

# Enhance In-Class Instruction

With These 8 Benefits of Digital Resources



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**In the current educational climate, students continue to struggle. Teachers feel burnt out.**

How can school leaders support students and teachers who deal with these and other challenges? And how to do it in a time of tech fatigue?

A vast body of research shows that the answer lies in intelligently deploying digital resources.

**Why? Because it works.**

**A 2021 AT&T study revealed that 94% of teachers feel open to using digital resources to enhance in-class instruction.<sup>[1]</sup>**

That figure may seem surprising given teachers', students' and parents' well-chronicled screen fatigue. But using digital resources does not mean teachers have to spend all day running Zoom classes or simultaneously teaching students in-person and online.

So what does the intelligent use of digital resources look like? The opportunities are endless. Consider a few examples:

- **Students** overcome learning loss through fun and engaging activities that take only minutes a day.
- **Teachers** save hours on lesson planning by using a comprehensive digital resource that integrates with their learning management system.
- **Students** watch a video with a customized introduction by their teacher to allow more time in class for face-to-face lessons and small-group discussions.
- **Teachers** tailor new assignments based on the student's progress and interests.

This playbook will examine the top eight benefits of using digital resources to supplement in-class instruction for students and teachers.

## 4 Benefits for Students

### **Student Benefit #1: Using digital resources to supplement traditional classroom instruction produces better student outcomes**

The research clearly shows it: When teachers use digital resources to enhance in-class instruction, it produces better student outcomes than conventional in-class instruction alone.

Study after study shows that students achieve better grades and test scores when using digital resources to supplement in-person instruction.<sup>[2]</sup> Digital supplements also improve students' performance on critical thinking, problem-solving and logical reasoning tests.<sup>[3]</sup>

These findings prove remarkably consistent. No matter the grade level or the subject matter, students tend to perform better when they have access to digital resources. Researchers around the world have demonstrated the benefits of digital tools.

To take only one example, consider a recent study published in the *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*. This study showed that elementary school students who used digital supplements performed much better on math and science tests than did students who received in-class instruction alone. The researchers characterized the benefits of using digital tools as “quite large.”<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Significantly, teachers don't need to follow a particular learning model for their students to benefit from digital resources.**

As researchers concluded after a systematic review of the literature on digital technology, “Leveraging technology is an essential part of every learning mode.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Why do digital resources prove so effective at improving student outcomes? **Read on to see how they engage students and meet their greatest needs.**



## **Student Benefit #2: Digital resources combat learning loss and meet students where they are**

School leaders, teachers and parents understandably feel concerned about addressing learning losses from the pandemic.

### **The crucial question asks, “How do we help students come back from losses they’ve experienced?”**

Clear evidence shows that digital support works wonders in bringing struggling students back up to grade level.<sup>[6]</sup>

The recent study published in the *International Journal of Educational Development* projects that traditional classroom instruction could reduce learning loss by half. But introducing digital supplements could fully overcome the learning loss—and then some.<sup>[7]</sup>

Digital curriculum consultant and former teacher Emily Ice has seen how quickly students get back up to speed using digital resources. Take elementary school students struggling to master multiplication facts. “Interactive math games are a much more engaging way for students to learn than studying flashcards or doing multiplication drills,” said Ice, who now works as the K–12 content manager for Infobase’s *Learn360* streaming multimedia resource.

**“Interactive games allow students to make the most of every minute in the classroom and work towards individualized goals and accelerate their learning.”**

Students with learning differences also benefit from digital resources. In fact, one study found that they saw the greatest gains from digital supplements.<sup>[8]</sup>

Just as important, digital resources serve advanced students who might otherwise become bored. These resources prove equally effective in multi-age classrooms. They offer teachers an efficient way to assign students activities that match their level of achievement.



### **Student Benefit #3: Digital resources increase student engagement**

A researcher at the University of Northern Iowa conducted a meta-analysis of 25 peer-reviewed studies on K–12 education. The main takeaway? Using digital technology to support classroom instruction increased “student engagement, student achievement and positive student perceptions of learning.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Students themselves report being much more engaged — both cognitively and emotionally.<sup>[10]</sup>

Why? Several reasons contribute to these effects, including:

- **Agency:** Students learn actively rather than passively when using digital resources. They can also follow their interests.
- **Independence:** Students can learn at their own pace. They can pause and rewind audio or video if needed; they can review readings before or after class. They discover a more personalized learning experience.
- **21st-Century Skills:** Digital resources give students experience with a range of software and technologies. Developing these skills will serve them well in their lives and careers.



Emily Ice has seen digital tools engage and empower her students. “As a teacher,” Ice explained, “you can see the subject areas and content types that students gravitate to. So while working within your lesson plan, you can help them find other activities that relate to what they’re passionate about. Students love having the ability to follow their interests.”

Emma McDonald agreed. McDonald works as the library systems manager at the Mesquite (Texas) Independent School District and has authored books such as *Classrooms That Spark* and *Survival Kit for New Teachers*.

**“Students really enjoy being actively involved in their learning,” she said.**

“When you’re passively taking in information, whether it’s listening to a teacher or read in a text you’re not as engaged as you are if you’re using an interactive learning tool.”





#### **Student Benefit #4: Digital resources help students have meaningful in-class experiences**

What happens when students can watch lectures or videos on their own time? It frees up class time for small-group discussions, group projects, face-to-face lessons with teachers and other meaningful experiences.

Digital tools can even maximize the impact of these in-class activities. Emma McDonald noted how digital assets make small-group work more efficient. Traditionally, a teacher would spend much of the class period walking around to speak with each group. Now, the teacher sets up a shared digital document where all groups enter their feedback. That way, the whole class can see – and discuss – each group’s findings in real-time.

#### **Digital resources also make traditional assignments more engaging for students.**

Emily Ice remembered how excited her students were to incorporate technology in the classroom. “When I first started teaching second grade, we did very traditional culture projects,” remembered Ice. “Students would learn about a culture they were interested in and write out the facts on a poster board.”

Soon, however, students began producing slide decks and PowerPoint presentations. “We videotaped the students’ presentations and even made a QR code available so parents and grandparents could watch the videos wherever they were.”

“We were still doing a research project,” said Ice, “but we incorporated all these 21st-century tools that made the work more exciting for the students and more accessible to their families.”



## 4 Benefits for Teachers

### **Teacher Benefit #1: Digital resources protect teachers' most valuable commodity: *their time***

Teacher burnout remains a serious concern. A recent *National Education Association* survey showed that 55% of teachers want to leave their profession earlier than initially planned.<sup>[11]</sup> One teacher told the Christensen Institute: “The workload is unreal. The pressure on teachers during this time is more than ever before.”<sup>[12]</sup>

Some teachers experiencing burnout feel inclined to pull back from technology.<sup>[13]</sup> This instinct seems understandable given that, during the pandemic, “technology” meant Zoom classes and synchronous hybrid teaching.

### **This experience should not be how educational technology works.**

Think of the hours teachers spend in the copy room preparing handouts and quizzes. But with a good digital resource? A simple upload takes care of the problem.

How about finding resources to align with their scripted lesson plans? Or identifying culturally inclusive texts? Teachers will spend hours scouring the web for the right piece. But if they have access to a digital resource with high-quality educational content, the right material stays at their fingertips.

This benefit appears especially powerful when the digital resource supports curriculum standards. Emma McDonald noted that in her district, “Teachers can go into the digital resource to find their grade level and subject area, and it will pull up the relevant state standards.” The online content updates regularly, allowing teachers to keep their lessons fresh.

A digital resource helps teachers integrate with your school's existing curriculum and tools like Google Classroom. Emily Ice said that teachers embrace a comprehensive digital resource when they see this powerful alignment. “Even the most reluctant person will get excited to see what they can do with it.”

In a time of burnout, making the teacher's life easier has an enormous impact on them and their students.



**Teacher Benefit #2: Digital resources don't detract from what teachers love doing; it enhances it**

During the pandemic, both teachers and students grew frustrated with the lack of connectedness.

But digital resources can enhance the teacher's connection with students. A systematic review published last year showed that seeing the teacher's face or hearing the teacher's voice in instructional videos helped students feel more connected.<sup>[14]</sup>

A good digital resource lets teachers do that easily — whether recording an entire lesson or making a short video introduction to an existing assignment.

Digital resources accentuate the teacher's importance, explained Emily Ice. "We're not telling teachers enough that you are the connecting piece for all this digital content," Ice clarified.

**"Students won't remember the digital resource they use; they'll remember the teacher who uses it and who sparked their love of learning."**

Teachers needn't abandon their favorite lessons or projects. Instead, they can upload them into their digital resource. Teachers can also share lessons with other teachers looking for inspiration. "I've taught in many different places around the world, and there is something so unifying about knowing that teachers everywhere are creating and innovating to support their students and one another," said Ice.



### **Teacher Benefit #3: Digital resources allow teachers to tailor assignments to students' needs**

Teachers don't need to wait for test results at the end of a unit when using a comprehensive digital resource. They can track a student's progress on embedded quizzes.

With those insights in hand, the teacher can tailor assignments and maximize class time. If a student or a group of students struggles with a particular concept, the teacher can assign materials to help in that area.

Digital tools help the teacher see where students thrive and where they need support. In Emily Ice's words, an effective digital resource allows a teacher "to assess and to meet students where they are, with less struggle on the teacher's part."

Emma McDonald explained this functionality has benefited teachers and students in her school district. "A teacher will give a pre-test to gauge where students are on a certain set of skills," McDonald said. "If the assessment shows that a student hasn't yet mastered the skills, the teacher can assign a learning game or another digital tool until the student has command of the material."

McDonald added that digital resources allow the teacher flexibility in approaching students. "An interactive lesson might contain some text, a short video and an activity," she said. "It's not one long text or a 35-minute video. Students are immediately engaging with and responding to the learning material. This is a very valuable tool for helping students.

**"Digital resources provide that extra edge when helping us meet the needs of all students," McDonald observed.**



#### **Teacher Benefit #4: Digital resources allow teachers to appeal to different interests and learning styles**

Digital resources allow teachers to see what materials students turn to and how they engage with different media.

This information provides crucial evidence about two things:

1. The student's interests.
2. The student's preferred learning style.

Does a student struggle to focus during in-class lectures but watches videos on the digital platform? Excellent — the teacher can pull up related videos on the digital resource.

Does the student seek out material about the environment? Wonderful — a good digital resource will have plenty of relevant content.

As a teacher, Emily Ice used digital resources to feed students' interests. One former student of hers who loved coding leveraged that passion during a project on animals. "Rather than do a traditional report, the student coded an entire animal habitat."

Ice further commented that digital resources enable "a big move within education." **They're "turning the student into the creator."**

Digital resources help teachers address different learning styles, Emma McDonald added. "With some students, all they need to do is read about a topic, and they've got it," McDonald said. "But others need to hear about it. Others need to talk about it." Digital resources provide readings, videos and audio content all on the same topic.





## How Can School Leaders Best Support Students and Teachers?

These are challenging times. Learning loss, teacher burnout and students' social and emotional health — all these and more remain problems our schools must confront.

So how can school leaders best support students and teachers? No magic fix exists, of course. But a growing body of research points to the power of using a comprehensive digital resource to supplement in-class instruction.

More than 9 out of 10 teachers want to use digital tools — as long as they have the right resources and support.<sup>[15]</sup> That gap offers a place where school leaders can make a real impact. Equipping teachers with a high-quality, easy-to-use digital resource will help both teachers and students flourish. And that means you will have flourishing schools.





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