The Global State of Digital Learning in K-12 Education

An Educational Study Powered by 2,846 Education Professionals Across 89 Countries
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A Note from the Editors

Education is a far cry from what it used to be. While some aspects may always stay the same, students are learning in ways few thought possible not long ago—thanks to the exploration of many creative education professionals around the world and rapid technological development. Self-paced instruction, gamified mastery learning, virtual reality—education has taken on a new life. Many teachers have stepped down from the stage to instead be a guide as their students wonder, discover, and create on their own. The age of digital learning is here.

This study aims to shed light on the global state of digital learning today in K-12 education. In this ebook, you’ll get a rare glimpse into the challenges, priorities, strategies, tools, and outcomes of 2,846 education professionals of all roles and backgrounds from 89 different countries. One thing to note is roughly 25% of the respondents for this survey use Schoology. While this is the case, the other 75% help ensure that this is a general survey, and the insights it contains are no less diverse or valuable.

One caveat we’d like to share is that you’ll see multiple data sets compared with whether or not respondents use a learning management system (LMS). We did this because we are firm believers that the LMS represents a cultural shift. It’s not just another tool; it is a catalyst that can transform how students learn, how teachers teach, and how institutions as a whole access and share information. As you will see, the possible implications of LMS use are many.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in Schoology’s inaugural Global State of Digital Learning Survey. And thank you to everyone who helped make this survey possible.

Ready to dive into the deep end?
The Context and Methodology of Our Survey

This is a general survey of digital learning in K-12 education today, conducted from May–June 2017. It encompasses 2,846 education professionals (25% of which are Schoology users) from across 89 countries worldwide.

Why We Did the Survey

Like you, we are obsessively interested in education and edtech’s role within it. We wanted to gather concrete insights about what’s generally happening in education today and shed light on the areas that are too often assumed or over-hyped.

This survey will give you, the reader, a better understanding of the current state of digital learning and a jumping off point for moving forward.

How We Did the Survey

This survey was designed and implemented by a team of former teachers, former administrators, and content specialists. We conducted the survey online, promoting it via email, blog posts, social promotions, and word of mouth. The data was then crunched by our team internally and rolled into this ebook.

No data was altered (or harmed) and is presented in a straightforward fashion—with some exploration of deeper insights and context.

Because not all questions applied to everyone, logic was used in our surveying to only ask questions that were relevant to each individual respondent. For instance, if a respondent stated she was an administrator, she was not asked about challenges faced by teachers. Likewise, if a respondent indicated she didn’t have an LMS, she wasn’t asked questions about LMSs. This is reflected in the number of respondents who were asked each question (e.g., n = 2,846), which accompanies every chart in this study.
10 Key Digital Learning Trends and Takeaways

1. Perceptions of Digital Learning are Overwhelmingly Positive
An overwhelming majority of respondents say digital learning positively impacts both student achievement (95%) and teaching effectiveness (92%).

2. Challenges and Priorities are Largely the Same, Despite Institution Size
Regardless of how large or small institutions are, their challenges and priorities are basically the same. Anecdotally, the expectation is that they would vary more depending on institution size.

3. Time is the #1 Obstacle to Effective Digital Learning
Lack of time, devices, and effective PD are the three biggest obstacles standing in the way of institutions and integrating technology into teaching and learning.

4. Instructional Approaches: Blended Learning Still Takes the Cake
There’s an obvious recognition of the need to tailor learning to students—via differentiation, personalization, etc.—but institutions still rank blended learning as the most effective strategy.

5. Teaching and Learning Looks Different on the Ground
While instructional practices such as gamification and flipped learning soak up all the press, they are not being practiced as much as one might think.

6. Static Instructional Resources are Still the Norm
Static resources (PDFs, Word Docs, Videos, etc.) are, by far, the most used instructional content, suggesting institutions may be digitizing traditional learning instead of enhancing it.

7. Dedicated Technology Coordinators Could Make a Big Difference
The respondents citing that their institution has dedicated instructional technology coordinators (many institutions have teachers fill in on the side) also cite the highest satisfaction overall.

8. LMSs May Have Notable Impacts on Students and Faculty
Respondents who use an LMS also cite the highest rates of student engagement, teaching effectiveness, ability to prepare students for college and career readiness, and more.

9. PD Doesn’t Reflect the Best Practices of Modern Teaching and Learning
Very little PD offered by institutions is via asynchronous learning, blended courses, or on-demand options. Plus, 46% of institutions still don’t use their LMS to model best practices.

10. Increasing Collaboration May Be a Core Strategy for Solving PD Challenges
81% of respondents consider PLC and PLN collaboration to be effective for PD. Interestingly, PD is the #1 challenge and faculty collaboration is the #1 priority of administrators by far.
Survey Respondent Breakdown
Meet the Respondents

At some point, the knowledge and experience a professional gathers over the years becomes an invaluable resource. That said, we had an incredible 66% of respondents who have been working for more than ten years in education. 31.8% of respondents fell into the administrator (principal, curriculum, superintendent, instructional technologist, etc.) category, while the remainder of respondents were teachers.

Job Functions of Respondents

- Teacher/Faculty Grades 9-12: 36.26%
- Teacher/Faculty Grades 6-8: 16.51%
- Instructional/Academic Technology: 9.94%
- Principal/Assistant Principal: 8.75%
- Teacher/Faculty Grades 3-5: 7.84%
- Teacher/Faculty Grades K-2: 7.62%
- Information Technology: 5.31%
- Curriculum: 3.87%
- Professional Development: 2.56%
- Superintendent/Asst. Superintendent: 1.34%
Sizing Things Up

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are nearly 100,000 public schools and more than 30,000 private schools in the United States. Of course, the corresponding ratio varies wildly by country, but it holds mostly true of these survey results.

*K-12 Public Vs. Private*

![K-12 Public Vs. Private](chart)

Although a majority of survey takers came from schools with 5,000 or fewer students, the working distribution includes a wide range of school sizes. This diversity in size is important for getting a clear picture of the state of digital learning.

*Institution Enrollment*

![Institution Enrollment](chart)
Insights from Across the U.S.

While a high volume of respondents within the U.S. came from the South, each region contributed hundreds of responses. The most frequently listed states were Texas, California, and New York. Considering the sheer number of students from those three states, and the corresponding fleet of educators and administrators required, this is not surprising.

**Top Ten States Represented**

- Texas 50.00%
- California 60.00%
- New York 70.00%
- Pennsylvania 40.00%
- Florida 19.49%
- Ohio 21.73%
- Georgia 38.89%
- Illinois 19.88%
- Connecticut 19.88%
- Michigan 19.88%

**A Breakdown of U.S. Regions Represented**
Adding much diversity to this study, participants hailed from every corner of the planet. The final count of countries represented neared 90. Despite a large number of respondents from North America, countries such as Australia, the Philippines, the UAE, China, and the UK made significant contributions.

**Top Ten Countries Represented:**

1. United States of America
2. Canada
3. Australia
4. Mexico
5. Philippines
6. United Arab Emirates
7. Jamaica
8. China
9. United Kingdom
10. El Salvador
Challenges & Priorities

In this section, teachers and administrators were segmented into two buckets and received separate questions.
It’s clear that teachers face numerous challenges in their day-to-day. To effectively understand the breadth of those challenges, in the question below we gave them the option to choose multiple answers. The top two challenges teachers faced by far are their students’ access to technology and a lack of time during the day.

Other notable challenges for teachers include the issue of tech bloat (too many tools), a lack of digital curriculum, and getting parents involved effectively.

**Teachers: What were your top challenges for digital learning in 2016-17?**
*(respondents could choose multiple answers - top 5 shown below)*

- Students’ access to technology: 39.86%
- Lack of time during normal business hours: 36.41%
- Multiple digital tools being used for teaching/learning: 30.28%
- Lack of digitized curriculum: 29.45%
- Lack of parent/guardian involvement/understanding: 28.89%
Looking ahead, the biggest priority for the coming year for teachers is moving to a new instructional approach. And after having discussed their challenges, the next three highest priorities for teachers are no surprise.

In fact, digitizing curricula addresses a lack of digital resources (their #4 challenge), working more closely with PLCs will save time (their #2 challenge), and consolidating tools solves tech bloat (their #3 challenge).

**Teachers: What are your top priorities for digital learning in 2017-18?**
(Respondents could choose multiple answers - top 5 shown below)
Administrators, as you would guess, have much broader concerns than their faculty. Defined in this survey as anyone who is not a classroom instructor, the #1 challenge of admin was providing effective professional development. The challenges of tech infrastructure, lack of collaboration, device management, and assessing and reporting on instructional effectiveness weren’t far behind.

**Administrators: What were your top challenges for digital learning in 2016-17?**
(respondents could choose multiple answers - top 5 shown below)

- Providing relevant and effective professional development: 41.81%
- Technological infrastructure (wifi, security, etc.): 32.41%
- Lack of faculty/staff collaboration: 29.98%
- Device management: 28.21%
- Assessing and reporting on teaching strategy and effectiveness: 26.22%
Top 5 Priorities for Administrators in 2017-18

When administrators look forward, their #1 priority, by and large, is to encourage faculty and staff collaboration. As technology has become more social, enabling collaboration and sharing on a much broader scale, many administrators are seeing the benefits. It stands to reason that education technologies will only become more collaborative as long as this remains such a high priority.

Administrators: What are your top priorities for digital learning in 2017-18? (respondents could choose multiple answers - top 5 shown below)

- Encouraging faculty/staff collaboration: 46.24%
- Rolling out new devices or device strategy: 25.88%
- Creating a digital citizenship program: 25.77%
- Assessing and reporting on student performance: 24.67%
- Providing ongoing professional development: 22.12%

n = 904
The Role of Technology
Staffing Up

No matter the size of the school or district, or whether it’s public or private, roughly 40% of respondents reported not having dedicated instructional coordinators on staff. And considering that hiring staff to fill this position is administrators’ last priority, this figure doesn’t seem likely to change much.

*Does your institution have dedicated instructional technologists/technology coordinators on your staff?*

Through the lens of whether or not an institution has dedicated instructional technologists (people who answered “yes” versus those who answered “No” or “No, but some faculty stand in”), we looked at the respondents who said they were “very satisfied” with the current state of their career. Of all respondents who said they were “very satisfied,” an overwhelming majority are also working at an institution with dedicated instructional technologists.

*Breakdown of respondents who said they are “very satisfied” with their career relative to if their institution has a dedicated instructional technologist*
Let’s Talk About Hardware

When it comes to devices, nearly 70% of schools and districts who responded to the survey use Windows laptops and computers. It’s notable that Chromebooks and iOS mobile devices command the second and third spots, because they have only been available since around 2010–2011. This survey did not look into the age of the hardware being used.

What kind of hardware does your school/institution currently use? (respondents could choose all answers that applied)

When looking at how the device landscape is structured at schools and districts, most respondents say they have shared carts of devices. And nearly 50% of schools and districts have 1:1 setups, but they are split down the middle as to whether students can take the devices home or not.

What does your hardware structure look like?
Going Mobile in the Classroom

Despite the (short) history of concern over the use of mobile devices in schools, nearly 80% of schools and districts use them at least monthly. Almost half use mobile devices daily.

Considering that just over half of respondents say their institutions issue tablets and other mobile devices, this regular use of mobile suggests personal devices are being incorporated more often.

If you use mobile devices, is your school/institution using mobile device management (MDM)?

Mobile Device Management (MDM) refers to an approach for monitoring, managing, and securing mobile devices. Slightly more than 22% of respondents are currently using MDM in their school or district. More than 2 in 5 indicated they didn’t know if MDM was in use.
The Use of Software & Tools

The cornerstone of many digital learning initiatives is the LMS. It’s the digital environment where online learning actually happens; it’s the grading and reporting tool; and it’s the hub connecting the various people, tools, and strategies in one place. Having said that, just over 45% of schools and districts use an LMS (barring the 33% of folks who are unsure whether they use an LMS or not).

Do you or your institution have/use a learning management system (LMS)?

![Chart showing use of LMS](chart.png)

Of the institutions in this survey that use an LMS, the larger they are the more likely they are to make the tool’s use optional.

This could be because it’s easier to enforce a mandate in smaller institutions. It also shows the sharp divide between the “top down” versus “bottom up” edtech implementation strategies.

Optional vs. Required LMS use (broken down by enrollment)

![Bar chart showing LMS use](bar_chart.png)
Of the respondents who use an LMS, the large majority of them use it every day or most days. This should be good news to the administrators who are concerned about LMS adoption. Your LMSs are being used, a lot.

How often do you or your faculty use your LMS?

Below, you’ll see that the respondents who use their LMSs more also report higher levels of student engagement. While these results only represent the respondents of this survey, 20 years of research has shown that increasing student engagement translates to more learning, higher rates of completion, and increased student achievement.

Level of student engagement relative to frequency of LMS use
Another dose of good news for anyone who recently rolled out a new LMS is that nearly 90% of respondents who use an LMS are at least somewhat satisfied with it.

*How satisfied are you or your faculty with your LMS?*

And of those institutions who have an LMS, having someone in the Instructional Coordinator role may increase overall satisfaction. Notice the more dedicated coordinators can be, the less likely respondents are to be dissatisfied with and ultimately switch out their LMSs.

*Satisfaction with LMS relative to whether or not institution has instructional technologist*
Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is based on the idea that there are norms of appropriate and responsible ways to use technology and interact with others on the internet. And while online bullying, an inability to discern real from fake information online, and other challenges created by rapid technology adoption are top of mind in education, very few institutions have a formal digital citizenship program.

*Does your institution have a digital citizenship program students are required to complete? (broken down by enrollment)*

Not surprisingly, the respondents who cite having digital citizenship programs most are also those who answered having 1:1 programs where students can take their devices home.

*The impact of hardware structure on digital citizenship*
Digital Educational Resources

Institutions spend a good portion of their budgets on educational resources, whether they be professional learning resources or content used in the classroom. A little over half of schools and districts provide PD resources.

While publisher content and classroom ready resources created by institutions are available to many respondents, just over 16% of institutions represented in this survey are not providing any of these resources. This could play into the fact that around 30% of teachers consider a “Lack of Digital Curriculum” as a top challenge.

*What types of digital educational resources does your institution provide faculty?*
*(respondents could choose all answers that applied)*

- Professional development resources: 51.09%
- Productivity apps and tools: 42.06%
- Publisher content: 37.53%
- Scope and sequence documentation: 31.48%
- Classroom ready resources created by the institution: 23.89%
- Faculty do not get access to these resources: 16.16%
So what kinds of digital resources are faculty and administrators using? Static resources—e.g., PDFs, Word Docs, and Videos—command the top two slots.

The high use of static resources may suggest that many institutions are simply digitizing their resources rather than enhancing them—which is the goal of digital learning in the first place.

What types of digital content do you or your faculty use in your digital learning program?
(respondents could choose all answers that applied)
The obstacles to incorporating technology into classrooms and across districts effectively are many. But the top three obstacles respondents cite are a lack of time, a lack of devices, and ineffective professional development.

Importantly, more than a quarter of faculty and administrators in this survey consider a lack of technology access at home (for them or their students) to be a major issue.

In my institution/courses, the major obstacles to effectively integrating teaching and learning are:

(respondents could choose all answers that applied)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to incorporate technology</td>
<td>43.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough devices (laptops, tablets, etc.) for my students to use</td>
<td>40.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective professional development</td>
<td>32.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware that’s inadequate to our educational tasks</td>
<td>29.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access at home</td>
<td>26.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor or unreliable network connections</td>
<td>25.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty creating lesson plans and integration strategies</td>
<td>25.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of local expertise and technical support</td>
<td>24.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems don’t work well together/talk to each other</td>
<td>11.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 2,846
Instructional Approaches
The Most Used Instructional Approaches

The instructional approaches used most by instructors represented in this survey include differentiated instruction (75%), blended learning (54%), and individualized learning (45%). And while flipped learning, personalized learning, and gamification command the most press, they aren’t being practiced as much as one might think. In many ways, this makes a lot of sense. These approaches require more time and resources than many of the others.

*Do you or your faculty/staff at your institution use any of the following instructional approaches? (respondents could choose all answers that applied)*

- Differentiated learning: 75.26%
- Blended/hybrid learning: 53.90%
- Individualized learning: 44.83%
- Flipped learning: 34.54%
- Personalized learning: 31.83%
- 1:1 learning: 31.41%
- Understanding by Design (UBD): 17.29%
- Gamification: 15.81%
- Purely online learning: 14.05%
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): 10.19%

n = 2,846
### Most Used Instructional Approaches by Enrollment

**Do you or your faculty/staff at your institution use any of the following instructional approaches?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;2,000</th>
<th>2,000 - 5,000</th>
<th>5,000 - 50,000</th>
<th>50,000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Differentiated learning 67.89%</td>
<td>Differentiated learning 76.79%</td>
<td>Differentiated learning 81.51%</td>
<td>Differentiated learning 83.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Blended/hybrid learning 50.86%</td>
<td>Blended/hybrid learning 56.67%</td>
<td>Blended/hybrid learning 58.52%</td>
<td>Blended/hybrid learning 48.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Individualized learning 42.12%</td>
<td>Individualized learning 43.89%</td>
<td>Individualized learning 49.09%</td>
<td>Individualized learning 45.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Flipped learning 32.96%</td>
<td>Flipped learning 35.83%</td>
<td>Flipped learning 37.47%</td>
<td>Flipped learning 30.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1:1 learning 30.74%</td>
<td>1:1 learning 35.83%</td>
<td>Personalized learning 35.64%</td>
<td>Personalized learning 30.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personalized learning 30.09%</td>
<td>Personalized learning 30.71%</td>
<td>1:1 learning 32.73%</td>
<td>1:1 learning 22.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Understanding by Design (UBD) 14.55%</td>
<td>Understanding by Design (UBD) 18.10%</td>
<td>Understanding by Design (UBD) 20.92%</td>
<td>Gamification 16.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gamification 13.87%</td>
<td>Gamification 13.89%</td>
<td>Gamification 19.46%</td>
<td>Understanding by Design (UBD) 16.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Purely online learning 13.53%</td>
<td>Purely online learning 12.98%</td>
<td>Purely online learning 15.09%</td>
<td>Purely online learning 15.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) 6.85%</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) 9.87%</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) 13.99%</td>
<td>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) 13.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n = 2,846*
Despite more instructors practicing differentiated instruction, blended learning is considered to be the most effective instructional approach for impacting student outcomes.

And while more and more courses move online in higher education (U.S. News cites consistent growth in online enrollments year over year), purely online learning in K-12 is considered the least effective instructional approach by respondents and few even practice it.

**Which of the following approaches do you believe to be the most effective for impacting student achievement?**

- 31.27% Blended/hybrid learning
- 21.75% Differentiated learning
- 11.49% Personalized learning
- 9.00% Individualized learning
- 7.73% 1:1 learning
- 7.17% Flipped learning
- 5.20% Understanding by Design (UBD)
- 2.81% Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- 2.74% Gamification
- 0.84% Purely online learning

*n = 2,846*
Professional Development
The Professional Development (PD) Landscape

This PD landscape provides a little clarity into how administrators are approaching the #1 challenge they faced last school year. The top three approaches to PD are periodic workshops, in-class observation, and single session workshops.

An increasing number of schools and districts are offering blended, asynchronous, and continuous PD programs. We expect these percentages to increase over time.

What kind of professional development do you receive/provide to your faculty? (respondents could choose all answers that applied)
## Types of PD Provided to Faculty by Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;2,000</th>
<th>2,000 - 5,000</th>
<th>5,000 - 50,000</th>
<th>50,000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Periodic workshops</td>
<td>53.00%</td>
<td>Periodic workshops</td>
<td>60.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In-class observation</td>
<td>47.35%</td>
<td>Single session workshop</td>
<td>50.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Single session workshop</td>
<td>43.84%</td>
<td>In-class observation</td>
<td>49.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Consultants or speakers</td>
<td>34.67%</td>
<td>Professional learning communities (PLCs)</td>
<td>36.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Professional learning communities (PLCs)</td>
<td>26.88%</td>
<td>Consultants or speakers</td>
<td>35.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Peer walk-throughs</td>
<td>23.80%</td>
<td>Peer walk-throughs</td>
<td>28.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Regular ongoing coaching</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>Regular ongoing coaching</td>
<td>22.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Visit by Institutional admin</td>
<td>15.84%</td>
<td>Online or blended courses</td>
<td>19.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Online or blended courses</td>
<td>14.98%</td>
<td>Visit by Institutional admin</td>
<td>17.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Academies or certified PD programs</td>
<td>12.24%</td>
<td>Academies or certified PD programs</td>
<td>10.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n = 2,846 \)
Learning Management Systems & PD

Using the same LMS teachers use in the classroom to host professional development is a known best practice. It allows teachers to experience learning as their students do, it provides opportunities for asynchronous PD, and it makes modeling easier to translate to the classroom.

According to the faculty and administrators who took our survey, 54% of them say the LMS used in the classroom is the same used for PD. This tends to shift the PD dynamic from one-off workshops towards a more blended or on-demand approach.

*Is the same LMS used in the classroom also used to conduct or support professional development?*

![Pie chart showing 54.1% Yes and 45.9% No](chart.png)
Collaboration, PLCs, and PLNs
How Broadly are Educators Collaborating?

Collaboration can happen at many levels. Most of our respondents collaborate with other members of their departments. But far fewer collaborate with their peers in other departments and schools.

Seeing as how faculty collaboration is the #1 priority for administrators and technology continues to become more social, collaboration beyond the department or grade level may become the norm.

What’s the highest level of collaboration and sharing of best practices, ideas, etc. faculty practice at your institution?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among members of a department or grade-level term</td>
<td>29.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among internal professional learning communities (PLCs) of 3 or more members</td>
<td>18.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between individuals in siloed or limited fashion</td>
<td>17.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across multiple departments</td>
<td>16.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across multiple schools (a.k.a. across the institution or campus)</td>
<td>12.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globally with educators or institutions around the world</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and sharing is not happening at any level</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focusing on PLCs and PLNs

The rest of this section will focus on professional learning communities (PLCs) and personal learning networks (PLNs). While PLCs are structured, often mandated small groups of educators that work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and student performance, PLNs are much more informal and less structured collaborations between a broader network of educators. It must be noted that people often confuse these terms, which can muddy the data a bit.
Who’s Who in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs are growing in popularity, particularly as technologies become more social and administrators look for ways to boost collaboration and PD efforts. Nearly 68% of the people who took this survey participate in PLCs.

*Do you participate in a PLC?*

As you can see, different roles and grade levels are involved in PLCs to different degrees. Not surprisingly, there’s a steep drop off with regard to IT and Superintendents.

*Participation in PLC, by job function*
The Driving Forces Behind PLCs

According to the data, the respondents with the most education experience are also the ones participating the most in PLCs. Those newer to the profession who aren’t encouraged to participate in PLCs may want to consider getting involved due to their well-documented benefits.

**Participation in PLCs, by experience level**

Based on size, the number of institutions that encourage PLC participation is pretty even across the board. There’s a steep drop off when looking at the smallest institutions.

**Does your institution encourage participation in PLCs? (by enrollment)**
It’s important for PLCs to have regular channels of communication. The preferred channels for a large majority of our respondents are face-to-face and email. Interestingly, more asynchronous methods using social tools aren’t utilized nearly as often, even though they are designed to bolster communication and collaboration.

Similarly, only 15% use their LMSs to create and share resources within their PLCs. This specific data point may change as LMSs add more social tools and educators realize the benefits of creating, sharing, and delivering instructional resources in the same environment.

How do you stay connected to others in your PLC? (respondents could choose all answers that applied)

- Face-to-face meetings: 74.49%
- Email: 70.19%
- Twitter: 18.51%
- Facebook: 15.34%
- Asynchronous groups in your LMS: 15.09%
- Virtual/video chat meetings: 11.87%
- LinkedIn: 7.31%
When it comes to how beneficial PLCs and PLNs are for professional growth, a whopping 81% of respondents agree that PLCs are effective PD tools. Almost 30% think they are “Very Effective.”

Considering how PLC participation dwindles among the least experienced educators and a large majority of respondents don’t collaborate with PLCs at all, the data above suggests it’s worth the investment to do so.
The Human Impact of Digital Learning
The Impact of Digital Learning on Student Achievement and Teaching Effectiveness

We asked respondents to offer up their opinions as to what degree digital learning positively impacts student growth and achievement (top) and faculty growth or teaching effectiveness (bottom).

There’s no question that respondents feel digital learning has positive impacts all around.

In your opinion, does digital or blended learning positively impact student growth or achievement?

- Very much: 52.18%
- Somewhat: 42.73%
- Very little: 4.11%
- Not at all: 0.98%

n = 2,846

In your opinion, does digital or blended learning positively impact faculty growth or teaching effectiveness?

- Very much: 45.19%
- Somewhat: 47.22%
- Very little: 6.47%
- Not at all: 1.12%

n = 2,846
How Does Digital Learning Affect Student Engagement?

When asked how engaged they thought their students were in learning, around 85% of respondents say their students are either “somewhat” or “very” engaged.

How engaged are your students in the learning process?

![Bar chart showing engagement levels]

So we had to ask whether or not there was a difference in student engagement between institutions with an LMS and those without. The chart below shows that respondents who have an LMS also report more student engagement. Considering that around 50.6 million students were enrolled in public schools for Fall 2017, this difference could represent a massive number of students in the US.

The Impact of LMS Adoption on Student Engagement

![Bar chart showing impact of LMS adoption]
Preparing Students for College and Career Readiness

Getting students college and career ready is the ultimate goal of any educational institution. Over 82% of our respondents consider their institutions to be effective at preparing students for their futures.

How effective at preparing students for college and career readiness do you consider your institution to be?

There’s an interesting difference in the perception of institutional effectiveness between those who use an LMS and those who don’t. If this data applied across the U.S., a 16% difference (shown below) in effectiveness would represent several thousand institutions.

Difference in effectiveness with preparing students for college & careers based on if institution has LMS
Professional satisfaction is an important metric, especially in a time of such rapid change to educational norms and strategies. Over 84% of respondents are satisfied with the current state of their careers to some degree.

An interesting finding of this survey is a possible correlation between regular use of an LMS and overall satisfaction. According to our data, the respondents who use their LMSs more also report higher rates of satisfaction.

LMSs are designed to save educators time and enhance the teaching and learning experiences. According to this graph, they may be working.

**Career Satisfaction Relative to Frequency of LMS Use**
Final Thoughts

There you have it—the results of Schoology’s inaugural Global State of Digital Learning Survey. With your help, we have compiled a snapshot of top challenges for teachers and administrators, we’ve begun to uncover the connection between digital learning and student engagement, and we’ve even found evidence of the importance of having a dedicated instructional coordinator staff.

Rest assured that we will continue to dig into this data and share the useful insights we uncover with you via ebooks, infographics, articles, and blog posts.

Thank you everyone who participated in the survey. And a special thanks to all of you who worked tirelessly to design and implement the survey, compile the data, and present it all to the public.

Until next year!

Want to see an LMS with everything you need to meet your educational goals? Explore our platform in a fun, self-guided tour.