



A National Consideration of Digital Equity

ISTE President Trina Davis describes an ongoing commitment to digital equity and invites members to weigh in.

The ISTE community has long been committed to addressing issues of digital equity. As part of that commitment, in 2005 the ISTE Board of Directors approved SIGDE, a special interest group that was formed to focus on digital equity issues, as well as, effective strategies and solutions. In addition, over the past nine years, ISTE has hosted digital equity summits and symposia during the National Educational Computing Conference (NECC). Past summits have focused on evolving DE issues and have ranged from such topics as helping to build leadership capacity in communities of color (2001); making home, school, and community connections (2000); sustaining digital parity for economic inclusion (2005); and critical dimensions and solutions of the digital divide (2006).

The 2007 Digital Equity Summit focused on *Engaging and Empowering 21st Century Learners*. A critical component of this year's summit was the release and examination of an ISTE report, *A National Consideration of Digital Equity*. I am very pleased to have been one of the lead authors of the report, which was an outgrowth of the 2006 Digital Equity Summit and is part of an ongoing effort to

broaden awareness of digital equity issues and provide resources to educators and policy makers.

In the report, *digital equity* is defined as equal access and opportunity to digital tools, resources, and services. Authors maintain that “when considering the role of technology in the development of the 21st century learner, digital equity is more than a comparable delivery of goods and services, but fair distribution based on students’ needs.”

Experts from the 2006 summit identified seven essential components for creating an environment that supports digital equity.

1. Develop an operational definition of equity.
2. Revisit whether current educational experiences are meeting the needs of culturally diverse students.
3. Challenge current assumptions about teaching and learning.
4. Focus on developing teachers’ technology skills before they enter the classroom.
5. Redefine the role of the teacher in the 21st century.
6. Consider the cultural implications of technology use.
7. Obtain buy-in from stakeholders.

Where Do We Go from Here?

In the report, authors recommend the following five strategies to help make progress toward digital equity:

1. Legitimize the significant role culture plays in students’ educational experience.
2. Continue to challenge perceptions about the role of technology in education.
3. Encourage others to recognize the critical link between technology, professional development, and classroom practice.
4. Create opportunities for students to access technology outside the classroom.
5. Continue to seek funding for technology in spite of challenges.

ISTE’s digital equity summits and subsequently this report have rekindled a powerful dialogue for making digital equity a national priority. We now have an ongoing venue in which to discuss key issues, share proven and scalable solutions, and mobilize key stakeholders with the tools they need to take action. The report, *A National Consideration of Digital Equity*, and details about the 2007 summit are available at <http://www.iste.org/digitalequity>.

Have you or your organization used promising strategies or resources to address digital equity needs or would you like to? Have you explored digital equity issues in your research or advocacy efforts that you’d like to share? Do you have suggestions for topics for future digital equity summits? Send your comments to digitalequity@iste.org. Let’s continue the dialogue and take action! ■