

## Digital Equity Reflection - June 24, 2016

My most powerful takeaway from the Digital Equity conference was how important it is for us, as educators, to have a realistic vision for what educational resources, if any, our students have access to outside of school. The opening speaker did a phenomenal job of clarifying the differences between equity and equality. He reminded the audience that it is irresponsible to assume that all Digital Divide issues can be eliminated by putting a device in the hands of all of our students without ensuring that they have equitable access to connectivity away from school.

My second most powerful takeaway was how desperately we need to get families on board with our vision to utilize technology effectively as we expose students to essential skills needed for their future endeavors. I especially liked what the mayor of Lexington had to say about using public buildings more effectively to maximize resources for students and families. He also brought up the point that jobs of the future will be extremely competitive and that N.C. counties that prepare students for those jobs will become more prosperous in comparison. I believe the economic need for digital savvy professionals will become a driving factor in connecting with our families.

The afternoon session that I attended focused on building parent and community support for digital initiatives. The first major challenge pertaining to digital equality addressed the lack of meaningful, two-way communication with parents. It was mentioned that schools often disseminate information in very basic, one directed ways such as ConnectEd calls, mass emails, and eFlyers, and have gotten away from more personal forms of communication such as personal phone calls and face to face gatherings. Part of the conversation involved the topic of racial and cultural differences which certainly resonated with me. I believe that the more we know about the lives of our students, the stronger, more productive relationships we can form. Often times I

think we mean well in reaching out to families, but I wonder how often we examine the effectiveness of our approaches. The second major challenge was the lack of a united vision about why schools are involving technology on such a large scale. Some suggestions for possible ways to improve parent and community support was to invite parents to the school more frequently and at varied times of the day. The most significant goal shared between a school and a child's family is that they both want the child to have a prosperous life. It was determined by our group that instead of asking parents to come in for information sessions solely, all interactions would include high amounts of student involvement so that the parents are coming in to see the successes of their child. Over these next few years, I believe that it is more important than ever to showcase the digital learning experiences of our students so that parents can see the positive results of our efforts. The group discussed how it would be very beneficial to engage families in ways to keep their child safe while using digital devices. At our school I think that it would be beneficial to provide parents with proactive measures to prevent misuse of the technology.

It is always going to be important for teachers, schools and school districts to have realistic views about what our students experience outside of the traditional school day. As teachers, it is easy to perpetuate the Digital Divide with our misconceptions about the home lives of our students. It's important for us to remember that students experience varied amounts of support from their families. I believe that some of these issues could be improved upon if schools strengthen communication with families about why we are trying such a different approach from what they may have had growing up. Until every area in the state has functional, high-speed Internet access there will always be students with inequitable resources. Educators have to make provisions for various situations on a daily basis. If we don't, then we are setting ourselves and

our students up for failure. Modifications could include building in time at the beginning or end of class to be sure that all the resources needed are stored in accessible ways for students to access later from home. Another may be that at the beginning of class we present a flexible task time for students to upload assignments if needed. In situations where content is challenging for students, teachers need to consider what support they can provide with flipped videos or digital notes. One strategy that my classes found successful last year was to have students gather research information while in class and create products outside of class with applications that do not require connectivity.

I am encouraged to hear that North Carolina has adopted literacy standards for technology and assume that they will be similar to ISTE's NET standards. As a teacher, I appreciate guidance from the standards as they challenge me to do even better than before to help prepare students for a future that is technologically advanced. I am grateful for the experience of being able to hear varied perspectives from various stakeholders around the state this week. A common thread of all conversations seemed to be that Digital Equity is best for all students. All of our counties are in different places along the Digital Equity journey, but I found that common vision to be refreshing.