have a school-issued device but limited Internet access. Remember that students who use school devices might not have permission to download or update the software by themselves, so teachers should work with the school's technical support staff to solve these problems. Wifi hotspots can be very helpful for students and families with unreliable Internet connectivity, but they are not always well suited for streaming online activities such as video conferencing calls. Teachers need to be mindful of these limitations. Inequality of technology access creates challenges for implementing blended and online learning. Being flexible is the key to overcoming these challenges. Building a strategic communication plan can help teachers create the most equitable learning experiences possible.

## KEY Elements