How Accelerated Learning Prepares School Districts for Present and Future Success

Istation | **K-12 DIVE**

Educators are well aware that the COVID-19 pandemic presented even more challenges for student learning this year. This is particularly true for previously disadvantaged students. Luckily, today's teachers are more equipped than ever before to harness the power of educational technology to create quick and effective strategies for forward advancement.

One solution, for example, lies in accelerated learning. "Instead of addressing learning loss with remediation — which at its basic level is reteaching — accelerated learning optimizes our teaching-learning system to keep the students moving forward on their intended grade level by providing appropriate content for those specific grades," said Julie Kalinowski, professional development special project lead with Istation.

In this playbook, educators will learn the advantages of a solid accelerated learning strategy, including the benefits for different administrative levels. You'll also find examples of how ed-tech provides the data and structure necessary to help foster those strategies. Pandemic learning loss won't be regained overnight, but educators who properly utilize the approaches in this playbook — those provided by an ed-tech-supported accelerated learning set-up — will reap the advantages down the road.

The Ed-tech Advantage

Ed-tech helps educators achieve their accelerated-learning goals by providing them with data to scale their interventions and resources to do so. A good ed-tech program helps educators roll out an effective accelerated-learning strategy at the district and school level by providing:

- **Adaptable programming based on real-time data.**

- **Personalized learning plans based on individual students' needs.**

- **Teacher time-management capabilities through features such as centralized tools and systems.**

These elements help school districts build long-term strategies to aid in regaining learning.

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Understanding
Accelerated Learning

Historically, schools have addressed learning loss in three ways:

1 **Retention**
Requires students who fall behind to repeat the entire academic school year.

2 **Social promotion**
Allows students to continue with their peers, even when lacking in performance.

3 **Remediation**
Reteaches content students didn't master the first time around.

With retention and remediation, "if we continue to only teach students what they don't know, they will always be a year behind," Kalinowski said. Accelerated learning allows students to continue on their intended grade-level trajectories, with the understanding that scaffolding will likely be needed to fill learning gaps.

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IMPLEMENTING ACCELERATED LEARNING IN CLASSROOMS

In its ED COVID-19 Handbook, the U.S. Department of Education shows districts how accelerated learning can help recoup learning lost during the pandemic. The handbook covers three questions educators face in determining the most appropriate interventions for acceleration. These include:

1

Where is each student in their mastery of critical skills and concepts?

The ed-tech answer: With the right tools, educators can quickly create plans that meet individual students where they are in their learning journey. High-quality assessments within the Istation program provide the data educators need to offer effective modeling for students to use in varied learning environments at home, in school or elsewhere. It also allows students and teachers to work together to create and set goals (which boosts student agency) and to identify individual priority standards and skills, as well as keep students on track with their peers.

In Pinellas County, Florida, educators use Istation data to pinpoint and target diagnostic needs for individual students, which helps them eliminate learning barriers by figuring out what's causing them. "We love the fact that we can use Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP) for ongoing progress monitoring, especially when we think about identifying specific areas of concern," said Holly Slaughter, elementary reading and language arts specialist with Pinellas County schools. "It's an adaptive, computer-based model that is meeting students where they are and providing not just practice but actual instruction to meet those needs."

2

What interventions are the most effective?

The ed-tech answer: The gathering and parsing of data are pertinent steps in creating an effective accelerated-learning intervention. With Istation, assessment, screening and progress-monitoring tools are the backbone of program development. With the data provided, educators can look at trends within a classroom, grade level or entire district, and then use that information to make informed decisions regarding instructional decisions.

3

When will accelerated learning occur?

The ed-tech answer: Whether assessments and programs are completed before, during or after school, at home or in the classroom, using an ed-tech program like Istation's helps educators gather data in real time to quickly create and implement an effective agenda.

Istation captures reliable student data within a 30-minute period for an entire class. Teachers can then take the data and break apart their students into groups for instructional interventions. Istation provides instructional interventions for a whole class, small groups, or individual practice.

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How District and School Leaders Can **Maximize Accelerated Learning**

The key to moving out of the pandemic is forward advancement.
Each stakeholder has a role to play when implementing accelerated learning, and e-learning platforms like Istation's can help everyone work toward that unified goal. But each tier of educator has different concerns when it comes to accelerated learning.

ACHIEVING SYSTEM-LEVEL GOALS AT THE DISTRICT AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR LEVEL

Months-long disruptions in learning have exacerbated inequities within our education system. Rather than reinforcing a loss of academic ground through remediation, accelerated learning uses strategies proven to help students work toward grade-level achievements by assisting administrators in creating new, districtwide plans for learning based on student data.

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ADDRESSING ADMINISTRATOR CONCERNS

Student achievement is at the forefront of administrator goals, but administrators should consider additional factors when implementing an accelerated-learning program.

1

Programming needs

Educators have less instructional time with students these days, so leadership teams may decide how much time to spend teaching different standards at each grade level. Using data collected from Istation assessments, administrators can look at trends for a specific student, within a specific classroom or an entire grade level, and then decide the best way to move forward.

"If they look at data for third grade at the district level, for example, and see that 50% of classes are struggling with vocabulary, that gives them an indication that vocabulary is a whole-group issue, and not something that can be addressed simply with intervention."

Julie Kalinowski
Professional development special project lead with Istation

2

Ongoing training support

Upfront effort is required to collect the data necessary for a successful accelerated-learning plan, but administrators don't have to reinvent the wheel. Looking to districts that have successfully created accelerated-learning programs can help.

Pinellas County schools' plan for third grade provides an accelerated framework for the entire district to follow. It includes best uses for actionable data, alignment for "just-in-time" instruction, an agenda for following the accelerated framework, and plans for monitoring student progress and adjusting supports based on student results. Monthly meetings with administrators and learning specialists help the district roll out the plan and point out additional resources to help teachers implement it, as do supplemental professional development training sessions.

3

Cost concerns

Administrators may also worry about the cost of implementing a successful accelerated-learning program. Allocating current ESSER funds toward acceleration strategies and professional development can help administrators ensure that teachers receive the best resources to help with current goals.

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ACCELERATED LEARNING AND TEACHERS: THE REAL ADVANTAGE

Accelerated-learning assessments through Istation provide teachers with a valuable benchmark for students, which allows them to work effectively within their day.

Customized deliverables are useful in several ways. They help teachers to:

- **Understand the current level of student learning.**

- **Discover new ways to improve in academic skill areas.**

- **Access follow-through supplemental resources.**

Istation data not only helps teachers measure where students are presently but also offers a prescriptive "what's next" to deliver immediate and intentional instruction and intervention.

ADDRESSING TEACHER CONCERNS

Like administrators, teachers may have apprehensions about administering accelerated learning plans, particularly when so many aspects of education are already disrupted. Fortunately, working within an accelerated learning framework can be streamlined in several areas.

1

Professional Development

A main concern teachers may have with an accelerated-learning platform is the time necessary to learn the system. Leaders at the district level who create a framework for using accelerated learning within their schools provide teachers with the advantage of a solid program structure that helps everyone move toward the same outcomes districtwide.

"One of the ways we used Istation [to help alleviate time issues] is that when we rolled our plan out, we actually showed the teachers where to find and triangulate the data," Slaughter said. Time used on the front end of data gathering is also recouped later in the classroom, since accelerated-learning assessments help teachers stay on track with individual student goals.

2

Implementation

Teachers are also concerned about finding the time to implement individualized educational pathways. Istation helps educators circumvent that issue by offering easy-to-read, teacher-friendly data that allows them to move quickly through the process. An abundance of teacher resources alleviates prep time with scripted, easy-to-follow lessons for small-group, whole-group or one-on-one teaching.

Pinellas County teachers were shown an example of how they could take lessons created in Istation and teach them across several days, giving students more practice, while then lessening the scaffolding with time. "One thing we learned after implementing accelerated learning is that we're rich with resources," Slaughter said.

"Istation contributes to that wealth of resources that teachers have at their fingertips. We just need to stick with our message and continue to provide professional development and support to teachers as they implement."

Holly Slaughter
Elementary reading and language arts specialist with Pinellas County schools

BRING INSIGHTFUL DATA AND INNOVATIVE TOOLS TO THE CLASSROOM

Over at Pinellas County, the results of its accelerated-learning strategy show promising evidence that what it's doing is helping to mitigate learning slides resulting from the pandemic. For example, in ELA/Literacy, while the entire state dropped two points in its fifth-grade assessment, Pinellas County gained a point. Being flexible with its actions has helped Pinellas County create a successful accelerated-learning plan. "We need to watch carefully and make adjustments along the way as we see fit," Slaughter said. "That's the science and the art of teaching."

Istation helps school and district leaders gather and understand data about student performance in accelerated-learning programs under their purview. This, in turn, helps them develop an accelerated-learning framework that works best for individual districts and classrooms, ensuring that students and teachers are more likely to reach their goals.

Propel your school or district to its full potential, learn more about how Istation can help with your accelerated learning goals! →

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Help teachers determine next steps, plan interventions and differentiate instruction with Istation. Named "Online Learning Innovation of the Year" by EdTech Breakthrough, Istation is recognized as a compelling distance-learning solution for reading, math and Spanish literacy.

Based on scientific evidence and comprehensive research, Istation's formative assessments, progress monitoring, adaptive instruction and teacher resources help measure growth and introduce new skills in school and at home.

Powered by the science of reading, Istation's assessments and instruction cover the National Reading Panel's "Big Five" foundational essentials. Schools get the support they need to improve comprehension and growth with activities and lessons taught through explicit, direct instruction. Plus, teachers are provided with actionable data that measure phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and other skills.

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