



2023 State EdTech Trends Report

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SETDA

PREFACE

By: Kirsten Baeslar, *Superintendent of Public Instruction, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction*

“ The only constant
in life is change. ”

Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher, is credited with making that statement 2,500 years ago as a reflection on the role of transformation in the human experience. It’s an idea that rings particularly true during the first quarter of the 21st century, a period defined by unprecedented, breakneck change prompted by remarkable technological advances like the internet, mobile technology and machine learning — to name a few — that have reshaped the way we work, learn and live.

As an educator and state leader tasked with ensuring that every student in North Dakota leaves our schools ready for life, I know how daunting it can be to keep pace with this breathtaking change. That’s because adapting to change — in particular, rapid change — is hard. And it’s particularly difficult for adults who have been doing things a certain way for most of their lives.

State leaders can’t shy away from change or the technologies that bring it about. That’s not an option for the students we serve whose future success depends on their ability to thrive in an ever-changing, technology-rich world. This is why last year our state agency successfully advocated for a new law requiring

every K-12 student to learn about computer science and cybersecurity. Our state took this step not because our advocates and leaders believe every student will become a programmer or fight cybercrime (although we do want to ensure they’re prepared for the millions of new jobs in these sectors) but because understanding these subjects is as critical for students’ success in today’s world as understanding the power and potential of electricity was in the early 20th century when it drove the Second Industrial Revolution.

While stakeholders agreed that the law would pay dividends for our students and the state, it was met with trepidation by some adults in our K-12 system who may have balked at the changes required to their existing systems and practices or may have been unfamiliar with — or even intimidated by — the new technologies.

This is a normal reaction to change, even when that change is widely acknowledged to be necessary. This is why it is insufficient for state leaders — and I would argue for all leaders and educators — to be reluctant stewards of change. We can’t view new and emerging technologies as unfortunate aspects of our modern world that should either be avoided

or addressed with the least disruption of our regular routines. Instead, state leaders need to embrace and, perhaps more importantly, use these new tools to fulfill our responsibility to our students. This is, in fact, what we're doing at the [North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#) (NDDPI) with generative artificial intelligence (AI).

ChatGPT took the world by surprise when it hit the market in 2022, and some found it a little intimidating. Generative AI wasn't part of the curriculum when I was a student (and it likely wasn't for most of my peers at NDDPI or other state agencies), but it should be for the students we serve today. If we are to serve them well, we need to learn about and

become intimately familiar with generative AI, cybersecurity and other nascent topics. For that reason, North Dakota joined the [TeachAI](#) coalition to ensure that every educator in the state can adapt their teaching for a world with AI. It's also why I've challenged everyone in the agency to learn about and use ChatGPT.

NDDPI is leaning into AI, new technologies and change in general not for the sake of change but to fulfill our responsibility to students and prepare them for their future. As a chronicle of the ways that NDDPI and other state education agencies are adapting to keep pace with the world, the "2023 State EdTech Trends Report" serves an invaluable purpose. It shows us that at state agencies, too, change is constant.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“What a difference
a year makes.”

Nevada State Superintendent Jhone Ebert opened her preface to [last year’s “State EdTech Trends Report”](#) with these words, and they feel just as relevant this year.

The first “State Edtech Trends Report” reflected the sentiments of state leaders at a time when the spotlight was brightly shining on educational technology and digital learning. Fueled by trillions in federal stimulus funding, they had just engaged in the largest edtech buying spree in history, and their survey responses captured both their desires to make the most of those tools for all students and their concerns about potential challenges and risks.

With the start of the 2022-2023 school year, edtech took a back seat to pressing priorities most notably addressing learning gaps brought about by school closures and staffing challenges. When edtech did appear in headlines, it was often in the context of cyberattacks on schools. Indeed, the first “State Edtech Trends Report” was released within days of a major cyberattack on the nation’s second-largest K-12 system, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and in the midst of a rash of attacks that plagued the start of the school year. Perhaps it shouldn’t be a surprise that the SETDA team received the most questions and interest relating to the cybersecurity findings in the first “State Edtech Trends Report.” Then, with district and state leaders working diligently to mitigate cybersecurity risks and protect their

networks, ChatGPT happened, generating more headlines, questions and concerns.

Such was the state of U.S. K-12 education when over 100 state leaders from 45 states, Guam and the Department of Defense Education Activity responded to the 2023 survey.

Their responses reflect the uniqueness of this moment in time as school systems emerge from the pandemic into a technology-rich new normal rife with opportunity but also risk. There’s good news in the data and this report. Last year’s needs have become this year’s priorities, and states are making progress in addressing challenges like cybersecurity. Perhaps most encouragingly, states like Arizona and Massachusetts (which are spotlighted in this year’s report) are investing in the effective, safe and equitable use of technology by establishing — or reestablishing in the cases of Arizona and Massachusetts — state offices of education technology. But, while the report shows that states are, in fact, adapting to a changing world, there remains significant work to be done.

By spotlighting the work and focus of states and their role, we hope this report serves as a guide for all education leaders and for SETDA’s work in the upcoming year.

— **Julia Fallon, SETDA**
August 2023

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About Whiteboard Advisors

For more than 20 years, Whiteboard Advisors has collaborated with the most transformative organizations, individuals and investors in education. Our diverse team of educators, wonks and storytellers brings in-depth understanding of policy, technology and practice to bear on cutting-edge research, powerful writing and the design of communications and advocacy campaigns that challenge the status quo. Whether we're working with startups or the most established organizations in education, we're passionate about taking breakthrough ideas to scale.

About SETDA

Founded by state education agency leaders in 2001, [SETDA](#) is the principal nonprofit membership association representing U.S. state and territorial educational technology and digital learning leaders. For over 20 years, we have provided well-established forums for advocacy on policy and practice, professional learning, interstate collaboration, and public-private partnerships centered around digital learning and equity. SETDA members are known for leading the charge within their state education agencies for proper uses of technology in schools, including supporting district leaders and their state colleagues in federal education programs, IDEA, assessment, curriculum, and data collection to ensure that technology is leveraged appropriately throughout the educational system.

INTRODUCTION

The 2022-2023 school year was the first since 2018-2019 that was largely untouched by the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, state and district leaders had to reckon with the pandemic's legacy: students struggling with academic and mental health issues, staffing challenges that stifled recovery efforts, and the opportunities — and difficulties — presented by abundant educational technology in classrooms.

This report captures state leaders' perspectives on various issues relating to education technology at this unique moment in time. To be more precise, the report provides an analysis of the feedback collected from state leaders through surveys administered in April and May 2023. Like its predecessor, it seeks to catalog the ways in which state education agencies are adjusting to a world in which technology is ubiquitous and unavoidable and where new and emerging innovations create never-before-seen opportunities for learning and risks. There are some familiar topics in this report, like addressing issues of access and equity and cybersecurity, but there are also new topics that were not covered in last year's report. Most notably, this year's survey asked state leaders about generative artificial intelligence (AI) to better understand how school systems and policymakers were responding to the launch of ChatGPT last fall. While district leaders and educators remain

uncertain in their approach to generative AI — for example, the New York City Department of Education famously initially banned ChatGPT in January, fearing it could lead to cheating before rescinding the ban in May after recognizing its potential to support teaching and learning — the 2023 State EdTech Trends Survey results show that states, too, are playing catch-up on the subject. But the results and the examples provided by states like Illinois (spotlighted in this report) suggest that states will make progress, just as they have with other technology issues before, during and since the pandemic.

Take K-12 cybersecurity, for example. The "2022 State EdTech Trends Report" was released within days of a [cyberattack](#) on one of the nation's largest school systems, the Los Angeles Unified School District. The 2022 report identified cybersecurity as one of the top unmet needs, with only 8% of respondents saying that their state provided ample funding for cybersecurity. This year's report shows progress, with 19% of respondents reporting ample funding.

This year's report — through data from the survey and, in particular, through the spotlights of state work — demonstrates how state education agencies are reinventing themselves to address today's challenges. The report presents four key findings.

KEY FINDING 1: Cybersecurity is now the top need but is still not receiving enough funding or support.

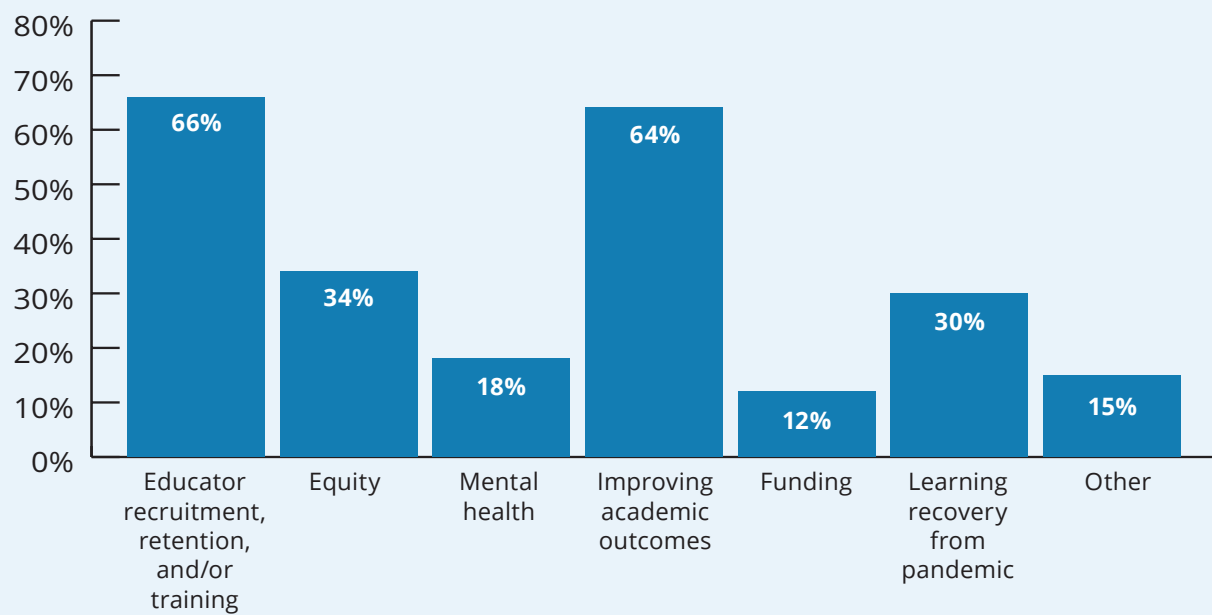
KEY FINDING 2: States are seeing an increased demand for guidance relating to AI — but most states don't have efforts currently underway around AI.

KEY FINDING 3: States are addressing areas of need, which bodes well for this year's biggest unmet need: home access connectivity.

KEY FINDING 4: While states believe progress is being made on the effective use of edtech tools, leaders still view this as an area of ongoing need.

As with last year's report, the attention on the work in a handful of states isn't meant to diminish the important work of states across the country. We look forward to administering the next survey in 2024, when we expect to learn more about how states are handling cybersecurity, home access, AI and whatever new challenges the new school year brings.

WHAT ARE YOUR STATE AGENCY'S TOP PRIORITIES FOR EDUCATION FOR THE COMING YEAR?



Spotlight on Arizona: Reorganizing to Support Edtech

Once upon a time, between 2004 and 2010 to be precise, the Arizona Department of Education had an office of educational technology — something it had lacked for more than a decade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a state technology task force recommended bringing back the office, which happened in 2021.



In its early days, according to Director Karina Jones, “Our group was focused on supporting online learning, which made sense during the pandemic when districts and students were struggling with remote instruction.” Since then, the department has evolved as a service agency with a focus on three key pillars:

- Developing a sense of community across the state.
- Leveraging data to focus the department’s work and to support educators.
- Providing solutions for the needs of educators and administrators based on their feedback.

One priority area for the department is leveraging edtech to bolster student academic outcomes. The [Educational Technology group](#) recognizes that the use of technology in the classroom is increasingly important to educate students who are growing up as digital natives and are preparing for a future of work that embraces technology. Part of that recognition includes developing a digital library of vetted and standards-aligned resources for educators to access at no cost, including a set of resources that have been shown to enhance student achievement. In addition, the group has hired a program manager of edtech who brings technology expertise combined with a strong background in teaching. “I have loved to see the evolution of this office,” said Jones.

KEY FINDING 1:

Cybersecurity is now the top need but still is not receiving enough funding or support.

On Sept. 6, 2022, the day before the public release of SETDA's "2022 State Edtech Trends Report", the FBI's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency warned that "[cyber]attacks may increase as the 2022/2023 school year begins and criminal ransomware groups perceive opportunities for successful attacks." The alert and SETDA's report were published amid a flurry of cyberattacks on a number of school districts — most notably the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest school system — in the preceding weeks.

Given that timing, it's not a surprise that the cybersecurity findings in last year's report garnered the most interest. It also isn't surprising that cybersecurity topped the list of state technology priorities in this year's survey, jumping over the top priorities in last year's report: equitable access to the internet and using technology to support instruction. And cybersecurity desperately needs state support, both in terms of funding and expertise. "Improving K-12 cybersecurity posture has become an issue of resources and equity," said Brad Hagg, director of education technology at the Indiana Department of Education. "Under-staffed districts and communities without access to a pipeline of cyber specialists will struggle to meet the requirements, often dictated by insurance companies, as well as the best practices necessary to implement a strong cybersecurity threat mitigation program."

WHAT ARE YOUR STATE'S TOP TECHNOLOGY PRIORITIES?

2022

1. Equity (Access to Internet) : 20%
2. Cybersecurity : 17%
3. Technology for Instruction : 14%

2023

1. Cybersecurity : 24% ↑
2. Equity (Access to Internet) : 20% →
3. Technology for Instruction : 19% ↑

There is good news, however, as more state leaders (19%) report providing "ample funding" for cybersecurity risk mitigation than they did in 2022. But it's apparent that schools need even more financial support, because 42% of respondents said their state provides a "small amount" or "very little" funding for cybersecurity needs. With AI and parents rights generating more interest in the related topic of student data privacy, cybersecurity may remain at the top of the priority list for the foreseeable future.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MOST ACCURATELY DESCRIBES THE FUNDING YOUR STATE DEDICATES TO CYBERSECURITY RISK MITIGATION?

My State Provides Ample Funding ...

+11% ↑
(8% to 19%) change from 2022-2023

My State Provides Very Little Funding ...

-12% ↓
(40% to 28%) change from 2022-2023

Spotlight on Louisiana: Cybersecurity is nonnegotiable in the electronic age



“We are in the electronic age. If you’re not already thinking about technology and security, you have to,” said Carol Mosley, co-director of the Education Technology program and overseer of the E-Rate program for the Louisiana State Department of Education.

For Carol, cybersecurity was a top-of-mind issue even before the COVID-19 pandemic. “We had four school systems hit by cyberattacks in the 2019-2020 school year,” Carol said. Luckily, the Office of Technology Services had begun establishing protocols to mitigate these risks and was able to continue this work throughout the pandemic.

Carol and her team have taken a very hands-on approach when it comes to supporting cybersecurity across the state, working with various school IT teams to determine what protocols and best practices would serve the needs of schools in the state. “We went from being reactive to proactive,” she noted. Her team offers to conduct full scans of schools’ networks to provide recommendations for what they need to put in place, like advanced firewalls and additional software for 24-hour monitoring of their most critical services. The Office of Technology Services also helps schools budget and plan how they’re going to maintain cybersecurity. In addition, Carol and her team are making sure edtech products pass Louisiana security standards.

Clearly, there’s more work to be done. Carol added, “I hope through SETDA that state leaders can start sharing a lot more of our forensic know-how so that states can give better guidance to their districts. The more we can have a network of K-12 districts and states sharing their hard-won wisdom, the more we can help other people and organizations.”

KEY FINDING 2:

States are seeing an increased demand for guidance relating to AI — but most states don't have efforts currently underway around AI.

The introduction of ChatGPT in November 2022 rocked the world. In its first five days, over 1 million users logged in to try out the new technology that at first blush sounded more like science fiction than reality. As was the case with the introduction of mobile technology (i.e., the first iPhone) and the internet, there's already a sense that generative AI will disrupt nearly every aspect of human existence, with some analysts proposing it may signal the [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#) or even the [end of the world](#).

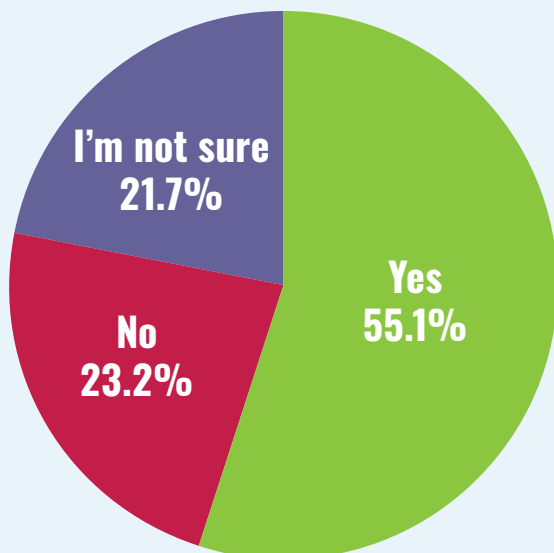
Educators share this perception. In a recent [survey conducted by Clever](#), 85% of teachers said they believe AI will

significantly impact teaching — split evenly on whether the impact will be positive or negative. Further, 96% of teachers indicated that they hadn't received any professional development on using AI for learning.

The need for additional guidance on AI was apparent in this year's State Edtech Trends Survey, with 55% of respondents indicating that they've witnessed increased interest in AI policy development compared to last year. But states are clearly playing catch-up, with only 2% of the respondents in this year's survey reporting that their state has an AI initiative in place.

But this number will surely increase in future surveys. With the recent release of the U.S. Department of Education's [report](#) on AI and the future of teaching and learning, along with the launch of coalitions like TeachAI, states will surely play a prominent role in providing school systems with guidance on how to safely, securely and positively use AI to provide students learning experiences that prepare them for postsecondary success.

GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION BEING PAID TO CHATGPT AND OTHER NEW AI PRODUCTS, ARE YOU SEEING INCREASED INTEREST IN GUIDANCE OR POLICY AROUND USE OF AI IN THE CLASSROOM COMPARED TO LAST YEAR?



DOES YOUR STATE HAVE ANY EXISTING INITIATIVES OR EFFORTS RELATED TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY TOPICS?

Respondents whose states have AI initiatives underway:



Spotlight on Illinois: Keeping K-12 in the AI Conversation



Illinois has a long history of cross-agency collaboration for supporting edtech in schools. For instance, leaders from the Department of Innovation and Technology, the Learning Technology Center of Illinois, the Illinois State Board of Education, the governor's office and Illinois Office of Broadband meet biweekly to discuss issues and opportunities.

The state is taking a similar collaborative approach to addressing AI. In 2023, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation to **create** the Generative AI and Natural Language Processing Task Force to investigate and provide a report on generative AI that would include suggestions on model policy for K-12 schools.

"We are excited for K-12 to be at the table to help inform the state's approach to generative AI," said Mindy Fiscus, director of government affairs at the Learning Technology Center of Illinois. "It's particularly exciting to collaborate with representatives from higher education, labor and the business community along with experts in AI and cybersecurity to craft K-12 policy recommendations that meet the needs of students, educators and the state as a whole," she said.

While Illinois' work on generative AI and K-12 education is in its early stages, the collaborative approach holds promise and is worth watching as other states take similar steps in the coming months.

KEY FINDING 3:

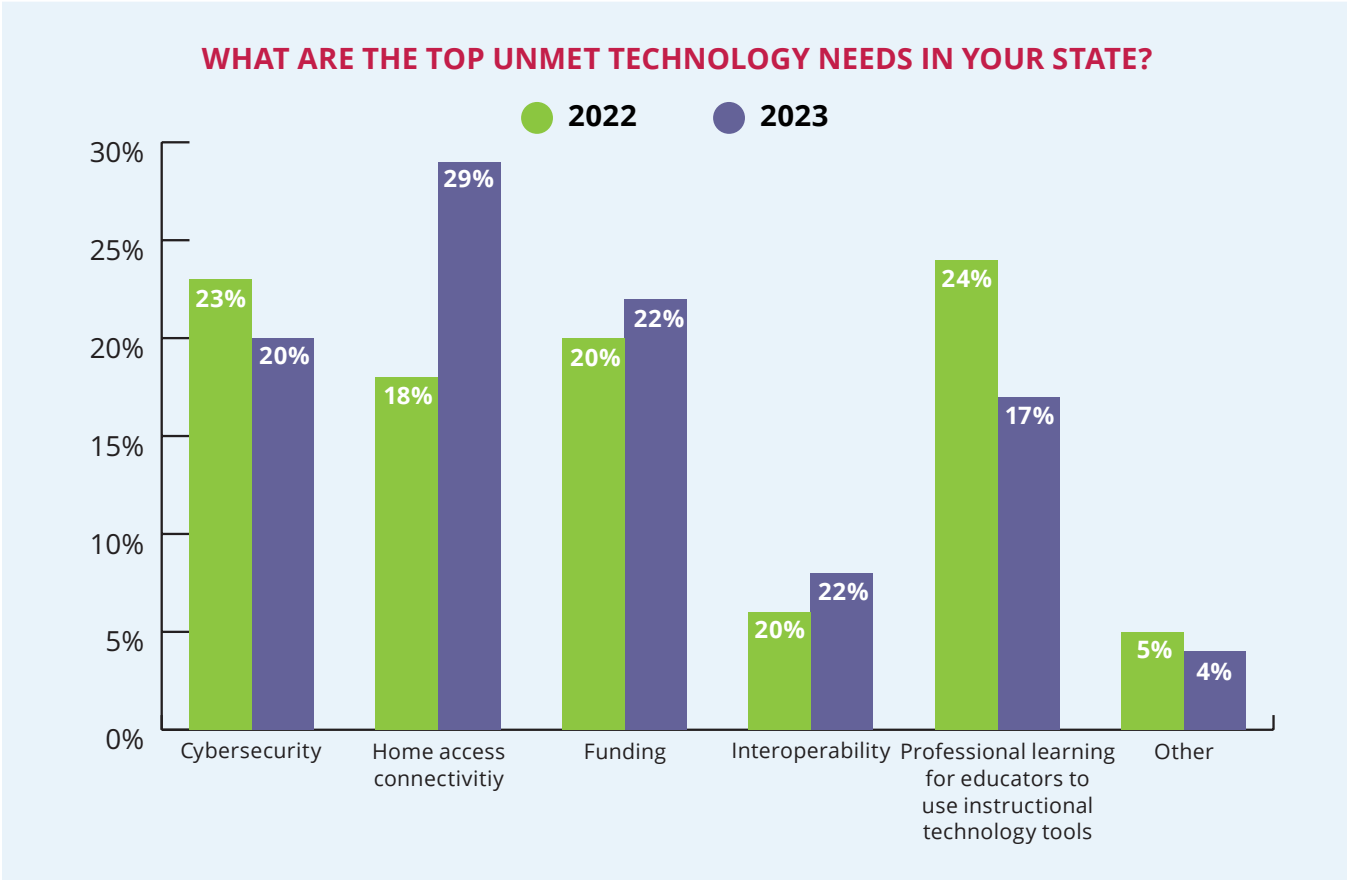
States are addressing areas of need, which bodes well for this year’s biggest unmet need: home access connectivity.

Comparing the data from the 2022 survey to this year’s results yields some compelling insights. For example, respondents in 2022 listed cybersecurity and professional learning on the use of edtech as their top unmet needs. This year, states have responded by making those issues priorities in terms of money and time.

If that trend continues, this should be an interesting year for a particularly thorny challenge: home internet access. During the pandemic, home access was a major issue for schools desperate to ensure continuity of learning during closures. Districts spent billions of dollars to increase broadband connectivity

and made some progress. But according to the **Federal Communications Commission**, approximately 17 million students **still lack** reliable home internet access. As with ensuring cybersecurity, providing reliable broadband to entire communities isn’t easy, often requiring cooperation across agencies (sometimes across states) and the private sector, not to mention significant funding. But in a world where access to the internet is critical — perhaps even a civil right — the stakes couldn’t be higher.

And states are taking on the challenge (see the spotlight on New Mexico). But will it be enough, or will home access remain a top unmet need in SETDA’s 2024 survey?



Spotlight on New Mexico: Cross-Agency Collaboration for Home Access

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the significant digital divide that exists across the country. As schools closed, states scrambled to ensure every student, including those without internet access at home, could participate in remote learning.



With more than 75,000 students lacking home internet access, including many who live in remote parts of the state, New Mexico officials worked across agencies and with internet service providers to find solutions to these challenges. Those efforts gained further urgency after a 2021 court order **issued** by First Judicial District Court Judge Matthew Wilson in the Yazzie-Martinez case required the state to provide access to students across nearly two dozen districts.

The Public Education Department (PED) played a big role in the effort, working with multiple agencies in the New Mexico Homework Gap Team. As John Chadwick, PED's digital equity coordinator, said, "The work of closing the home access digital divide started with a new data collection initiative, with districts providing PED with data every 40 days that could help us identify which students still lack access at home." Equipped with this data, PED staff worked with Natalie Runyan, geospatial information officer at the New Mexico Department of Information, to develop detailed maps that pinpoint every child in the state who lacks access — overlaid against potential internet service provider coverage areas.

Aquiles Trujillo, a project manager at the New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion, then worked with PED and local communities to develop strategies for addressing gaps in targeted locations across the state — like engaging local telecoms or launching campaigns to inform families of available money for home internet. And the collaboration crossed state lines in some cases as well. "To identify possible solutions for students living on the Navajo Nation, we had to engage with leaders in Arizona," said Chadwick.

The work in New Mexico is still in its early stages. The state has made progress in reducing the number of unconnected students to fewer than 40,000 students, but there are significant challenges to ensuring that every student has home internet access. "The work has not been easy, but we have learned and improved along the way," said Chadwick. "But with the strong cross-agency collaboration powered by new data tools and technology and our unwavering commitment to the students in our state, I know that we will make progress in closing the home access divide."

KEY FINDING 4

While states believe progress is being made on the effective use of edtech tools, leaders still view this as an area of ongoing need.

One of the more notable findings from the 2022 report involved state leaders' perspective on edtech in their state. Most said they don't need more edtech tools but rather need to use the tools they have more effectively. This sentiment wasn't surprising given the survey's context. K-12 education had just experienced the largest single investment in edtech tools in response to the pandemic, and schools were scrambling to support educators in the effective use of these new resources.

INCREASING NEED TO USE EDTECH FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES



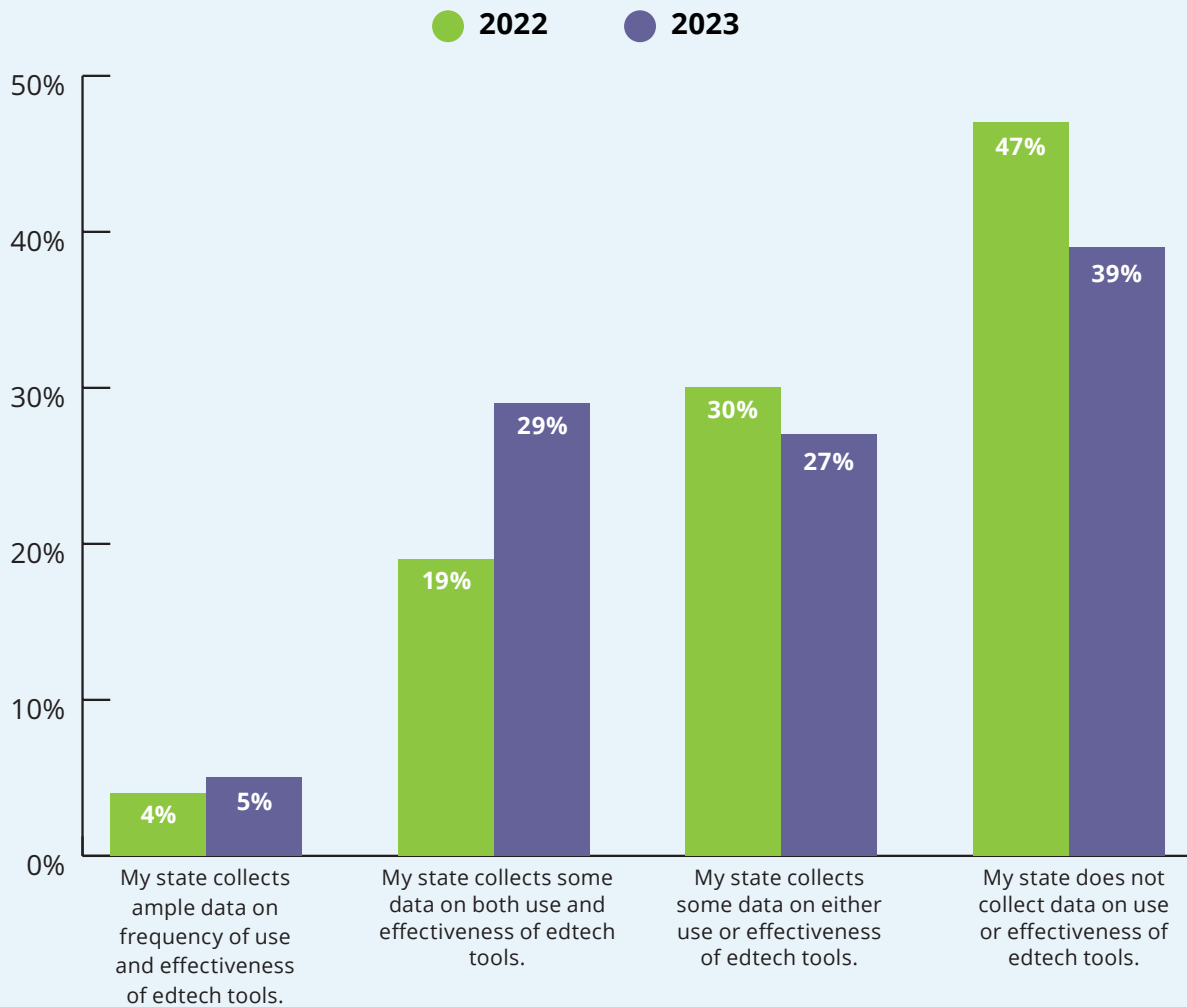
from 2022 to 2023 in technology for instruction as a priority for states

One year later, schools have taken steps to address this challenge. Last year's top unmet need, professional learning for educators on the effective use of edtech, dropped to fourth place this year, behind home access, funding and cybersecurity. In addition, the number of states collecting data on the effectiveness of their edtech tools also increased according to respondents.

Despite these steps, using edtech effectively to support instruction remains a top priority for state leaders, whose perspectives on edtech are largely unchanged from last year.

So, what story does the data share about the state of edtech use in America's classrooms? As they have with cybersecurity, states have taken steps to address this need. But it will take more action to support the effective use of edtech for instruction.

WHICH STATEMENT BEST REFLECTS HOW YOUR STATE COLLECTS DATA ON USE OR EFFECTIVENESS OF EDTECH TOOLS?



When it comes to effective use of edtech tools, more leaders view this as a priority than last year, but they are doing something about it, because providing professional learning opportunities on the effective use of edtech is no longer the top unmet need.

Spotlight on Massachusetts: Ensuring Equitable and Effective Edtech Use



Like other states, Massachusetts established a crisis-response team during the COVID-19 pandemic to focus on emergency technology needs. According to A.J. Coté, the assistant director of edtech at the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), “[w]hen the pandemic hit, districts needed one point-person at the department to call for support, which is when the remote learning team was created. Jackie Gantzer, now Director of the Office of Educational Technology and School Support, hit the ground running to ensure district leaders, educators and students had access to the technology they needed to effectively continue instruction during school closures. In response to growing demand and requests for support from school and district leaders, Commissioner Jeff Riley formally established the Office of Educational Technology.”

Since then, the new office has focused on the strategic and equitable use of edtech in schools. “We knew that providing access to devices and broadband itself would not result in equitable experiences for all students across the state,” said Coté. “We had to help educators and leaders establish systems and develop the competencies to use edtech tools that would result in learning experiences that are grade-appropriate, culturally-responsive, relevant and meaningful for their students.” The office published an [EdTech Strategic Planning Guide](#) for system leaders, which establishes the foundational systems necessary to sustain progress in access and equity post-pandemic. The office followed up with the more technical [Edtech Systems Guide](#) to help leaders establish or strengthen systems to select and evaluate edtech tools. “The need for the Edtech Systems Guide arose from edtech leaders asking for help as they struggled to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the tools purchased during the pandemic,” said Coté. “But we also saw the opportunity to reinforce that how you select and implement a tool is integral to its ultimate effectiveness and impact on students. For example, a district may question the effectiveness of a particular edtech tool and its ability to meet the needs of its educators and students, but really need to question how intentionally and equitably the tool was selected and implemented in the first place. The EdTech Systems Guide helps them work through that process while keeping equity at the forefront of all processes.”

The state next provided resources for leaders to put the recommendations into practice. The office, in collaboration with The Learning Accelerator, launched an edtech peer learning cohort for teams of edtech leaders and educators — and in some cases students — to meet monthly for coaching, collaboration, troubleshooting and addressing relevant problems of practice. The state also issued a Building Capacity for Effective Technology Integration grant, which supported 17 districts representing over 55,000 students to provide professional learning opportunities focused on utilizing edtech to deliver effective instruction. Both programs are now entering their second year.

With its eyes fixed on equitable learning experiences for every student and a mindset of continuous improvement, Massachusetts’ Office of Edtech continues to evolve its work in ways that meet the needs of leaders, educators and students.

CONCLUSION

A new school year has started, and we eagerly await the next administration of the State Edtech Trends survey. While we anticipate that many of the challenges state leaders faced during the 2022-2023 school year will remain — cybersecurity certainly isn't going anywhere — we are waiting with bated breath to see what new opportunities (and problems) will arise this year, particularly as school systems face the looming expiration of pandemic-era stimulus ESSER funding.

States have a unique and pivotal role in developing policies and implementing programs that foster innovation, ensure equitable access and readiness, and protect students' and educators' rights. As demonstrated in this report, state edtech offices and leaders across the country continue to evolve in ways that foster collaboration among educators, policymakers, technology developers and stakeholders to ensure that educational technology is

designed to meet their education systems' specific needs. By working together, they are helping educators and leaders identify and sustain best practices, share insights and collectively address challenges.

The findings presented in this report are just some of what we learned in the survey. We encourage you to explore the full results — [available here](#) — where, among other findings, you will find responses to the open-ended questions. Likewise, the spotlights presented in the report are just a small sample of the amazing work that educators and state and district administrators are doing across the country. We encourage you to learn more about the work taking place in your state and to continue asking important questions of state leaders about educational and technological priorities, how those priorities are supported with resources, and how we can work together to create technology-rich schools and districts for all students.