

Doing More with Less: Common Core, Next Generation Assessments, Teacher Evaluation

School leaders across the country are operating in a pressure cooker. With each passing month, the demands on school budgets increase as a result of new teacher/administrator evaluation systems, more rigorous standards and assessments, and other new requirements. Administrators and teachers are caught in an unprecedented command to do more with less.

The Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Assessments will require students to successfully engage in more rigorous and relevant curricula than ever before. Schools will need to support this shift during a time of increasingly tight resources. In effect, they will need to find ways to do more — and do it differently — with less.

As we have watched the nation's most rapidly improving schools, we have learned many important lessons on how they successfully went against past practice and dramatically improved student achievement. Above all, one practice these schools have embraced is central to their success: digital learning.

These schools utilize blended learning, online learning, digital instruction, and even game-based apps and activities to provide rigorous and relevant learning experiences for ALL students. In these schools, digital tools are more than just plug-and-play solutions; technology is changing the roles of both teaching and learning.

- **Teaching:** Technology shifts the teacher's role from disseminator of information and assessor of knowledge gain to facilitator of learning and manager of the learning process.
- **Learning:** Incorporating technology into the learning process exploits a comfort level that most students already possess. Digital natives are always "on"; they are increasingly communicating, exploring, planning, solving problems, and collaborating with their peers outside of school through technology. By bringing technology into the classroom, students engage in their learning in a way that is useful, fun, natural, and well, "normal."

Learning Through Gaming

One digital approach rapidly improving schools are taking advantage of is learning through gamification, which involves applying the underlying motivational elements that engage game players and sustain their effort. Those elements are:

- **Purpose:** All games — from the currently popular Angry Birds app to the classic Monopoly board game — have a specific reason for playing: setting or reaching a goal and maybe even winning. Kids — just like adults — want to feel adept and successful.



- **Progress:** Games — especially digital or app-based games — are challenging, but not so challenging that the next level is unattainable. And by visibly tracking progress with hopes of achieving a high score, players’ interest remains piqued while they continuously improve their performance.
- **Agency:** Think of “agency” as a synonym for control. The student takes charge and drives his or her own effort and success, sometimes without even realizing he or she is doing so.
- **Community:** Today’s students are playing against others around the world as team members, including strategic planning and dialogue along the way and — as a result of gamifying learning — they are developing essential communication, collaboration, and leadership skills in ways not available to previous generations.

The principles of gaming naturally foster and enhance relationships and build learner engagement. Games have a lot to teach us about motivating student behavior, but it's only when we get under the hood that we see that games are applying familiar research-based best practices. Rapidly improving schools understand how to harness these principles to increase student achievement.

Virtual Classrooms

As we look to the immediate future, it is clear that technology is not only impacting education through gaming, but also with online learning, which is about to increase dramatically.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 55 percent of districts had students enrolled in online courses in 2010-11. It predicts that number will expand to 75 percent of districts by 2014-15.

A 2012 study by the Education Center at the Parthenon Group compares the average cost of traditional, blended, and fully virtual models per student per year. The study showed the national averages as:

Instructional Pricing Model	Average Cost Per Student
Traditional	\$10,000
Blended	\$8,900
Fully Virtual	\$6,400

As a result, when schools leverage online tools and resources such as Quest for Learning, Khan Academy, or Penn Foster High School or models such as New Tech High, KIPP, or Department of Defense programs, they are changing the playing field in ways that would appear from emerging evidence to be transformatively effective.



Digital approaches are proving to be consistent with the world beyond school in the following ways. ([http://publications.sreb.org/2012/12T01 Inc Online.pdf](http://publications.sreb.org/2012/12T01%20Inc%20Online.pdf))

Interacting with digital tools is what students and teachers do outside of school every day: emailing, texting, banking, shopping, getting directions, managing personal records and information, researching, checking spelling, and even translating. Almost anything that can be done on a laptop, tablet, or smartphone will seem familiar, meaningful, and natural in a learning situation.

Technology allows schools to change how learning transpires by helping students to take charge of their own — and others’ — learning. From the existing and emerging large national providers of online learning, such as K-12 Florida Virtual and Penn Foster, to individual courses provided by boutique providers, students are able to work at their own pace. To serve the needs of those remote (and frequently non-traditional) learners who are not physically located “in a classroom” with their teachers or peers, these providers have developed a unique “service culture.” This is a system and process in which peer-to-peer learning and self-help, encourage, train, and allow students to become self-reliant and to take charge of their own learning. This innovative and transformational model:

- Frees up teachers and advisers to help more students who need one-to-one support;
- Allows students to find answers and support when they need them;
- Helps students to become more independent and active self-learners and problem solvers;
- Builds a sense of community;
- Promotes student interaction and provides opportunities for more capable students or those with advanced knowledge or talents to assist their peers and thereby develop their own leadership and communication skills.

Technology allows schools to do more with limited fiscal resources. For instance, the flipped classroom model in which students watch lectures online, at home, and at their own pace, makes better use of class time by automating routine tasks and enabling face-to-face student/teacher time to focus on high-value, engaging activities.

Next Steps

Technology, digital instruction, and learning show great promise for delivering higher results at lower cost and less time. The devil, however, is in the details of planning and implementation. For more than 20 years, the Model Schools Conference has showcased the nation’s most successful practices. This year, the theme is “Doing More with Less: Common Core, Next Generation Assessments, Teacher Evaluations.”



Conference attendees can expect to learn best and next practices around:

- Digital delivery of personalized instruction for improved student performance at substantial cost savings.
- Models of transformative schools and practices.
- Guidance with strategic planning and implementation.

Go to www.modelschoolsconference.com for more information.

