



WHY ONLINE LEARNING WILL BE HERE TO STAY POST-PANDEMIC

Here are the keys to a sustainable online learning program

A [RAND Corp. research report](#) found that 1 in 5 US school districts plan to offer fully online learning even after the pandemic ends.

Many districts are choosing to continue offering fully virtual and/or hybrid learning options post-pandemic because of the flexibility it offers families as well as the ability to meet diverse student learning needs and personalize learning. It also fulfills the critical need to have virtual learning options in the event of illnesses, school closures or emergencies.

According to a [Tuscany Strategy Consulting](#) Stride LEA Survey, districts expect to continue to serve approximately 25% of students virtually in the upcoming school year. Respondents indicate they

believe the COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on virtual learning investment and demand.

“We polled some districts recently and we found that even though people are getting vaccinations and starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, a lot of families are saying they still want virtual options. People do realize they need a virtual solution,” says Jodi Marshall, senior vice president at Stride Learning Solutions.

While districts are looking to continue virtual learning options, some had better experiences than others with online learning over the past year. Learning loss is evidence of this.

Marshall says some educators and students were thrown into emergency remote learning last year,

versus a designed virtual education experience, such as what Stride offers with its instructional design and planned scope and sequence of learning.

“It’s different than just suddenly taking what you were doing in a brick-and-mortar and putting it online overnight,” Marshall explains.

If online learning is here to stay, then what can schools do to be more proactive in its inception? How can districts “think bigger” about virtual learning?

SOLID, MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

A full-time online learning solution requires resources to support and enhance education delivery and management. An ideal platform has a single sign-on with streamlined classroom management, real-time data, analytics and reports to track attendance, engagement and outcomes. A modern online learning model best supports all age groups of students with a unified platform and features live collaboration tools designed to engage and support students virtually.

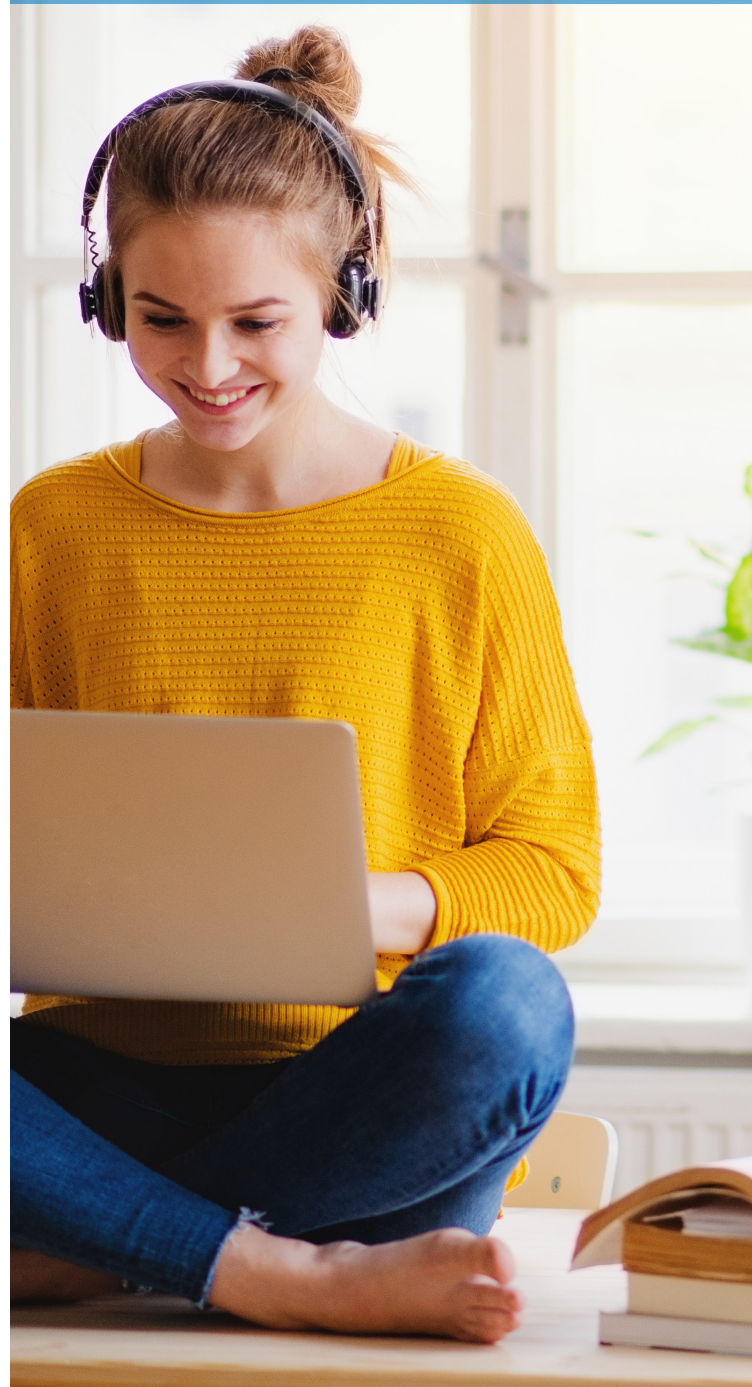
“We’ve seen students that we may not have expected to see flourish in this environment, really flourish,” Marshall points out. “This has taught us a lot about how our kids learn, what they need based on the content level or grade level or subject area. We are learning that there is something for everyone.”

Marshall explains that diverse learners — this includes those in gifted and special education, and English as a second language students, too — all can thrive in online learning. Stride partners with service providers in areas across the country to deliver special education services, and related services such as speech, physical therapy and occupational therapy, that put this belief into practice. Stride can support districts to learn how to incorporate these special services into their online learning model too.

Jeanna Pignatiello, chief academic officer at Stride, agrees and says the best online learning platform works for a variety of students for any number of reasons.

“I love hearing those stories of the families who say, ‘We bought an RV and we’re traveling the country.’ Those learning experiences, coupled with an online option, can be phenomenal for families and fits exactly what parents want for their children,” Pignatiello says.

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Stride offers whole-student support

Modern learning requires flexibility and freedom, with self-paced and personalized content. The best learning solution needs to address today's challenges and prepare for tomorrow's needs, no matter the physical location.

Stride Learning Solutions offers all-inclusive, full-time online or blended options for students to learn outside of the brick-and-mortar classroom. Years of experience, combined with a holistic student approach, make this learning platform a great fit for a variety of learners. Stride's foundation is based on a systematic and planned approach.

"What sets Stride apart is the comprehensive, holistic approach to the learning environment. We have everything to help not just the child, but the parent, enter this environment," says Jeanna Pignatiello, Stride's chief academic officer.

"It's not just the knowledge of 20 years of being in this space, but the innovative spirit and passion because we've seen so many examples of how well it works," says Senior Vice President Jodi Marshall.

Students enrolled at Stride K12-powered schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, and who participated in one of the [NWEA's growth assessments](#), did not experience the same level of learning loss as their peers. In fact, they were more likely to maintain or grow academically than to slide. [Read more](#) about how Stride can support your online learning program.

But to really deliver effective and sustainable online learning, Marshall says a program must have three major components: a holistic foundation; technology that works and that keeps data accurate and safe; and dynamic content that works for each age group and ability.

DYNAMIC, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM AND CONTENT

Effective virtual or hybrid learning utilizes interactive, dynamic, engaging content; a project-based learning curriculum that provides opportunities for active, real-world learning; an adaptive personalized curriculum; and content that is developmentally appropriate to address the needs of individual learners.

Diverse learners can learn online — and some learn better that way — but adaptations and customizations must be made to adequately support each student. Instructional plans and other modifications cannot just be thrown to the side. Continuity is needed to ensure students thrive.

Marshall says that, moving forward, she expects online learning to be less of a rigid break and more of a fully incorporated option of schooling.

"I think online learning is going to evolve into an even more student-centered approach than it is now. The menu of options is going to get more and more specific, and we're going to see the lines blur," Marshall predicts.

Educators and administrators must be on board with this continued evolution for it to support students the way it should, however.

"If you don't actually believe that blended, hybrid and online is essential to diversifying the learning options, you're failing right out of the gate," Pignatiello says.

She adds that diverse learners require choices in learning delivery methods and the actual content. Even individual students may require diversity of learning options within their educational plan.

"Online learning, both blended and hybrid options, provides an opportunity for the students and the whole family to find options that work for them," Pignatiello says.

PROACTIVE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Before the pandemic, the vast majority of educators and classroom teachers were not experienced in virtual instruction. Research shows that professional development has proven beneficial to teachers improving their effectiveness and comfort level in virtual instruction. Teachers need to feel supported with resources and professional learning opportunities so they can also thrive in a virtual or hybrid setting.

The shift to online or blended learning can be smoothed out through comprehensive teacher training programs. An accredited program that offers hands-on training, support materials and on-demand courses to enhance the skills needed to teach using an online learning platform sets teachers and students up for both short- and long-term success.

The teachers at Stride are state-certified and use a tailored approach for diverse learners. They participate in ongoing professional development and evaluation. Stride teachers are specially trained in online instruction methods and are prepared to train district educators on successful strategies and practices for virtual instruction.

Pignatiello says, “When we bring on new teachers, we often tell them you’re going to feel like a first-year teacher again. You might come to us with 20 years of teaching experience, but you must have the professional development infrastructure in place to support virtual teaching.”

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT

Districts with effective online and hybrid learning programs know how important it is to get parents, families and caregivers on board to support online learning and feel comfortable with it.

The pandemic has emphasized the need to give parents a seat at the instruction table. From providing resources for parents, to allowing them to play an active role in the learning process, an online learning infrastructure must allow parents to be engaged “stakeholders in their children’s learning,” Pignatiello says. This often means making



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space for parents where there has never been that type of feedback or interaction, but it is important to student success, she notes.

Marshall echoes the importance of listening to and involving all stakeholders in shaping a successful virtual program from the start.

“The stakeholders are not just parents, but they are the students and teachers. The role of the parent, the role of the teacher and the role of the student will evolve because technology always evolves. I think it is critical that any virtual learning program has elements of listening and the ability to change. As tools and technology continue to improve, we need to be able to adjust,” Marshall says.

Community support is also valuable in student success. Opportunities for online learning that involve community members or organizations include virtual field trips and virtual mentorships designed to enhance the online learning experience for everyone.

Through Stride’s proven online learning infrastructure and systematic approach, modern learning extends beyond the physical classroom and offers the flexibility of setting a learning pace and schedule that fits everyone’s agenda. If you want to partner with an expert with 20 years of experience, [proven results](#) and an innovative spirit for online learning, reach out to Stride Learning Solutions to implement a tailored full-time online or blended solution today. ■

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— Jodi Marshall,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, STRIDE LEARNING SOLUTIONS

ABOUT STRIDE LEARNING SOLUTIONS

Since 2000, Stride Learning Solutions has been a leader in strategic solutions to solve district challenges. Stride’s flexible and highly engaging online and blended learning options are designed specifically for virtual learning and supported by professional learning for educators — led by experienced Stride virtual instructors. With an innovative platform, comprehensive digital courseware, adaptable technology, and extensive support, Stride will help your school or district empower a brighter future for learners.

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