



What is the role of technology in education?

The International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE) publishes internationally-recognized standards for evaluating the skills and knowledge students need to learn effectively and live productively in an increasingly global and digital world.

“Simply being able to use technology is no longer enough. Today’s students need to be able to use technology to analyze, learn, and explore. Digital age skills are vital for preparing students to work, live, and contribute to the social and civic fabric of their communities.”
(www.iste.org)

ISTE Standards include a focus on:

- Creativity and Innovation
- Communication and Collaboration
- Research and Information Fluency
- Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making
- Digital Citizenship
- Technology Operations and Concepts

To learn more about ISTE Standards, visit www.iste.org/standards

In addition, the Framework for 21st Century Learning, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills group, provides an integrated view of student outcomes and learning support systems for learners in today’s world.

Read more at www.p21.org.

Defining “digital learning” in the CRSD

Adults residing within the boundaries of the Copper River School District may well remember their first experiences with technology. These memories may include a mysterious machine connected to a telephone handset, large floppy disks that could “go bad” at any time, mobile phones so large that they required their own carrying cases, and three-inch thick laptops that weighed as much as a small child. That was “technology” only a couple decades ago.

Technology in today’s world is pervasive. Similarly, you can find technology in every classroom in the CRSD. The machines and devices have become so common place in our classrooms that they certainly are not considered unique or cutting edge any

longer. What *has* changed in the last few years is how the technology hardware and software are being used.

When technology tools are used for teaching and learning, it is commonly referred to as “digital learning.” This issue of the CRSD’s Digital Learning Digest is devoted to answering questions about *what* digital learning is and looks like in our classrooms, and it specifically addresses questions and answers related to Edgenuity, a digital learning resource that received much air time in the district during the Fall of 2013.

Time for Technology: How much is too much?

This may be the question of the year...or perhaps even the decade: **How much technology is too much?** When technology use, in general, was thrust into the CRSD’s public spotlight during the first semester of the 2013-14 school year, the question arose...and it is very difficult to answer.

The CRSD does not have policy that defines maximum/minimum time limits for technology use in the classroom. Discussion related to time limits will be a topic addressed by the Digital Learning Resources and Policy Review Committee during their meetings throughout the first several months of 2014. The challenge will be to balance general guidelines with best practices, without constraining each teacher’s ability to meet the needs of individual students within their classrooms and schools. Not an easy task. The question is complicated by varied re-

sponses to the question that must precede the “how much” question: How do we define “technology” itself? If students are “using technology” in the classroom, what is (and is not) included in the definition? Promethean boards, laptops, iPads, interactive response “clickers,” word processing, online math games, creation of digital projects like PowerPoint Presentations and movies, web searches, reading texts from an online site, quizzes through an online testing platform, keyboarding practice...all of these include various forms of “technology.”

Stay tuned as the Digital Learning Resources and Policy Review committee grapples with this complex question during the spring semester.



Where we're headed: The future of digital learning in the CRSD

A significant ramification of the “rollout” in August (see “Rollout” article on pg 2), was speculation regarding the CRSD’s “direction.” At one board meeting, it was suggested that a plan was in motion to “do away with” all textbooks. Others have suggested a conspiracy to replace teachers with computers. Their concerns were understandable even if based on assumptions. By not having a period of public review for the new resources, we created an atmosphere that gave breathe to these speculations. Added to the concerns created by our own digital learning resources, the national, state, and corporate digital learning initiatives cause both warranted and unfortunately exaggerated speculation.

Thus, a few people in our community have respectfully asked, “where is all of this headed?”

Before we speculate about national and state agendas, let’s begin by answering a couple of accusations about our own CRSD policies. First, there is no current plan to eliminate the use of paper-based textbooks in the CRSD. Secondly, there are no financial or programmatic plans to replace teachers with computers. Neither notion is possible or logical with the technology currently available or the values clearly expressed by the CRSD Board of Education.

Regarding the bigger national picture: We don’t know where digital learning is headed. Public education is in a time of considerable

transition. The politics of education has created regulatory uncertainty. President Obama has sought to reform education through administrative regulation rather than seek an unlikely consensus in Congress for revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Part of his agenda is to promote the digital education.

The global recession and new economic realities also play a role. States are looking for ways to save money. Education is one of, if not the most costly component of most state budgets. With the increase in health care spending, policy makers will be looking for ways to sustain public education while shifting resources.

Publishers are also involved in the changes. Rather than one-time textbook purchases, publishers now offer (maybe push is a better word) subscription based resources. For example, the last major Language Arts curriculum adoption in the CRSD costs \$110,000. Typically school districts have a seven year expected turnaround on curriculum purchases. Some district are now opting for a yearly subscription that is more financially manageable on a year to year basis. It is unfortunate, but the curriculum industry is very lucrative and does not favor small districts like the CRSD. The publishers cater to large states that have statewide textbook adoptions such as California and Texas.

Other states and large cities also have ambitious digital learning agendas, including the purchase of devices for every student. Over thirty states now

have full-time “virtual schools” for students who wish or need to take courses online.

How will that all impact the CRSD? Not sure. When purchasing curriculum (which we need to do in several grades/subjects) digital resources will certainly be an option to consider. For our high school students, qualifying for the Governor’s Scholarship and other college/career requirements will necessitate digital learning options. And yes, lesson learned, we won’t let circumstances override our commitment to parent and student input for future curriculum adoptions.

For now, our agenda remains clear, to provide a quality education in a rural environment. The Digital Learning Resources and Policy Review Committee will be assisting administrators and the Board of Education in developing digital learning policies and programmatic guidelines.

And rest assured, no Board or Administrative directive has pointed the CRSD down a road of robotic instruction minus professionally trained educators. Digital learning, like other resources, are used by teachers to teach students. Technology has been used in the district for many years. We have trusted our teachers to use it wisely. I hope our community will continue to trust them in the future.

What is Edgenuity?

Founded in 1998, Edgenuity is an educational-resource company that provides rigorous, research-based content delivered by highly qualified teachers through online and classroom-based delivery models. The Edgenuity "tool" is computer based and is used by teachers to support classroom and online instruction of core-content and elective courses for students in grades 6-12. Nearly one-million students learn with the aide of Edgenuity courseware each year. The company partners with 14,000 schools in all 50 states. For more information about what Edgenuity is and how it works, visit their webpage at www.edgenuity.com.

Does Edgenuity make a teacher's job easier?

Yes and No. Yes, a tool like Edgenuity does save a teacher time when it comes to identifying and pulling together a vast array of resources required to plan and teach a course, and ensuring that all course activities are aligned with standards. Edgenuity's courseware has already done that for the teacher. However, the amount of time and effort required to review the content, prepare for classroom instruction, provide direct instruction, interact with students, respond to written assignments, and the many other responsibilities of a classroom teacher are still there. Teaching is a challenging and time-consuming job, regardless of the tools available.



The Rocky Roll-Out of EDGENUITY

Much has been said about the so-called "roll out" of Edgenuity in the Copper River School District. It can all be summarized with only three short words: It was bad. Okay, maybe four words: It was really bad.

Though it was unintentional, Edgenuity arrived in the CRSD without the proper introduction it deserved. Teachers and administrators continue to believe Edgenuity, used appropriately, offers many advantages to students. The value of Edgenuity should not be judged based on the lack of orientation we provided for students and parents. Many, if not most, of the frustrations experienced in the first few weeks of the Edgenuity implementation can be directly attributed to the lack of communication and preparation in August of 2013.

While there were several events that led the sloppy and rushed implementation of Edgenuity, the most important message we hope to convey is, "We accept responsibility and apologize." Though communication takes place at all levels of the district's operation, on behalf of everyone, the Superintendent

has accepted the responsibility for the inadequate implementation process.

Here is a brief description of how the situation developed:

Teachers in the Copper River School District have used digital resources for a number of years. As they collaborated and shared successful strategies, they began to explore the potential benefits of an expanded use of digital resources. Those conversations peaked in the Spring of 2013.

The exciting possibilities and advantages that were apparent to teachers last spring (and now to many who have used Edgenuity) caused us to aim for an August implementation. We now realize that implementing a new digital content tool over the summer doesn't provide enough opportunities for adequate orientation for teachers, parents, or students. The process needs to start much earlier.

Adding to the situation, August arrived with a slew of newly adopted accountability regulations from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. Administrators were busy reading and analyzing the impact of these new

documents and rules. A proper introduction to Edgenuity for students and parents was neglected.

We learned a hard and important lesson. Our challenges in August probably resulted in a lot of students and parents not liking Edgenuity early on. We regret not giving people an opportunity to judge the quality of the product BEFORE understanding how it would be used and its benefits. We are very grateful to many who initially expressed frustration with Edgenuity but have given it a fair chance and found aspects of the program they like. From the beginning, the teachers' vision for Edgenuity has been improved student achievement.

Criticism is most painful when it is accurate. The criticisms of Edgenuity's introduction to the CRSD are accurate and painful.

Bottom line: We are sorry. We accept the deserved criticisms of our implementation process. We will do better. We respectfully ask that the merits of digital learning not be judged based on one poorly-planned implementation.



In terms of technology hardware and software, what is currently being used in CRSD classrooms?

The short answer: a LOT of different technology tools and resources are being used in our various schools and across all grade levels. The following list is not exhaustive, as teachers have the freedom to select supplemental technology resources to support and enhance classroom instruction.

Technology Hardware:

- iPads
- Desktop computers
- Laptops
- Promethean boards
- "Clicker" response systems
- Document cameras
- Digital cameras
- TI Graphing Calculators

Web-based Tools:

- Discovery Education
- Math Chimp
- Student News Daily
- Quizlet
- That Quiz
- Poetry4Kids
- Penzu
- IXL Math
- Lexia Reading
- Edgenuity
- EdHelper
- BrainPop
- Spelling City
- Free Rice
- Academic Skill Builders
- 6+1 Traits Writing
- Read-Write-Think
- Dozens of iPad apps!

FAQs about Edgenuity in the CRSD

Q: When did the Board of Education approve the use of Edgenuity?

A: The CRSD Board of Education approved the use of Edgenuity at the August 2013 Board Meeting. The Board was presented information supporting the use of Edgenuity at a work session immediately prior to the meeting. Both the work session and Board meeting agendas were publicly announced.

Q: Was the use of Edgenuity mandated by district administration?

A: No. During the 2012-13 SY, high school English teachers used Apex Learning digital curriculum for high school Advanced Placement classes. In the spring of 2013, middle school teachers in Glennallen opted to pilot Edgenuity for Language Arts and Math. On several occasions during the Fall 2013 semester, teachers were provided the opportunity to discontinue use of Edgenuity with no strings attached. All chose to continue using the tool.

Q: How did the district pay for Edgenuity?

A: Edgenuity was purchased using money from the general fund and technology fund. Both are maintained through the funding formula based on student enrollment. Each year the CRSD BoE budgets for technology and curriculum-related expenses.

Q: Does Edgenuity replace direct instruction provided by the classroom teacher?

A: No. Edgenuity is used as a curricular resource and instructional tool by teachers, just as a textbook, workbook, or teacher-created instructional material might be. Observers in a classroom where Edgenuity is being used will still see teachers standing in front of the class providing direct instruction, presenting content, leading class discussions, answering questions, providing assistance to individual students, and "teaching" as they would in any other class.

Q: Does Edgenuity meet the needs of struggling learners?

A: Edgenuity includes a number of tools that support both visual and auditory learners. In addition to direct instruction provided by the classroom teacher, a student

can go back and watch an instructional video repeatedly. Transcripts of the lectures are provided for the majority of lectures. Interactive note-taking tools, highlighters, glossaries, vocabulary support, and text-to-speech tools are also embedded in each lesson.

Q: Will other teachers be required to use Edgenuity?

There are currently no plans to mandate the use of Edgenuity for any teacher. The BoE makes the final decision regarding curriculum.

Q: Is the CRSD locked into using Edgenuity for three years?

A: In order to obtain a substantial discount, the CRSD BoE approved a three-year agreement with Edgenuity. If the BoE determines it is appropriate to discontinue the use of Edgenuity, the district will work with the company to negotiate an end to the agreement.

Q: Will Edgenuity be used in the 2014-2015 school year?

A: The BoE will make that decision in the Spring of 2014. The Board will consider the recommendations of staff and the Digital Learning Resources and Policy Review Committee.

Q: Currently, how many "Edgenuity classes" does a student take in one day?

A: Students do not take "Edgenuity classes." Rather, they take content-area courses that may include delivery of content using Edgenuity or another digital curriculum tool. Most high school students have one or two classes in which the teacher uses Edgenuity as a teaching tool. Middle school students in Glennallen may have up to three classes during the day in which the teacher has chosen to utilize Edgenuity's content and tools.

Q: Is the CRSD the only district in Alaska using Edgenuity's digital resources?

A: No. A number of districts in Alaska use Edgenuity's digital tools and resources, including the Alaska Learning Network (the state's leading e-learning provider).



Why Edgenuity?

During the winter and spring months of 2013, CRSD administrative staff worked to identify, investigate, explore, and determine which digital content tool might best meet the needs of our district as a whole while also meeting each school's unique needs. For three years, we had been using Apex Learning resources for our Advanced Placement (AP) English classes, and teachers and administrators were interested in expanding the use of standards-aligned content in other classes.

Initially, we considered Apex Learning, as our high school AP teachers had used it for two years. However, Apex's resources were only available for limited grade levels and they were not all aligned with the Common Core and Alaska's new standards. In addition, Apex's resources

and those from several other content providers did not provide students with opportunities to engage with content beyond reading text on a screen. Lack of alignment with standards and lack of engagement for different types of learners ruled out a number of options.

Edgenuity rose to the top as a preferred product because of its full alignment with standards and its rich array of content delivery and learning tools (including video, transcripts, audio support, online assessments, text tools like e-notes, online glossaries, writing tools, and more). In addition, the level of product support for a small district like ours was very important, and Edgenuity outshone all others. From initial conversations with their sales representative to ongoing support

throughout the first semester, Edgenuity continues to be one of the most responsive, attentive companies with which we have ever worked.

During the rocky days of Fall 2013, it was suggested that the CRSD selected Edgenuity without much thought or research. This could not be farther from the truth. Literally, *weeks* were spent investigating digital content options, visiting with company representatives, participating in product demonstrations, and then comparing the pro's and con's of each option. After a lengthy and thorough review of each available product, Edgenuity was the best fit for CRSD classrooms...and remains the tool of choice for many teachers.

What do the teachers using Edgenuity in their classrooms have to say?

"What Edgenuity can and does deliver is core curriculum concepts, all in one place, that a teacher can use for instruction, along with traditional methods and/or other resources. It has expanded our "tool box" of what we can use to help students succeed."

"Instead of searching the Internet for literally hours each week, we are able to spend more time personalizing the classroom to allow a greater amount of differentiated instruction to occur."

"Instead of rote memorization, students are having to apply their knowledge and show real learning."

"In all honesty, I feel that in my classrooms that use Edgenuity as a learning tool, we have more class discussion time than we did last year in classes that used textbooks."

"I know more about what my students know this year than I ever did before. The instant feedback lets me offer immediate assistance to the students who need it, instead of waiting a day or two until assignments are graded and returned to the student."

"Edgenuity gives me a tool that tells me what a student learned and understands, not just whether or not he turned in an assignment."

"The content in Edgenuity is impressing me on a daily basis. We are really raising the bar."

"The year has been filled with more student and teacher interaction about content than I have ever had in previous years."

"I am a parent and a teacher and I am wholeheartedly in favor of using Edgenuity. I can be sure that my child has access to the content that will him/her succeed in whatever they do, regardless of whose classroom they are in."



What is happening around digital learning in the Alaska Legislature?

The Governor has announced a digital learning initiative for rural Alaska. He has included \$5 million in his FY15 budget to expand the delivery of instruction through digital technologies.

The Alaska School Board's Association is also promoting legislation that will provide a device for every student in Alaska's public schools. For more information on Governor Parnell's Digital Learning Initiative, go to: <http://1.usa.gov/1eXZEqe>

In addition, the Alaska Legislature's Sustainable Education Task Force released a report that references technology as a means to "achieve a sustainable future." Read more at the report: <http://bit.ly/1KHQSNn>

More Frequently Asked Questions about Digital Learning...

Q: What's all this talk about "raising the standards," and what do standards have to do with digital learning?

A: In 2010, the CRSD adopted the Common Core Standards, and in 2012, the state of Alaska adopted a new set of standards closely aligned with the Common Core. The new standards are *significantly* more demanding than our previous grade level expectations. Digital learning tools provide teachers with resources that make a transition to more rigorous standards easier to implement in the classroom. In addition, many digital tools provide students and teachers with immediate feedback on student learning, allowing teachers to differentiate and adjust learning to help individual students and the entire class grow academically at a more rapid pace.

Q: Does the CRSD intend to replace all textbooks with computers?

A: No. Though the federal government and publishers are using their influence to transition schools to digital textbooks, the CRSD does not currently have plans to eliminate traditional textbooks from the curriculum. As publishers limit the options for paper-based resources, we will review and consider digital resources for some classrooms. Under the district's current leadership, there is no interest in using digital textbooks in the primary grades (K-2).

Q: Is there research that supports the use of digital curriculum in the classroom?

A: Yes. As the use of digital resources and online content have expanded over the last few years, research related to the effectiveness of these tools has begun to emerge. We have added a page to the CRSD web site with many links to digital learning-related topics. Visit www.crsd.us/digital-learning-resources

Q: What about students who do not have internet access at home?

A: Teachers work with each student and their families to ensure that connectivity does not affect their academic achievement. In addition, each school has created support systems for students without Internet access at home, including before and after-school study halls, lunch-time computer lab hours, and supported study time during PLUS period.

Q: What is the difference between Edgenuity and e-Learning?

A: In the CRSD, Edgenuity is a digital learning tool used by classroom teachers in a few of our classrooms. In these cases, Edgenuity is an instructional tool that provides teachers and students with content, assignments, and assessments. E-Learning refers to opportunities for students to take courses completely online in e-Learning labs. E-Learning provides students with access to dozens of classes they would not otherwise have access to in CRSD classrooms, and the availability of "anytime, anywhere" classes helps alleviate scheduling issues. CRSD students currently take classes through a number of e-learning providers, including EdOptions, NDCDE, Alaska Learning Network, and Edgenuity's Instructional Services program.

Q: What in the world is "blended" learning, and how is it different from a "virtual" class?

A. "Blended learning is a term used widely in education today. It refers to the use of technology tools and content in a traditional classroom setting where the teacher provides the bulk of direct instruction. Teachers in blended learning classrooms utilize many of the same traditional teaching strategies that have been used for decades, such as lecture, guided practice, class discussion, small group activities, and more. However, in a blended learning classroom, teachers and students also utilize digital tools (as opposed to textbooks, workbooks, and paper-pencil assignments) to access content, activities, assessments, and more. A "virtual classroom" is one that does not rely on a physical space to bring teachers and students together. Students enrolled in "virtual classes" log onto a computer to access content, discussion, activities, and tests; however, they still engage regularly with teachers via email, Skype, online study halls, and by telephone. Virtual classroom teachers provide feedback on assignments, answer questions, and provide additional tutoring and support, just as a teacher in a traditional classroom does.

Interested in reading or learning more? Visit the district webpage at www.crsd.us and select "E-Learning Resources" under the Students & Parents menu for links to dozens of resources and reports.

Interested in more information about digital learning in the CRSD? Contact us!

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