



Unexpected E-learning Illuminates the Technology Issues in Our Schools

By Educator Barnes – March 30, 2020

If parents suspected there were issues at their children's school, those issues might stand out even more now that parents have been tasked with helping their children with e-learning. Some school leaders knew there were issues, but they haven't received the help they needed. I remember when I learned that we were moving away from paper and pencil state standardized assessment. Many school leaders were upset.

Some leaders in rural Indiana reminded the IDOE that there is not reliable internet in some parts of the state. Some leaders in urban school districts shared they did not have enough devices or limited devices to administer the test. Yes, the IDOE did allow some schools to use paper and pencil if they could not make it work. However, the reality was a shift to online testing was wanted, but the work to make this a successful reality for all schools did not get addressed beforehand.

Now, fast forward to the COVID-19 pandemic. These same school districts are sharing the same concerns. When is access to technology going to be addressed and the need met? Schools are finding temporary options to make this work, but what happens when schools open again?

Then, you have school districts where students are one-to-one or have adequate technology, yet students don't really know how to use technology efficiently. Let's give kids computers, but let's not teach them how to type. As part of the schedule that I created for my children, I have them practice typing daily, so they can learn how to type. This will continue once they return to school. It is painful to watch my sons peck type an entire assignment.

Most of the schools I have worked in have some sort of technology initiative. Typically, with new initiatives, you have early adopters who are all in, you have some who use technology enough to be compliant, and the rest only use it when they have to such as administering a state standardized test or a district test. Now, you have children sitting at home having their parents teach them how to use the technology they have had access to during the year. Parents are in family rooms and at kitchen tables across America teaching their children how to attach a file to an email, how to download a PDF, how to create a new Google doc, how to submit a video on Flipgrid, how to mute on a Zoom video, etc. Tax dollars went to purchasing materials that children don't know how to use.

Technology will never be a substitute for a teacher, but teachers need to know how to use technology effectively to help with instruction. Teachers needed this instruction and support long before the school closures took place. Technology access and effectiveness is only one piece of the picture that will need to be addressed once schools reopen.