

## **A Pathway Towards Home Schooling**

We live in uncertain times. The unprecedented events that are unfolding around us highlight now, more than ever, the need for schools to forward plan and build learning contingency plans in the event of mass school closures of undefined duration.

The following paper aims to address and identify the various factors schools should consider in order to effectively establish, run and maintain remote learning for the staff, students and communities more broadly.

The top five factors to consider are set out below:

- 1. Equity Considerations - Internet Bandwidth & Device Access**
- 2. Accessing Digital Resources**
- 3. Collaboration Tools**
- 4. Remote Student Monitoring**
- 5. Self-Managing Bottlenecks & IT Environments**

### **1. Equity Considerations - Internet Bandwidth & Device Access**

- Schools need to consider that some parent households have low speed internet connections, or none at all, which makes Home Schooling strategies based around video conferencing (Skype/Zoom) problematic.
- This makes it important to choose technology platforms that also offer an offline capability. Teachers and students will not always be connected; however, they always need access to their school books. eBook resources need to be able to be downloaded to the device once connectivity is available and these resources can then be accessed at any time.
- If parents do not have internet at home, schools should consider using platforms that allow eBooks to be downloaded to their devices once using phone tethering.
- Many schools will face a situation where not all students have their own computers. However, many students will have mobile phones and potentially access to parents' computers or shared school devices, and as such schools need to consider technology platforms which support sharing eBooks on multiple devices.

### **2. Accessing Digital Resources**

- Home schooling obviously requires that students can still access their physical or digital resources. Technology platforms that provide access to a school's in-classroom resources will become a necessity as they afford teachers and students the ability to seamlessly access all required resources from the one location.
- The more technically progressive platforms have gone one step further and solved the issue of publisher automatic logins without the need to enter any further school credentials.

- Schools should also consider platforms that can house online tests, notes created by teachers or assignments in case your school does not have a Learning Management System or it is not accessible. It is important that these additional resources can be uploaded and shared within an eLearning platform.

### **3. Collaboration Tools**

- As teachers will not have the normal daily contact with students it's important that schools consider technology platforms that enable communication in virtual classes and promote collaborative learning opportunities. The ability to remotely engage in a discussion inside the eBooks improves student learning outcomes and provides for "flipped learning" experiences.
- Collaboration Tools at a minimum need to allow for text annotating, sharing and commenting in threads. Enhanced Collaboration Tools will enable the addition of Video, Audio, Rich Text and Images inside of the resources whereby a Teacher can share more valuable content with the students.

### **4. Remote Student Monitoring**

- With students working remotely it's important to consider technology platforms that provide learning analytics so teachers can monitor the student's attendance and study behavior.
- Some platforms allow teachers access to see if the individual students have opened their eBooks and how much time they have spent studying.
- Some platforms allow teachers to monitor and moderate the classroom discussions occurring inside of the eBooks.

### **5. Self-Managing Bottlenecks & IT environments**

- Transitioning to Home Schools is unlikely to be trouble free on day one. There are several further technical considerations a school should consider.
- Textbook publishers are currently being swamped with enquiries for schools wanting remote digital access. It is likely response times will increase significantly and, as such, schools should consider platforms with tools allowing the school to self-manage changes to students' resource requirements.
- New students arriving and student class movement needs to be dealt with swiftly so that students have quick access to the correct resources.
- User login experience needs to be seamless and efficient - Sign in and Remote Access now needs to be top of mind. Due consideration needs to be given to a solution that seamlessly interacts with the School's Single Sign On (SSO) environment when (and where) available.
- Password Management – Schools should be considering platforms that streamline teacher and student access, whilst at the same time automate processes and provide easy and efficient access to resources. Co-ordinating a single sign-in approach to access publisher interactive content through one platform is also fundamental in any well thought through end-to-end in-classroom experience. Those publishers that

support LTI or SSO provide a far easier and more cost-effective solution for schools to deploy and teachers and students to access their interactive content.

- All solutions need to work within the technical parameters at school and need to seamlessly integrate both internally and externally with existing platforms – Timetable, Learning Management Systems, Student Management Systems, Interactive publishers, web conferencing facilities to name a few.
- Solutions needs to work with BYO devices (cross platform), school owned devices and shared family devices. A set of native applications need to be available for all devices within a school. This can be quite varied and somewhat challenging in a true BYOD environment. Software support needs to extend beyond the currently available Operating System for the device to at least the two prior releases. This enables device support up to 3 years old and needs to include the following:
  - At a minimum your cross-device support must include Windows, macOS, iOS, Android and Chromebooks.
  - Support for the current evergreen Browsers in the above devices should also be expected, however it is best to ensure that the Reading experience in the browser is the same as that in the Cross Device Native Applications
- Setup, onboarding and ongoing support of schools transitioning to a digital learning environment/eReading platform should be considered. Schools need to ensure their technology partner is capable of interfacing with your timetable data so that user and class creation is automated from the outset.
- Class management and the corresponding content used in each class is becoming increasingly important - both on campus and in a home-schooling environment. eLearning platforms need to remotely manage these continual movements, including any associated content provisioning - both offline resources and the activation of publisher interactive codes (from within print books or stand-alone digital only codes) to support interactive access on school's behalf.
- Remote In-servicing and Professional Development needs to be conducted in an efficient manner and include tools such as faculty specific webinars, remote video tutorials and product feedback.
- Commercial and Software Agility
  - When you need extra resources, you don't want to wait days or even weeks. Ask about your provider's abilities to provide new resources you require in a timely manner.
  - It is vital that your platform provider can respond quickly to new features and functions to improve the learning experience and to software issues (bugs do happen).
  - Every environment is different and it will be important your provider is experienced and has the local knowledge you will require. Where your solution is developed and supported is crucial.

The ReadCloud platform is currently being used by over 350 schools across Australia and offers offline/online access to student curriculum on up to six devices as well as providing low bandwidth collaboration tools between teachers and students and easy to self-administer support tools.

Contact ReadCloud at [contact@readcloud.com](mailto:contact@readcloud.com) to learn more.