



YOUR EDTECH CONVERSATION GUIDE:

*Talking to parents about
technology for learning*

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Talking to parents about technology for learning

5 Tips for changing the conversation

You may be getting questions from parents about how you're using technology in your classroom. Often conversations focus on the features of the device or rules for appropriate use. But the most important thing to share with parents is your vision for how technology supports learning in your classroom. Here are five tips for changing the conversation about technology for learning:

- 1. Talk about the possibilities.** Think about the ways technology engages students and fosters learning. It allows you to bring astronauts into your classroom and lets [students conduct real scientific research](#). It offers rich, adaptive and culturally relevant learning materials that allow students to feel successful as they progress at their own pace. Free collaboration tools let kids solve real-world problems with peers around the world. In fact, tech does so much more than allow students to passively consume content; it enables them to be creators – filmmakers, bloggers, designers and engineers – who share their work with a global audience.
- 2. Inspire with your stories.** Next, consider sharing some specific ways your students are learning with technology in the classroom that parents might not be aware of. (Use the worksheet below to prepare examples.) You might stress the point that tech allows students to pursue their passions, which engages them in their learning. If you have a student who comes alive at the chance to make a video about a math concept, a budding writer who can't wait to post his fan fiction online, or a gamer who demonstrates perseverance as she creates a challenging level using Super Mario Maker 2, share these stories and illustrate how they connect to learning.
- 3. Talk about meeting the needs of all learners.** Every student has different needs and interests. They may have a disability or struggle mightily with reading. Some love sports and some love music. Some excel at math, while others would rather read. Technology can help teachers reach all students. Built-in accessibility tools allow struggling readers to listen to a story and struggling writers to record their thoughts. Shy students can give feedback in a shared doc instead of speaking out in class. Artists can tell their stories [using sketchnoting](#) or comic-creation tools instead of putting words on paper, while musicians can demonstrate their learning by composing a ballad about a historical event.
- 4. Cite the data about the skills of the future.** According to the [World Economic Forum](#), in just five years, more than a third of the skills we believe to be essential for today's workforce will have changed. As technology takes over more of the tasks that people have traditionally done, workplaces will require those who can bring an analytical approach to solving complex problems. That is, students need to know how to analyze data, design solutions and be [computational thinkers](#). They will also need cognitive flexibility, [creativity](#), logical reasoning and visualization, among others. [Skills – not job titles – will define the roles of future workers](#) and most of those skills will be honed by [creating, problem-solving and collaborating using technology](#).
- 5. Remind parents that this is not the future – it's the present.** It's essential that we not only equip schools with the tools they need to get the job done, but train students in [the skills they need to work and to be good citizens](#) – both in the future and today. That means preparing students to stay safe, solve problems and become a force for good. It means giving students practice using social media, sharing opinions on blogs and videos, making their voices heard to elected leaders, and learning how to balance their time on and off line.



How to tell your story

Answer the questions below to share how your students are learning with technology.

1. How are students using technology to get feedback on their work? *(Do students use video, slideshows or infographics to demonstrate their learning or get feedback?)*

2. How are students demonstrating good digital citizenship? *(Do students comment respectfully on each others' work? How do they use technology to promote causes they care about?)*

3. How are students using technology to research, vet and authenticate information, and develop their thinking about real-world issues? *(Do students seek sources from different points of view? Do they recognize true and false information and know how to recognize bias in online information?)*

4. How are students using tech to solve real problems? *(Do students use technology to research local issues? Do they use technology to make others aware of issues or propose solutions?)*

5. How are students using technology to collect and analyze data and present the results? *(Do students use survey tools to collect data, visualization tools to analyze results and presentation tools to share with a real-world audience?)*

6. How are students using technology to communicate with their teachers, classmates, experts and the community? *(Do students collaborate using online tools for projects? Do they share their school successes on social media?)*

7. How are your students using technology to collaborate with experts and peers globally and locally? *(Do students engage with people from different cultures and backgrounds using technology? Do experts visit the classroom using streaming video?)*



4 strategies for communicating with parents about using technology for learning

1. Hold a family tech night to teach parents how to use technology to support learning.

Host a family tech night at the start of the year to share how – and why – you are using technology in your classroom and school.

Ensure these events are inclusive by sending the invitation in multiple formats and in the languages parents speak. You'll get better attendance if you provide childcare and translators and offer snacks. Make it clear that all are welcome regardless of tech skills.

It's important to provide enough information but not overwhelm parents. In addition to sharing how teachers are using technology for learning, you can demonstrate how they can access student attendance and academic records, show them how to navigate the school website and teach them how to download district-supported apps.

Consider making or finding a compelling video so that you can paint a positive story about technology. You could also bring students in for a demo to illustrate the power of technology to transform learning.

2. Create a parent technology playground.

You don't need 3D printers and expensive robotics. Create a simple space using the classroom technology that students use every day. Set up in a library or classroom and schedule these periodic events at different times and on various days of the week so all parents can attend.

You can even staff this space with students who can demo the equipment and prepare exercises for parents to work through. Parents can edit a video, weigh in on a topic using collaborative docs and can answer poll questions using survey tools.

While parents are in this space and experiencing for themselves how they can use these tools for learning and civic engagement, you can talk about all the ways students around the district use technology to connect with experts or other classrooms as well as the role technology will play in every career, from farming and mechanics to biochemistry and food service.

3. Invite parents to student-led tech talks.

At Stamford American International School in Singapore, Craig Kemp asks middle and high school students to educate their parents about social media. They present on various tools at rotation stations and parents get plenty of time to ask questions.

This event empowers students to share their knowledge, gives them experience planning and presenting information, and proves to parents that students can be a valuable font of information.

You don't have to limit student tech talks to social media – although that's a popular topic with both students and parents. Kids can talk about digital citizenship, gaming, internet tips – you name it!

"This experiment proved to me how powerful student voice and student-driven learning can be," Kemp recalled. "I left the evening totally inspired and ready to expand the idea and give students more opportunities to lead the learning."

4. Prepare text, audio and video demos and tutorials




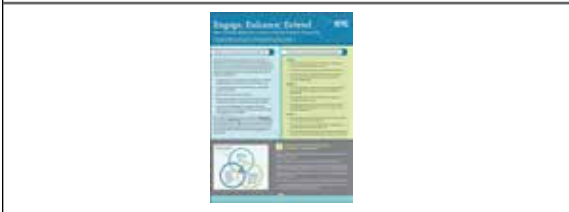


Not all parents can visit your school. For those who can't, staff and – better yet – students can create videos, podcasts and documents to inform, teach and inspire parents. Livestream and record family tech night and student-led tech presentations, ask students to make a video demonstrating an activity or project they did in class or create a weekly or monthly podcast highlighting some of the great projects and activities students are involved with.

Link to these assets in your school newsletter and post them on the website to make it easier for parents to access them.



Need additional ideas?

Want to dive deeper into learning with technology? Here are six ways to get started:

	Learn more	Get practical ideas you can use in your classroom immediately on the ISTE Blog.
	Learn more	Get answers to your burning edtech questions with the ISTE podcast, <i>Your Edtech Questions</i> . You'll love Episode 3: <i>What can educators do about device distraction in the classroom</i> .
	Learn more	Dive into the neuroscience of learning with the ISTE podcast <i>Course of Mind</i> . You'll love Episode 6: <i>Learning first, technology second</i> .
	Learn more	For quick reference in your classroom, purchase a laminated jumpstart guide outlining practical strategies from Liz Kolb's book <i>Learning First, Technology Second</i> .
	Learn more	Read <i>Learning First, Technology Second</i> by Liz Kolb.
	Learn more	Take our virtual course <i>Digital Citizenship in Action</i> or browse all ISTE U courses.





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