



Guidebook *for* **Digital Learning** executive summary





Arkansas Digital Learning Plan

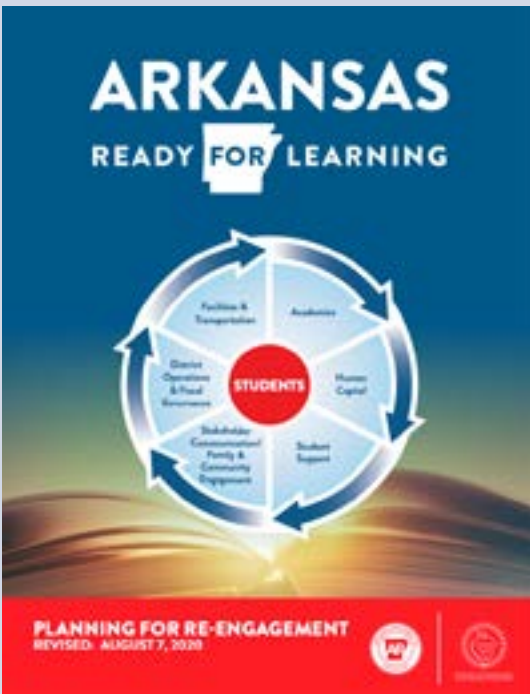
Blended Learning in Our Schools

Introduction

The re-opening of schools for the 2020-21 school year amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic brought about a myriad of challenges that schools have never before faced. This monumental task required first-time solutions, unimaginable in years past. Until recently, a comprehensive digital learning program model was a novelty for most schools, rather than the standard for all.

In the few short months since school started in August, a plethora of models for providing digital learning programs have evolved, and the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recognized the complexities and insistent needs interconnected to providing blended learning in schools. Thinking forward about the context by which schools will offer digital programming and the challenges around infrastructure, connectivity, and instructional platforms, DESE has established a standard application and approval process for district digital learning programs.

A Guidebook for Digital Learning has been designed to Build common knowledge and language; Provide high-quality training opportunities; and Provide guidance and resources to support districts with implementing digital learning programs. This is the executive summary for the Arkansas Digital Learning Plan.



Looking Back: School Year in Review

The vast majority of districts sought to offer a virtual OPTION as large numbers of families chose not to send their children back to school due to potential threats associated with COVID-19. In response to districts’ appeals for options, DESE developed Arkansas Ready for Learning to sanction an alternative structure by which districts could meet the varied needs of their learners. Arkansas Ready for Learning allowed districts to opt in, offering a virtual OPTION and access to the needed flexibility for operation without additional waivers. For some districts, the option to provide digital learning was achieved through virtual days, fully remote options, or a full conversion charter. Looking back, there was limited time for districts to take a digital learning program to scale through a

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strategic plan that was fully embedded in school operations and culture. This reflection led DESE to develop additional supports that would allow schools to offer robust digital learning programs.

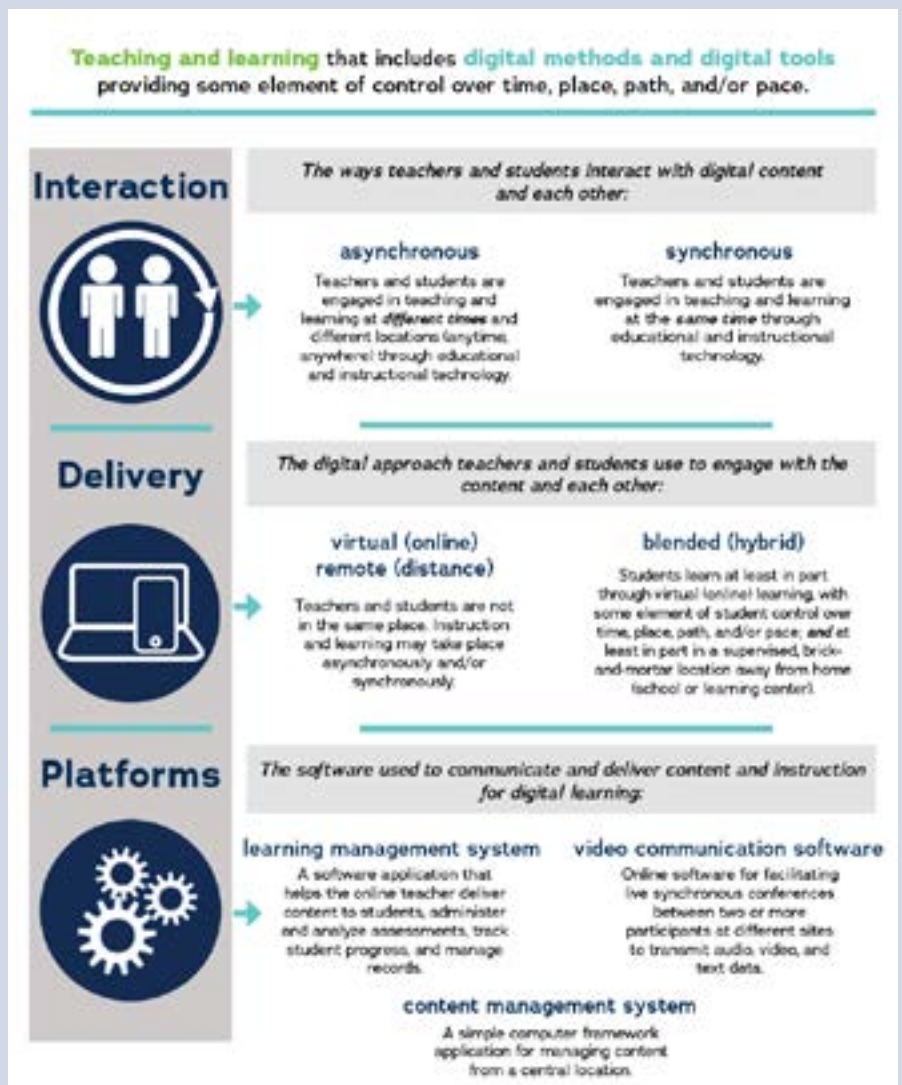
Looking Forward: Navigating Digital Learning in Arkansas Schools

Numerous school districts are experiencing high levels of success with remote learning options provided through AR Ready for Learning. Conversely, there are a number of schools that have struggled with challenges associated with offering digital learning opportunities. These districts desire to deliver flexible options but need robust guidance and support to do so. The Guidebook for Digital Learning will support providing a digital learning OPTIONS with strategic programming and clear identification of the necessary criteria for success.

Defining Digital Learning: Building Common Language

Digital learning provides flexibility for innovation to support a student-focused vision. There are numerous digital learning models that have been successfully implemented across the nation and others that are emerging. A true blended learning model provides the student some element of control over time, place, path, and/or pace of learning. Teaching and learning that includes digital methods and tools requires consideration of 3 components.

- Delivery
- Interaction
- Platform



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Planning for Success

Thinking about the K-12 Spectrum of Digital Learning, it is critical to purposefully plan for implementation. Districts are encouraged to utilize a strategic planning process to ensure implementation from Choosing the digital model and Considering the hardware, software, and technology supports to Identifying the content choices & LMS Integration. The Guidebook for Digital Learning provides the necessary resources to plan for success.

Starting Point: Building a Digital Program

When building a digital program, determining the Interaction, Delivery, and Platforms are most essential to the decision-making process. Districts are encouraged to use the graphic below to begin conversations with Arkansas Ready for Learning Teams. Districts should also consider the support system for teachers, students, and families as they make decisions about offering a digital program. The Guidebook for Digital Learning will provide greater detail and information for teams to make informed decisions.



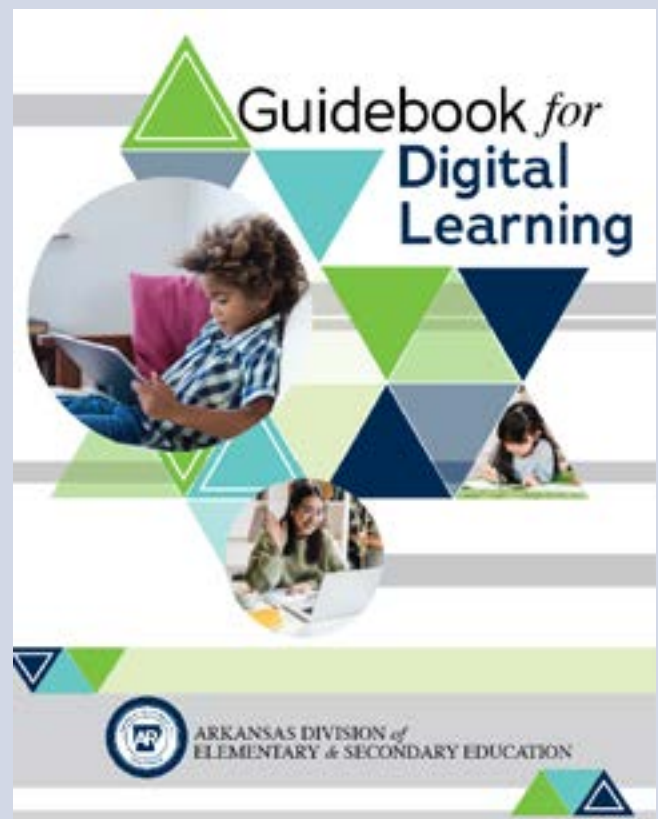
Technical Assistance

Beginning with the 2021-22 school year, districts may apply for approval to offer a digital learning program under their current LEA. Technical Assistance for intentionally deploying digital programs will be embedded in the Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Cycle. Program implementation should be grounded in Arkansas ESSA's aim to "integrate new efforts with existing improvement cycles" (AR ESSA, 2017).



The Guidebook for Digital Learning is designed for Arkansas Ready for Learning Teams to facilitate the planning process for officially integrating a digital learning program into the operations and culture of the school.

Recognizing that schools are in different places regarding digital learning, offering a digital program is **OPTIONAL**. As districts reflect and make decisions around the flexibility of education for students onsite and remotely, it is essential to consider the full scope of taking the digital program to scale.



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Timeline: Road to Approval



Next Steps:

Application Process

Districts that are ready to offer a digital learning program should apply to operate a virtual (online), remote (distance), or hybrid (blended) program options. Waivers applicable to the digital learning program option will be indicated in the application document. Waivers have been aligned to different options and are differentiated based on selected options for Interactions, Delivery, and Platforms.

Alternative Methods of Instruction (AMI)

Per Arkansas Code Annotated § 6-10-127, a district may apply for up to 10 days of AMI for the use of alternative methods of instruction, including [remote] learning, on days when the district is closed due to exceptional or emergency circumstances such as:

- contagious disease outbreak
- inclement weather
- other acts of God
- utility outage

There will be instances when the district will need to decide whether to close down and make-up the school day or to apply their AMI practices.

Considerations for using an AMI Day		
Indicators to determine a makeup day	Indicators to determine the use of AMI Days	If a district decides to apply for AMI and a Digital Program
<p>The school will be closed and the day will be made up at a later date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For funerals • For sporting events • If the power outage involves most of the district boundaries • If the school is conducting a professional development day • If teachers are unable or unavailable to provide instruction and support to student learning • If the district determines that it is in the best interest of students and teachers to make the day up at a later date (snow day, evacuation/ displacement or illness of many students and teachers) 	<p>The school will document an AMI day for contagious disease outbreak, inclement weather, utility outage or other acts of God that prevent students from physically attending school on campus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When learning is planned and instruction can continue remotely for all students • Students have access to paper packets or digital learning prior to the AMI day • When teachers are available to provide instruction and support for student learning • Parents have received clear communication regarding the student learning expectations for the AMI day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They should consider how the digital program will support AMI Plans • Use the same application, though separate requests, to denote plans for AMI and digital options • If only applying for AMI, proceed to the application.

In Conclusion: *Moving Forward*

The need to advance digital learning in schools has evolved in response to the current health emergency. Moving forward, implementing quality digital learning must become an integral part of the school improvement process as called for in ESSA. This approach promotes personalization of learning through a student-focused system. Moreover, providing robust digital learning options better prepares Arkansas' students to graduate prepared for college, career, and community engagement.