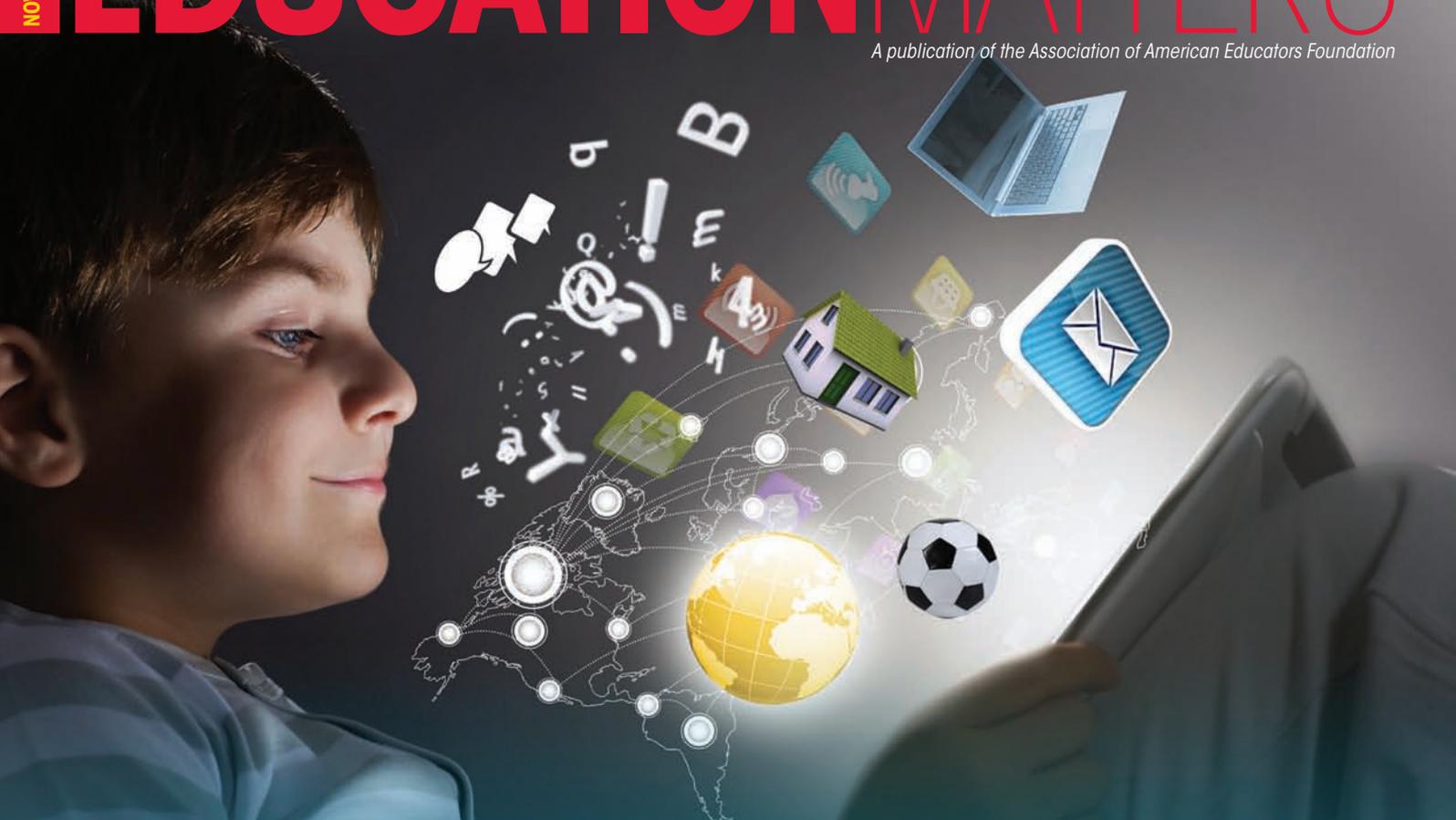


# EDUCATION MATTERS

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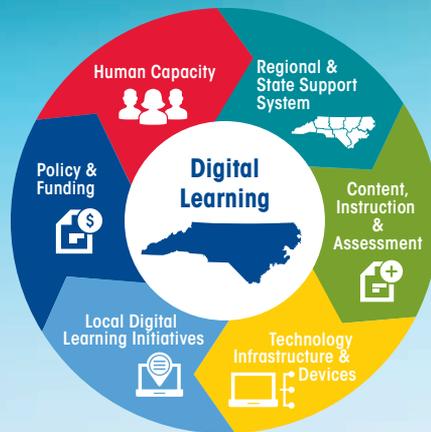
By Stephen Noonoo

## The Digital Learning Plan Every Educator Should Read

North Carolina's brand new Digital Learning Plan (DLP) is generating buzz in schools and at the capitol. Here's what other states can learn...

**L**ike every state, educators in North Carolina are struggling with complex demands around digital learning. In the era of personalized learning-meets-BYOD, and with a big push on 21st century skills, districts and education leaders can still feel pretty isolated as they work out where to go next. And conveying their needs to state legislators, who often have the power to regulate funding and set the pace for any statewide digital initiatives, can be yet another challenge.

“A lot of people tell us that these kinds of digital initiatives get written at the capitol, when the focus should be on engaging stakeholders at every level,” said Jenifer Corn, the director of evaluation programs at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation.



 <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	 <b>GOALS</b>
Develop and implement digital learning competencies for teachers and administrators as required by SL 2013-11.	All teachers and administrators demonstrate understanding and application of the digital learning competencies.
Provide professional development for school and district leaders, instructional support staff, and technical staff, in order to prepare local leadership teams to plan and implement successful digital learning initiatives.	All teachers and students report effective leadership and support for digital learning in their districts and schools.
Develop a network of professional development facilitators to prepare teachers for digital learning. Provide resources to support them in delivering face-to-face, online, and blended professional learning programs for teachers of all content areas and levels.	<p>All teachers report that they are prepared to effectively use digital learning to increase their students' engagement and achievement.</p> <p>All students report that their teachers use technology effectively to enhance learning.</p>
Guide teacher and administrator preparation programs to ensure that their graduates are ready for digital-age schools.	Superintendents, principals, experienced teachers, and students report that new teachers and administrators are well prepared for their roles as digital-age educators.

An example of the recommendations and goals from the Human Capacity section.

When the state's department of education decided to educate lawmakers, district leaders, and other stakeholders and set North Carolina's digital learning future, it turned to Corn's organization to do it in a systematic, data-driven way that gave a voice to nearly every educator in the state.

Recently, the Friday Institute released the results of that 18-month-long effort, the North Carolina Digital Learning Plan, which outlines both recommendations and specific goals for education leaders and policy-makers around digital learning-related topics, such as infrastructure and devices, professional development, instruction and assessment, and funding.

The DLP is, in part, a response to two new state laws passed in the last

legislative session—that schools must transition to digital resources by 2017 and that colleges of education, teachers, and administrators would be responsible for meeting new digital competencies. The state's department of education contracted with the Friday Institute on how to implement those goals simultaneously.

In response to that charge, the Friday Institute, a policy and research land-grant that is part of the college of education at North Carolina State University, began by checking in with districts one by one. It crisscrossed the state conducting needs assessments and asset management surveys. It spoke with all 115 local education agencies and held town hall meetings. And, during that process, they collected a lot of data.

“This was the first time every bit of the institute was touched by the same work,” Corn explained. “We were building buy-in so [everyone] really felt like this wasn't the Friday Institute telling people what to do, but it was reflecting back to the folks in Raleigh about what was happening.”

### A digital snapshot

In addition to those deep dives, the institute also developed an ed-tech rubric and assessed every district's digital progress. “For the first time,” Corn said, “we have a snapshot of where every district in the state falls along a continuum about where they thought they were in terms of readiness in technology.”

As might be expected, few districts are in truly advanced stages of their digital transitions. According

“This is about changing the role of the teacher in the classroom, changing the way school works. It’s not about the devices or the technology.”



to results from the rubric, about 19 percent of districts in the state confessed to only just beginning to move toward digital, while just six percent rated themselves advanced. The vast majority said they were in a developing stage.

For them, the DLP might serve as something of a road map, or at least a set of goals to aspire to. While many of the recommendations can be read as a call to action for statewide organizations and leaders, specific goals—spelling out the skills and resources teachers, administrators, and schools should possess as they enter more advanced stages of their digital transitions—can help school and district leaders at every level in their planning.

Of interest to both lawmakers and educators, the DLP makes recommendations around providing flexible professional development for district-level staff and principals, as well as the creation of a larger network of PD facilitators devoted to helping teachers adjust to digital learning concepts, such as blended instruction. It also suggests beefing up regional and statewide collaborations to support local educators and developing sustainable funding models. Of course, many of these initiatives will require new funding, and the report takes pains to spell out where federal money can step in and what, exactly, the state might be on the hook for.

“It’s been quite a budgetary fight,” Corn said about working with legislators to secure those funds. “But we did get an increase in textbook allotment and school connectivity. We didn’t get everything we asked for but because of the Digital Learning Plan and the conversations we’ve been having, at a time when our state budgets have been fiscally conservative, they did give increases in those two areas.”

Right now, Corn and her team are talking up the DLP to legislators and continuing their work. A toolkit for district tech directors is in the works and they are in the early stages of considering a data clearinghouse that education leaders can use to more easily find out what kinds of technology their colleagues across the state are buying—and using.

The overall goal of the DLP, she said, was to make it easier for everyone to come to grips with a digital world, no matter what their role in education. “The model that we developed could certainly be applied to other states,” Corn said. “This is about changing the role of the teacher in the classroom, changing the way school works. It’s not about the devices or the technology.” ■

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Stephen Noonoo is an editor at eSchoolNews, a former ed-tech editor at CUE, SmartBrief, and THE Journal.

## Your Colleagues Belong in the AAE Family

AAE and its state chapters are growing in record numbers because teachers see the true value their membership brings to teachers. Do you know teachers who would make an excellent addition to the AAE family? Send them to [aaeteachers.org/membership](http://aaeteachers.org/membership) to learn more about the preferred choice for teachers!



# AAE and Vergara:

## A Call for AAE Members to Be a Voice in the Movement

In a ruling last year that rocked the world of education, a California Superior Court decided in favor of nine public school students who challenged the state's quality-blind teacher tenure, dismissal, and layoff laws. The Court found that by trapping students in classrooms with ineffective teachers, while pushing many effective teachers out of the classroom, the laws violated students' constitutional right to equal educational opportunity and in particular, disproportionately harmed low-income students and students of color.

Since the court's historic ruling in *Vergara v. California*, the state of California and its two largest teachers unions have appealed the decision, attempting to block the transformative change that California's six million public school students desperately need.

But that hasn't stopped Students Matter, the organizational sponsor of the student plaintiffs in *Vergara*. In addition to defending the *Vergara* ruling in both the courts and in the legislature, Students Matter has helped a group of teachers, parents, and California taxpayers file *Doe v. Antioch*, a case challenging the collective bargaining agreements of thirteen school districts across California, which expressly violate the state's teacher evaluation law, impacting 250,000 students.

Here's where *you* come in.

Students Matter seeks to elevate the voices of everyday teachers—not teachers unions—who support quality and accountability in the teaching profession and want education policy to better serve the most vulnerable students, as well as respect, reward and retain effective educators. AAE members are perfect to represent a voice for commonsense reform.



For instance, numerous California Teachers of the Year recently filed an amicus curiae (or “friend of the court”) brief in *Vergara*, urging the Court of Appeal to uphold the trial court’s ruling. Another California teacher traveled with Students Matter to Sacramento to speak to legislators about the impact of pending bills on teachers and students. And another teacher published an op-ed in *The Los Angeles Times*, urging lawmakers to listen to the teachers on the ground when rewriting California’s teacher employment laws.

As its work expands nationally, Students Matter is looking to raise the voices of everyday teachers through our communications and advocacy work. ■



Please email us at [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org) if you’re interested in lending your voice to the movement to transform public education.

Originally published on the AAE blog. Bookmark our blog at [aaeteachers.org/blog](http://aaeteachers.org/blog) today!



## AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

? What one thing can AAE do to better serve teachers and why?

▶ Take the survey at [tinyurl.com/November15Survey](http://tinyurl.com/November15Survey) today and be entered to win an AAE Prize Pack just for letting us know.

You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone!



## Annual Membership Survey to Release This Month!

Watch your inbox for the 2016 AAE National Teacher Survey coming soon!

### Here’s what you need to do:

1. Visit [aaeteachers.org/update](http://aaeteachers.org/update) to ensure your information is current.
2. Make sure you are receiving emails. If you are not, email [editor@aaeteachers.org](mailto:editor@aaeteachers.org) with the subject line “Send me the National Survey.”
3. Encourage your colleagues to participate by becoming an AAE member—[aaeteachers.org/join](http://aaeteachers.org/join).
4. Start gathering your thoughts on education policy and reform!
5. Be watching your inbox for email notifications.



## Teachers Aren't Dumb

One of my colleagues at the University of Virginia, a world authority on how culture influences personality, almost didn't become a professor. He wanted to teach high school but went for his Ph.D. because it seemed easier; he thought he would fail the exacting admissions test for teacher candidates. Perhaps I should mention that my colleague is from Japan.

When I tell this story to Americans, they usually nod knowingly because it confirms their beliefs about the quality of teachers in both countries.

Most Americans think that teaching is a natural talent, not the product of training, and that smart people are the ones with the talent. So some policymakers have concluded that the way to improve schooling is to lure top-scoring graduates into teaching (as Japan does) instead of scraping the bottom of the academic barrel (as America supposedly does). Arne Duncan, the secretary of education, invoked this idea in a speech last year.

However, the problem in American education is not dumb teachers. The problem is dumb teacher training.

It's true that the average SAT score of high school students who plan to become teachers is below the national average. But planning to teach doesn't guarantee that you'll succeed in college, pass the certification test, and be hired. The median SAT score for those who actually do end up teaching is about the national mean for other college graduates. (There is some variation, depending on teaching specialty.)

Teachers are smart enough, but you need more than smarts to teach well. You need to know your subject and you need to know how to help children learn it. That's where research on American teachers raises concerns.

Consider reading. In 2000, a national panel of experts concluded that reading teachers need explicit knowledge of language features that most people know only implicitly: syntax, morphology (how the roots of words can

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combine with one another or with prefixes or suffixes), and phonological awareness (the ability to hear parts of spoken language like syllables and individual speech sounds). Yet many undergraduates preparing to teach, fresh from their coursework in reading instruction, don’t know these concepts. In one study, 42 percent could not correctly define “phonological awareness.”

Of greater concern, those who educate future teachers don’t know them either. Emily Binks-Cantrell of Texas A&M University and her colleagues tested 66 professors of reading instruction for their knowledge of literacy concepts. When asked to identify the number of phonemes in a word, they were correct 62 percent of the time. They struggled more with morphemes, correctly identifying them 27 percent of the time.

Mediocre teacher preparation extends to mathematics. An international study of new middle school teachers showed that Americans scored worse on a math test than teachers in countries where kids excelled, like Singapore and Poland. William Schmidt of Michigan State University identified the commonsense explanation: American teachers take fewer math classes. Instead, they take more courses in general pedagogy—coursework, that is, on theories of instruction, theories of child development, and the like.

Teachers themselves know that their training focuses too much on high-level theory and not enough on nuts-and-bolts matters of teaching. In a 2012 survey, that was their top complaint about their training. The same survey showed that most thought the current system of training should be changed; a fifth thought it worked well.

Policymakers have debated the best way to evaluate teacher effectiveness but have shown little interest in

the training that is supposed to make them effective in the first place. That’s changing, but it’s not obvious where and how to intervene. Tougher entry requirements for teacher training? A more challenging certification test? New accreditation standards for teacher training programs? The problem is that many different organizations influence various aspects of the teacher training process. For changes to be effective, they must be coordinated. Two guiding principles could help.

First, let’s agree that the way to evaluate teacher training is to test teachers. It’s tempting to use student outcomes instead: If teachers trained at Podunk University can’t get their kids to pass state exams, doesn’t that reflect badly on Podunk U.? The Obama administration’s proposal for program evaluation used that logic, but it’s hard to say how much Podunk mattered compared with other factors such as the school curriculum or the student’s home life. A more direct measure of teacher training is to test, at graduation, whether a teacher has learned what he or she was meant to learn.

Second, use existing research to generate the list of things that a teacher ought to know. A good deal of evidence shows that students learn to read better from teachers who understand the structure of language and learn math better from teachers who know specific techniques for drawing analogies to explain mathematical ideas. A list like this could be used as the guiding framework not only to evaluate whether a teacher is well trained but also whether he or she should be certified to teach and whether a training program should be accredited.

Much of what makes a teacher great is hard to teach, but some methods of classroom instruction have been scientifically tested and validated. Teachers who don’t know these methods are not stupid; they’ve been left in the dark. ■

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