

## Use of Digital Tools and Learning Platforms in the Classroom

Educators are increasingly using digital resources to support instruction, assessment and evaluation, communication, collaboration, and student well-being.

School boards may provide or approve a variety of digital learning platforms and applications to support teaching and learning and the sharing of educational resources. These platforms allow students and educators to access learning materials, submit assignments, and engage in learning activities in both in-person and online learning environments.

While technologies such as learning management systems, video conferencing tools, cloud-based applications, and artificial intelligence (AI) can offer significant educational benefits, they also create considerations around professionalism, privacy, security, and record-retention. Members must exercise professional judgement when using digital technology and ensure that their practices comply with board policies, privacy obligations, and professional standards.

### Best Practices for Using Digital Tools and Learning Platforms

#### Equipment and technology

- Use only board-provided or board-approved devices, applications, and communication tools whenever possible.
- Use only learning platforms that have been approved or provided by your board and consult with your administrator before introducing any new platform or application. Board-approved platforms typically include privacy and security protections that may not exist in external applications.
- Avoid storing personal student information, including assessment data, medical information, photographs, videos, or other confidential records on personal devices.
- Avoid communicating with students, parents/guardians, or administrators through personal text messages, social media messaging applications, or other personal communication accounts.
- Be aware that using personal technology may create privacy, security, record-keeping, and professional boundary concerns and may contravene board policies.

### Obtain consent

- Ensure that all required parental/guardian consents have been obtained in writing before providing students with access to digital tools or learning platforms. Even when consent is not required, inform parents/guardians about the digital tools and platforms being used with students.
- Review the platform's terms of service, privacy practices, and minimum age requirements before introducing it to students.
- Consider what student information the platform collects, stores, or shares and whether its use is appropriate for educational purposes.

### Set clear expectations

- Clearly communicate the purpose and expectations for any technology used with students. Consider setting expectations out in writing.
- Be aware of and comply with provincial and board requirements regarding student use of personal mobile devices in schools. Clearly communicate expectations regarding when and how personal mobile devices may be used in the classroom. When in doubt, get approval in writing from your administrator.
- Where appropriate, ask students and parents/guardians to acknowledge that they have read and understood these expectations.

### Ensure compliance with board policies and codes of conduct

- Ensure that your use of digital technology complies with all applicable board policies and procedures.
- Apply board codes of conduct consistently in digital environments.
- Address inappropriate online conduct, including bullying, harassment, inappropriate comments, or inappropriate images, in the same manner as similar conduct occurring in person.
- Ensure that students and parents/guardians are aware of applicable expectations and policies.

### Protect privacy and security

- Keep login credentials confidential and secure.
- Ensure that students do not have administrative access to platforms used for educational purposes.
- Take reasonable steps to prevent unauthorized changes to content or settings.
- Protect student confidentiality and avoid disclosing personal or sensitive information.
- Consider whether posted content could be embarrassing, harmful, or otherwise inappropriate.

- Take reasonable steps to prevent images or content from being downloaded, copied, or misused.
- Remove or archive student information, accounts, and digital records in accordance with board policies and retention requirements.
- Obtain any required permissions before sharing, posting, recording, or distributing images, videos, or recordings that include students.

### Maintain a professional tone

- Be professional in all communications with students and parents/guardians.
- Keep communications focused on educational purposes.
- Avoid discussions, comments, or interactions that could be interpreted as inappropriate or that may cross professional boundaries.
- Recognize that humour and sarcasm can be more easily misunderstood in digital environments.
- Consider how comments may be interpreted without the benefit of in-person context and non-verbal cues.
- Remember that digital communications can be copied, shared, and taken out of context.

### Virtual classrooms and video conferencing

- Use board-approved video conferencing platforms and follow board requirements respecting their use.
- Establish and communicate clear expectations for student participation, behaviour, and appropriate use of cameras, microphones, chat functions, and screen-sharing features.
- Establish and communicate clear expectations regarding observation, participation, recording, and communication by parents/guardians during virtual classroom sessions.
- Be mindful of privacy considerations when students and educators are participating from home or other personal spaces.
- Avoid recording virtual lessons, meetings, or classroom interactions unless authorized by board policy. Ensure all applicable privacy requirements have been addressed.
- Continue to monitor participation in virtual classroom sessions to ensure that only authorized students and school staff are present and that unauthorized individuals do not access the learning environment.
- Maintain the same professional standards in virtual classrooms as would be expected in an in-person learning environment.

### Ensure inclusion and accessibility

- Do not assume that all students have access to internet services or personal devices outside of school.
- Consider the impact of technology requirements on student participation and engagement.

- Ensure that technology use does not disadvantage or exclude students because of access limitations.
- Where appropriate, provide alternative means of accessing learning opportunities when students are unable or unwilling to use a particular digital platform.

#### Stay up to date with technology

- Stay informed about emerging technologies, including AI tools.
- Understand the capabilities, limitations, risks, and implications of new technologies before adopting them for educational purposes.
- Regularly review board policies, procedures, and guidance respecting technology use.
- Seek advice from your local, your board, or Professional Relations Services when considering the use of a new technology or digital tool.
- Exercise critical thinking and professional judgement when using AI tools. AI may support student learning, planning, and preparation tasks, but it should not replace an educator's professional judgement. Educators should use critical thinking to ensure AI-generated content is accurate and equitable, and that their use complies with school policies and procedures related to privacy. Members are encouraged to review ETFO's PRS Matters *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Advice for Members* for additional guidance.

**For further information contact your local ETFO president or Professional Relations Services staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.**

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