

ED TECH SUCCESS STORIES

During the 2020 pandemic America's colleges and universities needed to immediately transition from in-person learning to virtual. SIIA's Ed Tech members products help schools across the country bridge the gap keeping students and instructors engaged and learning. Here are their stories.

IN FOCUS:

UCPS
UNION COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Union County
Public Schools and
LearnPlatform**





UNION COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION

Union County Public Schools (UCPS) is the sixth largest school district in North Carolina. Just outside of Charlotte, the county serves approximately 40,000 students across more than 50 schools. They're proud to offer programs to their students and boast a graduation rate over 90%. Part of what makes UCPS thrive is the autonomy they provide schools over their classroom resources. As individual schools have more insight into what might work best for their students they have agency to choose what ed tech is best suited for them.

Prior to the pandemic, decisions about ed tech used in classrooms were largely made at the school level. However, the rapid acceleration of virtual and hybrid remote learning technology caused confusion with staying abreast with classroom tools offered across the district. UCPS' central office wanted more visibility into what schools were buying to ensure support programs and instructional practices were working well for all students.

District leaders set out to discover how to retain site-based freedom for their teachers and principals while ensuring key student privacy, and security compliance requirements were met and investments were delivering value. In other words, they needed a solution to organize, review and vet the technology schools used in order to ensure the quality of the tools being used. Three key pieces the solution needed to address were how to:

- Promote local control for teachers and principals while ensuring ed tech choices met student data privacy requirements.
- Provide district-wide visibility into ed tech usage and licensing agreements to enable more informed decisions across the district.
- Streamline all facets of ed tech management within a single system configured specifically for the district's needs.

The Solution

Enter LearnPlatform. LearnPlatform is an ed tech effectiveness system that streamlines requests and other processes and analyzes ed tech interventions to gauge the level of value they provide. District leaders implemented LearnPlatform and soon after were quickly able to manage a district library of approved tools using a centralized platform. Through using LearnPlatform, UCPS was able not only to find an all-in-one solution to their problem but also able to achieve four major goals that facilitated smoother operations for ed tech tools.





INCREASING EQUITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

1. **Organize tools:** The district identified spending and needs criteria, such as student data privacy requirements, achievement goals and school improvement plans. UCPS then started to see trends and opportunities to shift from unmanaged and/or non-compliant tools via the report generated by LearnPlatform.
2. **Ask for teacher input on existing ed tech:** UCPS asked teachers for feedback on school and district-level purchased tools. Educator input was and continues to be essential to the district's ed tech ecosystem, with input incorporated into future ed tech selection.
3. **Provide consistent communication and training support:** UCPS gave all educators access to its district product library with approval statuses displayed for each product, allowing them to quickly identify approved tools.
4. **Streamline ed tech request process:** Teachers can now use the product request functionality in the platform to suggest products to be vetted for approval, notifying administrators when a request comes through. The district built essential elements, like data privacy requirements and interoperability, into the request process to increase efficiency and transparency.

Providing Greater Equity

With the sudden shift to remote learning in the spring of 2020, the district had a renewed sense of urgency in managing the digital tools used by students and teachers. Casey Rimmer, UCPS' Director of Innovation, emphasized how having their centralized product library and streamlined request processes were critical to the effort of advancing student growth. "Using LearnPlatform, we give teachers and principals the academic freedom they deserve, ensure students are protected and can even determine which ed tech is best for our students based on outcomes," Rimmer said.

In addition to the four initial goals, her team has continued to work on improving access to key information on ed tech usage and effectiveness. As part of this, using LearnPlatform, the district began to take notice of trends and opportunities for underutilized and ineffective tools. This is essential to ensuring resources are equitably distributed and investments are adequately supported.

The district is committed to equitable access to resources, seeking alternatives to traditional (often chaotic and time-consuming) ed tech procurement processes in order to better personalize learning at scale and help students with college and career readiness.





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Supporting Teachers

Partnering with LearnPlatform saved teachers a significant amount of time spent researching and identifying ed tech tools for classroom use and provided them with product insights from more than 100,000 educators across the country. With LearnPlatform, educators are given the academic freedom they deserve, students have assured protection while learning with online tools, and educators can determine which ed tech is best for our students based on outcomes.

LearnPlatform also empowers educators to initiate a request of what they need for their students and get status updates along the way – giving them confidence that their voices will be heard in purchasing decisions. The product library offers teachers the evidence they need to make informed decisions when choosing tools to implement in their classrooms.

Looking Ahead

When navigating ed tech during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UCPS team refocused on the core reason they implemented LearnPlatform in the first place: to identify and communicate district-supported products it could provide training for, ensuring each tool was safe for students and advancing their growth.

The district continues to improve processes that help them make more evidence-based decisions about edtech usage, resource distribution and support. This iterative nature of edtech evaluation allows district leaders to deliver the best learning opportunities possible for students and teachers quickly and efficiently.

Moving forward, the team plans to take the next step in building its edtech ecosystem: running rapid-cycle evaluations (RCEs) consistently and purposefully. Specifically, the UCPS team wants to dig into which tools to sustain using ESSER funding and timing RCEs with the beginning of budget season. The team will then work with LearnPlatform to interpret evidence and take action with what it discovers.

<https://www.ucps.k12.nc.us/>

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