



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 5, 2014

Dear Colleague,

Technology can help transform learning when used with innovative instructional approaches such as those outlined in the [National Education Technology Plan](#). Yet many schools, particularly high-need schools, lack the connectivity, resources, and support for teachers and leaders needed to implement digital learning strategies. The President's [ConnectED Initiative](#), unveiled in June 2013, sets a clear goal to have high-speed internet to the classroom, affordable mobile learning devices, high-quality learning content, and support for teachers to move to digital learning within five years. To reach this goal, federal agencies, State and local educational agencies, and private-sector partners must work together to bring the right resources to the table. The purpose of this letter is to help State, district, and eligible partnership grantees better understand how they may be able to use their federal grant programs to support innovative technology-based strategies to personalize learning.

Educational technology advances quickly. Many of the terms we use today to describe technology-enhanced learning did not exist when laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were written. However, that does not mean that federal programs can't be used to support thoughtful implementation of educational technology to support schools and teachers in improving educational outcomes, consistent with program requirements. Many federal formula and competitive grant programs allow funds to be used to support digital learning, even if the program statutes do not reference educational technology specifically.

The enclosed document provides some examples of how funds from ESEA (Titles I, II, III) and IDEA may support the use of technology to improve instruction and student outcomes. Examples are limited to ESEA and IDEA due to the scale of these programs, but funds from many other formula and competitive grant programs that are administered by the Department of Education (ED) may also be used for this purpose. These examples do not depart from previous ED guidance, but clarify opportunities to use federal grant funds to support digital learning, including: (1) improving and personalizing professional learning and other supports for educators; (2) increasing access to high-quality digital content and resources for students; (3) facilitating educator collaboration and communication; and (4) providing devices for students to access digital learning resources. Funding these four areas is important because technology itself is not a panacea. Technology can help improve learning and educational outcomes for students only when teachers are well-supported with appropriate resources and have an opportunity to integrate technology with high quality instruction.

Coordination of Federal program support can help maximize the impact of available resources. For example, a school incorporating digital learning in a Title I schoolwide program might use Title I funds to purchase devices and digital learning resources, Title II funds to help teachers improve their teaching through effective blended-learning practices, and Title III funds to provide access to technology specifically for English Learners. As grantees incorporate technology into instructional practice, any use of technology for these purposes must comply with applicable privacy laws and the specific program requirements of each funding source.

We hope the examples and other information provided below will be helpful in your efforts to leverage advances in technology to improve student learning and achievement.

Sincerely,

Richard Culatta
Director, Office of Educational Technology

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

Examples of Leveraging ESEA and IDEA Funds for Digital Teaching and Learning

The examples below identify some of the ways in which grantees may use funds made available under ESEA and IDEA to support teaching and learning with technology through professional development, the development and acquisition of digital materials and resources for students, and educator communication and collaboration online. Each federal grant program has requirements that govern the use of funds, including allowable costs, eligible participants, and supplement not supplant. The examples below highlight how a grantee *can* use federal funds for technology consistent with these provisions.

1. Professional Development – Program funds may be used by grantees to support teachers as they implement digital learning tools effectively, use technology to personalize professional development, use data systems to support and improve teaching, and implement personalized (competency-based) professional learning for teachers.

Support Teachers Using Digital Learning Tools

Districts may use Title II-A funds to hire coaches or help grantees tailor professional learning to the needs of individual educators. For example, coaches might help educators learn to use selected devices, platforms, online assessments, or digital materials or to implement technology supported content-specific instructional practice, based on areas identified for improvement. *ESEA, sec. [2123\(a\)\(5\)\(A\)](#).*

Provide Online Professional Development

States and districts may use Title II-A funds to help district staff create or participate in personalized digital learning opportunities for teachers that help move districts away from one-size-fits-all professional development. This may take the form of “blended” professional learning, webinars, simulations, online conferences, massive open online courses (MOOCs), or online communities of practice. These strategies may help teachers better understand the subjects they teach, improve their instruction, and demonstrate proficiency in using technology to support learning. *ESEA, sec. [2113\(c\)\(10\)](#) and [2123\(a\)\(5\)](#).* School districts may also use Title I-A funds for similar purposes to benefit educators in schoolwide or targeted assistance Title I programs. *ESEA, secs. [1114\(a\)\(1\)](#), [\(b\)\(1\)\(D\)](#); [1115\(a\)](#), [\(c\)\(1\)\(F\)](#).*

Implement Systems to Collect, Manage, and Analyze Data

States may use Title II-A funds to support district programs that implement systems and supports for teachers and district leaders in the effective use of data to improve instruction and decision-making for school improvement efforts and accountability. *ESEA, sec. [2113\(c\)\(11\)](#).* Similarly, districts may use Title I-A funds to help educators in Title I schools manage and analyze student data in order to improve instruction and decision-making for school improvement efforts. *ESEA, sec. [1114](#), [1115](#).*

Adopt Digital Competency-Based Professional Development

States may use Title II-A funds to develop, or help school districts develop performance systems that reward and acknowledge professional learning outcomes that are competency-based rather than time- or input-based. This may include creation or coaching in the use of online portfolios or digital badges in place of seat-time-based certificates. *ESEA, sec. [2113\(c\)\(12\)](#).*

2. Student Materials, Resources, and Support – Federal funds may also be used by grantees to provide access to digital materials to better support students.

Provide Access to College- and Career-Ready (CCR) Digital Resources

States and districts may use Title II-A funds to help educators better discover, use, and share content that is aligned with CCR standards. This might include training for educators to find and adapt relevant [Open Educational Resources](#) (OER). *ESEA, secs. [2113\(c\)\(6\)](#) and [2123\(a\)\(3\)](#)*

Enhance Instruction for English Learners with Digital Resources

Districts may use Title III-A funds to improve instruction for English Learners by acquiring digital learning resources and software, including materials in languages other than English. *ESEA, secs. [3115\(d\)\(2\)](#), [3115\(d\)\(7\)](#).*

Expand the Use of Technology in the Individualized Education Program Process

States may use IDEA Part B set-aside funds to support the use of technology to help reduce paperwork and digitize the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process for families and teachers. *IDEA, sec. [611\(e\)\(2\)\(C\)\(ii\)](#).*

3. Educator Communication and Collaboration – Federal funds may be used by grantees for technology to enhance collaboration among educators, experts, and parents.

Use Technology to Communicate with Parents

States may use IDEA Part D State Professional Development Grants (SPDG) to enhance both special education and general education teachers' ability to effectively integrate technology to communicate with parents of students with disabilities. *IDEA, sec. [654\(a\)\(2\)\(C\)](#).*

Use Technology to Connect Educators with STEM Professionals

States may use Title II-B Math Science Partnership funds to purchase software and devices that are an essential component of a grantee's plan to create and provide digital professional learning communities (PLCs) with practicing scientists or engineers. *ESEA, sec. [2202\(c\)\(8\)](#).*

Participate in English Learner Focused Communities of Practice

Districts may use Title III-A funds for online professional development activities, virtual communities of practice, and sharing of digital materials to support efforts to improve instruction for English Learners. *ESEA, sec. [3115\(d\)\(2\)](#).*

4. Devices - Federal funds may be used by grantees to purchase devices for students to access digital learning materials and collaborate with peers and educators.

Provide Students with Mobile Learning Devices

Districts may use Title I-A funds to acquire devices (tablets, laptops, etc.) in addition to curriculum and professional development as part of a comprehensive plan in a Title I schoolwide program school. This may include transitioning to school-wide blended learning or personalized learning models. *ESEA, sec. [1114](#).*

Provide Students with Assistive Technology Devices

States may use IDEA Part B funds set aside for State-level activities to support the use of assistive technology devices that maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. *IDEA, sec. [611\(e\)\(2\)\(C\)\(v\)](#).* Districts may use IDEA Part B funds to provide the specific assistive technology devices and services that are identified by the IEP team as needed by an individual student to receive free appropriate public education. *IDEA, sec. [613\(a\)\(2\)\(A\)\(i\)](#).*

These are just a few examples of allowable uses of grant program funds that may support the development, implementation, and expansion of technology-based approaches to help improve student achievement and educator effectiveness. To identify further opportunities, please review the statutes, regulations, and guidance for each federal program or contact the U.S. Department of Education. Additional resources for planning and implementing technology to support learning are available at <http://www.ED.gov/technology>.

If you have any questions after reviewing this document, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Office of Educational Technology or the Title I, II, III or IDEA program offices directly. Contact information is provided below.

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