

California Adult Education Digital Learning Guidance

Chapter 2: Ensuring Equity and Access

Think about:

- How can adult educators and support staff assist learners in overcoming barriers related to access and connectivity?

Digital Devices and Connectivity – Access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity is not equal among adult learners. Many rely on mobile phones, which may limit their participation in certain digital activities. Sharing devices with family members and limited data plans also pose additional challenges.

Helping Learners Get Connected and Understanding Learner’s Needs – Adult educators and support staff can assist learners by conducting surveys to identify barriers and sharing information about relevant programs. Various federal, state, and nonprofit organizations offer discounted internet access and devices for eligible individuals. Program providers can gather information through pre-assessments, surveys, and personal relationships with learners to identify and address access and connectivity needs.

Building Digital Infrastructure – Ensuring access and addressing the total cost of ownership are essential for effective digital infrastructure in education. Factors to consider include software licensing, device maintenance and upgrades, inflation costs, technical support, and technology training. Institutions should explore free or discounted software options, plan for device lifespan and maintenance, account for inflation in budgeting, provide technical support, and offer training opportunities for educators and support staff. State organizations and technology companies can offer professional development resources. Considering these factors contributes to short-term implementation and long-term sustainability in digital education.

Digital Literacy Skills – Digital literacy is crucial for adult learners and adult educators. It encompasses skills such as finding, evaluating, organizing, creating, and communicating digital information. The Maryland Department of Labor’s Digital Literacy Framework identifies seven elements, including technical, civic, communicative, collaborative, computational thinking, investigative, and productive skills. The ISTE SkillRise Profile of a Lifelong Learner offers a research-backed framework for building digital and lifelong learning skills. The Digital Navigator model and resources from organizations such as the Barbara Bush Foundation and Digital Promise provide guidance on implementing digital literacy programs.

Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning – Accessibility is crucial in education to ensure that all learners, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities. Adult educators need to consider accessibility laws and standards, such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Providing accessible learning materials and environments is not only a legal requirement, but it also supports the needs of diverse learners. Resources like those provided by OTAN and the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials can assist educators in creating accessible materials. Universal Design for Learning promotes the design of inclusive learning experiences by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression for all learners.

For consideration:

- As a practitioner, what have you done to assess students’ technology needs?
- What successes and challenges have you had in building digital literacy skills for students?