

Virtual Teaching Academy Session 10

(upbeat music)

Welcome to the Summer Virtual Teaching Academy.

And thank you all for joining us.

You have a great session ready for you, but before we start, we have just a couple of housekeeping items to review.

First, all attendees are in the room muted by default, we invite you to participate.

However, we invite you to submit your comments and questions in the question panel, you'll be answering questions and passing questions on your presenters throughout the session.

Also, this session will be recorded and you'll be able to download all the recordings and slides on our Virtual Teaching Academy Resource Page.

Now I'd like to pass the mic to Pam, to get us started.

Hi everybody.

My name is Pam Roggeman.

Welcome to the 10th and final session of our Summer Virtual Teaching Academy.

I'm so excited that you're here.

I just want to tell you a little bit about what's been going on.

As Ryan mentioned, you'll be able to access all slides and all the recordings for any of the sessions that you've missed, or you might wanna hear again.

I thought it was kind of interesting what we've learned throughout this Virtual Teaching Academy is 75% of those of you who are on our teachers.

Which makes perfect sense to me because anytime that there has been a leading shift in the field of education, it's always been the teachers who lead that change.

So welcome to everybody who's on here, parents, district and building leaders and teachers, 'cause teachers, you are the overwhelming majority of folks who are joining us today.

As Ryan mentioned don't bother with the chat section of the webinar.

You're gonna go to the questions section, that's where you'll be able to give feedback and connect with our panelists and our team behind the scenes who are fielding your questions.

Again, my name is Pam Roggeman, I'm Dean for the College of Education here at the University of Phoenix.

And we are super excited to bring you this free alliance, just to really kind of share with you what we have, what we know about virtual learning.

I wanna talk a little bit about why we created the Alliance for Virtual Learning with our partner, Blackboard and other K-12 leaders in this space.

As you all know, I think it was exactly March 15th where K-12 education was halted for in some cases as short as 24 hours and in other cases, it took school districts weeks to kind of pivot to what distance or online learning was gonna look like for your school district.

And what we noticed is that there were varying levels of success in that pivot.

And so our goal here in presenting the online Virtual Teaching Academy is to help equip districts with the ever dwindling days that we have for what back to school will look like this fall.

I think what this pandemic has shown us is that there is a need for a change in K-12 education.

I like to think that 20 years from now, we will look back on this time and say, What did the pandemic do for public education, not what did it do to public education? A recent survey that the University of Phoenix conducted over a thousand educators showed that 47% of those who participate in those survey of active educators felt that their training for online or virtual teaching was good or excellent, only 47%.

Meanwhile, 84% said that they would like to learn more about how to leverage online teaching tools.

So that led to us connecting with other leaders in this space to bring you the online Alliance for Virtual Teaching.

Little bit about University of Phoenix, University of Phoenix has decades of experience in being a pioneer in online education.

We partnered with some leaders out there in the field to bring you this alliance.

First and foremost, I wanna give a huge thank you to our incredible partner, Blackboard.

Blackboard is recognized provider of online K-12 learning management and communication systems, and already across the country, One in every two K-12 students nationwide are using some kind of Blackboard services.

I'd also like to introduce you to a couple of the leaders who are bringing you this Virtual Teaching Alliance.

First off Dr. Patricia Hoag, I'm sorry, Hoge or Pat Hoge as we call her is a veteran in the K-12 education space with a deep experience in both traditional brick and mortar environments, as well as online teaching and learning.

She's most recently served as the Chief Academic Officer for Connections, Education and Pearson Online, Blended Learning with a focus on curriculum and instruction.

She's devoted her career to helping students and adults who serve them achieve success and develop tools and resources.

Pat Hoge, and everybody else that you will meet throughout this journey in this Online virtual Alliance will make themselves available and you'll have all their contact information.

I'd also like to introduce you to Mr. Heath Morrison.

Heath is a former president of McGraw Hills School Group.

He brings extensive experience in the K-12 education space, including a rich history serving as a principal and superintendent.

Heath is super connected in that space.

And he's been kind of the voice of boots on the ground of superintendents across the United States, as we've been creating this virtual alliance.

He's leveraged his connections around the country to help bring us a unique and deeply-informed perspective to the gaps that superintendents have seen in their pivots to online learning.

Just interestingly, a recent New York times article reported that most students will have fallen behind where they would have been if they had stayed in the classrooms with some losing equivalent of a full school year of academic gains.

And I think that we educators know those pockets of students who will probably lose more than that.

And so the alliance's efforts are ultimately to be in service of helping students get back that academic loss that we're all experiencing with what we'll be up to six months in some cases, but when our kids go back to school.

And so you know, we all are learning what back to school looks like for our own kids and our own families.

And I'm sure you all are playing a role in that.

So with that I'd like to turn this session over to the presenters today to what I think is one of the most widely anticipated sessions that we provided so far, it's all about instructional resources, and how do we choose them and why? So you are gonna Monte Kalisch, Mr. Pete Just and Ms. Kelly Hermann.

So with that, I will turn this session over to our talented presenters.

Thank you.

Good morning, afternoon or maybe evening, wherever you are.

I'm Pete Just, I'm the Chief Technology Officer for the Metropolitan School District of Wayne township in Indianapolis.

Hi everybody. I'm Kelly Hermann.

I'm the Vice President for Accessibility, Equity and Inclusion here at the University of Phoenix.

And I happen to be running your slides and trying to make sure that I can run the slides and still not stay disconnected from the webinar.

May be a little bit of a challenge.

So please bear with me as we go through today, but I'm excited to be here.

Oh, Monte, you're muted.

Technical difficulties.

Yeah.

Which is odd, 'cause this was working very well before.

So I'm not sure what happened to the technology there.

You know- What might check.

I don't know what- There you go, we gotcha ya'..

Okay, great.

I guess I'm back.

You're back.

I did even do anything, it just started working.

Anyway, I am Monte Kalisch.

I'm the Director of Technology for the Jacobs Institute, Innovation and Education and the Co-inventor of Pactful, which is a curriculum and app to support social good innovation with teens.

I'm also the Former Chief Technology Officer at Connections Education at Pearson Online and Blended Learning.

I spent 15 years at Connections helping to build educational platforms and ultimately create the K through 12 virtual public school industry.

So I'm super excited to be with you here today.

Now that you can hear me.

In today's session, we're gonna cover a number of topics, maybe, yeah.

A number of topics, all focused on instructional resources in the virtual school ecosystem.

So I know you've heard a lot about that throughout the sessions today.

I've attended several of them myself, but we're going to hone in on these topics on the screen today.

In addition to the ecosystem and tools, we're gonna talk a little bit about technology use strategies and how to evaluate and make tech purchase decisions.

And finally, the role of digital accessibility, which is something that's really important to many of us here on this call, and hopefully many of you.

Just to kind of set the stage.

So digital accessibility is really the process of making digital products accessible so that no user is excluded.

And that includes specific guidance for users who rely on assistive technology and they may be blind or deaf or have other disabilities where they rely on it.

But frankly, these are also just good practices that benefit all users.

I'm sure that you've heard some about that in some of the other sessions.

So with that, I'll turn it over to Pete, to talk about some of the ecosystem pieces.

Thanks.

So we're going to get started talking a little bit about the digital learning environment that probably exists in your school or your school district.

No matter whether your school has just two teachers or whether you have 20,000 teachers, chances are that these things we're about to talk about will be true for you and your school district.

And so what we want to talk a little bit about are the products that work together to facilitate the needs of instruction.

Now, if you're a teacher in the classroom, you're usually thinking about technology as maybe Chromebooks, maybe iPads, computers but even with those, your school districts has probably chosen a specific type of product that they support.

That's part of what we would call an ecosystem.

In technology...

I used to be a biology teacher.

So ecosystems obviously, according to most of us in terms of understanding how they're a bunch of interrelated parts.

And the technology in your school district in your school is also a bunch of interrelated parts.

Now we're not gonna talk about the super technical things like networks or anything like that, but we are gonna talk a little bit about what are the kind of software pieces that are a part of your school district and why are they important when you're thinking about purchasing or utilizing a product for your classroom? And if you're a technology director or a district administrator, hopefully this will be helpful for you as well, just to have a high-level overview.

If you're really into this, apologies in advance, because this might be an introductory course for you.

So when we think about a tech ecosystem in K-12 schools, they are going to have a number of components, and I've simplified those here, as your Student Information System or your SIS, your Learning Management System, or your LMS, and then a number of different types of apps, productivity tools, and communication systems.

So let's dive in a little bit on those and why those are all important.

So let's go to the next slide.

So let's start with the SIS or what we know is a Student Information System.

This system is one you're probably familiar with, no matter what your role in the district, because this is where all the grades are held.

This is where transcripts come from.

This is where a teachers might put in assignments and then assign grades once those assignments are completed.

It's also where we start with parents that walk in the door to our schools and get them registered.

This is where we put in all that preliminary information and where their schedule is generated as they get ready to take classes.

So the Student Information System is a really critical core database that we actually pull from for a bunch of different products.

And it's really important to understand this as we kind of get into a further discussion today.

Let's move on to the next slide.

Now, the Learning Management System is something that your school or school district may or may not have.

We'll talk a little bit more about that in some detail, but at a high-level the Learning Management system or what we'll be calling the LMS, is going to be the place where in an ideal world, at least, all digital content would reside.

Now, we don't live in an ideal world, so some digital content resides there, and this is intended to be the resource repository for all learning tools.

And there are ways to make that happen.

We're not gonna get into the detail of that because that's a little too in the weeds for us today, but it's also place where teachers can have their lesson plans, the documentation of student progress, assignments that may be provided, practices, exams, things of that nature.

They're very learning focused.

And then also progress tracking, which if it's a completely online school is really quite critical because in a day-to-day interaction in a classroom environment, progress tracking is pretty much kept really in the hands of the teacher.

And if someone wants to know where they're at, they just ask the teacher, but the teacher's marching everyone.

Pretty we call it synchronously through a program.

In an online school progress tracking is really important because it's asynchronous.

And if you've been to some of the sessions, you were to one about the differences there.

And so progress tracking in an asynchronous world is really critical and it helps Johnny or Jimmy or whomever to know where they are in the progression of the course, and their parents hopefully as well.

So that's what an LMS does.

And we'll get into a little bit more detail about that, but I wanna talk about some other things in the kind of ecosystem.

And we'll kind of give you a couple more examples before we move on.

So let's go onto the next slide.

And so here you see the whole big picture again.

and to the button one more time, and zoom in here, I think.

All right, so you might've listened closely to what I was saying and realized that there might be a couple of things that seems similar.

So digital content and resource repository is a part of a Learning Management System.

There are ways to get in adopted resources and to place in there.

And it's a lot easier to find things if you're a teacher in what would be considered like a library of resources.

Let's go again, and then independent apps, are applications that might fit into the LMS, but oftentimes don't.

There maybe web apps or something like that, that won't reside someplace other than on the website that you might go to.

So there's thousands of these out there.

They oftentimes just perform one function like for example, maybe it's a calculator, and that's all it does is do calculations.

That would be an independent app.

That might not be possible to put into your LMS, but chances are your LMS has some version of that.

It just might not be the one you like the most.

So independent apps are really kind of a separate product and they don't really integrate.

And that does start to begin to give us some problems that we'll talk about here in a moment.

So let's move on to the next slide.

All right, so zooming in to the LMS and understanding a little bit about what we call rostering.

So rostering is really the way that we get things into names, addresses, phone numbers, what grade level, courses, things of that nature are what we call rostering.

How do you put someone into your class or how do you put them into that independent app? And there's a lot of ways that that could be done.

Really the worst one in most people's opinion is hand entry by the teacher because we don't want the teacher doing all the hand entry.

They have so many of the things they should be doing.

They shouldn't be putting in all the student information.

So that's really kind of the worst case scenario.

And if you're a teacher who's signed into some of these apps that are free on the web, and you have to put your students' names in or you have to have them put their names in, that's really a hand entry approach.

Those of us that are technology leaders often prefer at least to nightly upload.

Something that's coming into that student information or into that system from a Student Information System.

Now, if it's going into your LMS, it is all pretty much gonna be ready to go every time.

No one's ever thinking about it, it's automatic.

And so there's a fully automated version too, but for some products that the district may even adopt, there's no easy way to do that rostering.

And so a nightly upload happens from that SIS.

There's someone that works in your data team, who has worked all the magic to automatically load those things and the teacher doesn't have to do it.

So there's a whole range of how things get entered that are student information.

And it's important to understand how this works from the perspective of when you do adoptions, you wanna try to get the best possible, easiest solution for your students and your teachers and your staff.

Let's move on.

All right, one more time.

I think we hit that.

Great.

Keep going.

Thank you.

All right, now I want to talk a little bit about the work of products in as they work together.

I gave you some examples of that, but just to be a little clear again, let's go ahead and hit the button.

Schedule, so Learning Management Systems can have schedules added and so that you don't have to, as a teacher really do anything.

Let's say you're a high school biology teacher like I was, any one of my first period biology class, would automatically come out of the Student Information System, their schedule would show up as first period, and here's your 28 of 32 students in.

All their information is there and ready to go in the LMS.

Just like it would be in your grade book.

That's a really great benefit of tying the LMS to the SIS.

Now we're starting to use a bit of alphabet soup to explain these things,

but hopefully you're following along at home.(laughs)

All right, let's try another example, assignments and grades.

You might've thought, "Why do we need to keep those in two places?" Well, the reason for that is because the official transcripts come out of the SIS.

That's the official place where grades reside.

Now, if you have an LMS, you might be putting grades in there, or maybe you use Google Classroom and you could be putting grades in there, but that eventually has to make its way over to the SIS.

Now that again, maybe hand entry, we don't wanna do that.

We wanna automate these things.

So it's really important that a tech department understand how the LMS works and how it connects to the SIS.

And it's why tech departments and school districts and schools adopt a specific LMS.

They don't just want teachers to get any LMS they choose.

Although that would be great for choice.

It would be really difficult on the teacher and on everyone else involved because of all the hand work that's going to have to happen.

All right, one more example.

So attendance, well, attendance again, should be eventually put into the SIS.

Well, if we have a system in an LMS that tracks every time the student logs in and participates, we can count that student as present and it automatically, should go into the SIS.

So these are just a couple of examples to kind of help illustrate the point that in order for a really nice ecosystem to be created, we have to have connections between different products in that ecosystem.

And those connections help the teacher, they help the student because it starts to automate things.

It really makes everyone's life a lot easier when we think about everything as a whole, rather than just independent applications.

Hope that makes sense to you as we're trying to move forward and understanding how we can leverage that digital learning environment.

Monte? Yeah, okay. I think I already hit that.

Oh, yeah. So one last thing, sorry.

The idea is that everything needs, I guess I already did the summary.

Everything needs to play nice with each other.

Every part of the ecosystem has connections that are critical and intentionally adopting products are what's going to help them fit together the best because some products they don't fit as well.

And other products might take a lot more work to fit together.

So that's, I think the point of building this digital learning environment and how to leverage it, to keep things simple and straightforward for everyone.

All right. Thank you. Monte? Thank you, Pete.

And I would say having an introduction to the entire ecosystem is important to kind of set the stage.

I will say we believe that in terms of the place where many schools may be right now, we're gonna talk about essential tech.

I know that you've heard some of this throughout some of the other sessions, but we wanna kind of drive this point home.

And I'm kind of talking about the purpose of our discussion today is sort of leading with the why.

So in a virtual classroom or a classroom that is sometimes virtual, it's important to have a consistent starting point that happens every day where learning begins.

And we want that to be true, whether students are in a classroom, the physical classroom where you are or whether they're working at home at various points or times in the day.

So that is the place where consistency starts.

And then frankly, that's also the piece, that accountability piece is an important aspect, especially when you think about a virtual world where you are not necessarily seeing the kids in the classroom.

So we've talked about what the LMS is, the Learning Management System.

It is really this front door, the virtual schools use for where the hub, the starting point for all learning.

And that's becomes a great place where students and families, they know where to go every day to begin their effort.

And frankly they know where to go to turn in work and do things.

That only works and it only works well if the LMS exists and it's sort of pervasive for everyone and has the digital content supported and created in there.

And we're gonna talk about some of those pieces that come and go, but that is our premise, that in order to truly be successful to level the playing field and make it equitable and consistent for everyone that you need an LMS, that is the place where learning begins and that's where their jumping off points.

So that that's how they work with things every day.

Pete talked about the SIS, that's sort of like a backend system, typically for students.

From an essential tech perspective, we're not gonna tell you today that you must start with an SIS.

Although clearly there are elements of that that are important.

And frankly, your district or school may already have one that you may be using to integrate it's officially, but from a student and parent or family learning experience, the LMS is where it's at.

Next slide.

We've talked about, or you've heard probably these.

You know, Pete just talked about several of the features in an LMS.

I'm listing several more here.

I think it's really important to understand that LMS has come in a variety of flavors.

And frankly, there are some LMS that consume or have capabilities that a traditional SIS may have.

Or there are some LMS that started as an LMS and are now more of an education management solution in their entirety, and they sort of bake those pieces in.

when we're talking about an LMS specifically for you, it's really that place where students go every day that teacher understand where their coursework is.

That's where they get their activities and assignments.

That's their launching place to other learning and other activities.

So it is a consistent daily place where they can engage, and hopefully your LMS has these other kinds of capabilities where they can halfly where they can communicate with their teachers.

It's the forum for that mechanism.

It's an enclosed portal that is safe for them, but it's also the place where they know that they can get everything.

Looking at the next slide, I would say, you know, there are a number of, and we just listed a few, frankly, these are four examples of LMS is Blackboard Learn, Canvas, Schoology, Moodle.

There's a zillion of them out there.

And frankly, I keep encountering new ones every day.

Some of which are brand new, some of which have existed in either K-12 or higher ed.

I will say that most LMS is in some ways, began their life in a higher ed environment and then moved into the K-12 world.

But they're pretty robust now in a lot of cases.

The important piece about choosing an LMS is really that you're gonna have to sit down with your, as a district has to make that decision and figure out what works best with their entire ecosystem and what works best for their students and teachers and the content repository, because that's the piece that's key in terms of where learning content begins, and how you consume it.

We did note here that Google Classroom...

so this keeps coming up.

I think Google Classroom is a great tool.

I'm a huge Google advocate.

But it will say from a straight up perspective, just that analysis perspective, it's not typically considered a complete LMS solution right now.

I think they had aspirations to do that long term, but that's kind of, it's a little bit of outlier.

That said, if Google Classroom is what you have and especially if you have coupled with the Google Productivity Suite, and Productivity Suites are things like Google Docs and Google Slides and Google Sheets.

Microsoft has a similar productivity Suite in Word, PowerPoint, Excel.

It can make a very powerful solution.

If that's what you have and that's what you're going into this fall with, that's great.

And frankly, you're gonna hear from us throughout today that most of the tech that we're suggesting and believe these are things that are the responsibility of the district and the school to put in place.

They're not the responsibility of teachers to take on.

But they are that responsibility, but it takes time to put those systems in place and ultimately make sure that they work effectively.

So you may be in a place right now, where your school is working on toward that objective, which would be great.

Longer term it may take one, two, three, or even more years to ultimately have a complete system that has all the things you really want from an LMS perspective Monte? Yeah.

So someone has asked the question, if there is a recommendation on a free LMS for independent academic advisors and counselors.

I think that there's a lot of free items out there.

I'm not too familiar with free LMS or other core databases like an SIS or anything.

Are you familiar with anything like that? Did you know that Canvas has an LMS solution that is free for teachers? I know that Moodle could be stood up for teachers.

You could stand it up on your own.

There's some cautionary tale there, which is our belief is that it is the responsibility of the district to create, institute and have the LMS and provide that to the schools and the teachers.

We don't really advise having individual teachers go out there and creating and standing up their own, frankly, for the very reason why I introduced what an LMS can be, which is that consistent starting point for everyone.

If every teacher did their own thing or counselor, it's gonna be an issue.

And it's gonna cause fracturing, in terms of where the learning begins and where people know where to find things.

That consistency especially right now is really critical.

So I would say it would almost be better just to have one thing for the entire school, even if it's imperfect to get started so you have a starting point and a consistent place where people can begin.

I don't know if Pete or Kelly, do you have any other comments about that? Kelly, I think you're gonna talk about Microsoft teams and other types of webinars, tech products later on.

Yes.

So there is a question about that, and whether that is in LMS? I don't think of it as such really in any way, shape or form.

And Monte, what about Google Classroom and not being a complete LMS solution? I know I have my thoughts on that.

What are your thoughts on what it's missing? Well, if we were to go back a couple of slides and you can revisit in our slide deck later, it's really, it doesn't have that cohesive infrastructure currently in place for everybody.

It's a little bit more teachers can create their classroom and make it work for their purposes.

And so when we're thinking about these things from a virtual school, and I say school specifically, district is really an overhanging piece, but from a school perspective, you want the experience to be as similar as possible for students, regardless of which class they're in.

And so I do think that there's some elements..

Google Classroom has an amazing place, but from a purist perspective and an integration perspective, it's not quite the place to be a full fledged LMS, but I'm not going to discount what it provides and what you have.

So if that's what you have right now and you're going into the fall, I would say, I think your focus should be on trying to establish a consistent experience, getting your content made available there.

But over time, you can think about what the future...

what it could look like if things were a little bit different and can be a little bit more cohesive from the entire school perspective.

Pete, do you have any other? Yeah, I mean, I think that your list here is a pretty good list.

And although you'll find things in Google Classroom, like grade books, obviously collaborative docs,

I mean, gosh, that's what outfit they invented that (laughs)

well, maybe not directly, but they certainly, we're the experts at it and can continue to be really strong.

And so those are the things that really, you start with those docs and then you try to get to classroom and found a way to kind of get them all together in classes.

And for teachers, it made it much easier to grade documents and things like that.

And they've continued to develop it.

They actually got on the line with my staff a year or two ago trying to find out what are the differences.

And for me, the biggest difference is what I talked about in terms of a content repository.

I'm not talking about collaborative content that students or teachers have made, I'm talking about content from publishers.

I'm talking about content that is rich and has a lot of modalities and has a lot of accessibility.

Those types of resources are not...

there's no repository for that.

I mentioned a library, there's no library in Classroom.

There's some things you can do in regard to progress tracking, but it's very minimal.

And so on and so forth.

Some things really great.

Communications, collaboration, even the grade book has become very strong.

The grade book can go into the SIS.

But I like to think of classroom and when I talk to other school districts I often talk about it as a starter relevance, it's a great place to start.

And then eventually once you've used it for awhile, if you take a look at almost any LMS, you'll be very envious of some of the things that an LMS has that you've realized the classroom product doesn't have.

So that's how I'd summarize it.

I would say just one key distinction because Google Classroom is almost always coupled with the Google Productivity suite, all those collaborative capabilities, those can exist regardless of whether you're using Google Classroom and they could exist in your world with any other LMS.

So that's kind of the thinking that we're not in any way, I think dismissing Google and what it can provide to folks.

It's just in terms of thinking about a cohesive experience in ecosystem, it's not our number one choice for that from a school or district perspective, okay.

And how does Clever figure, someone else asked us.

So Clever is usually it's a backend tool where there are apps that can be designed they're already designed to work together and work with your LMS.

So Clever sort of takes away the responsibility from schools and districts of having to deal with the integration aspects.

They handle that directly with the ed tech vendors themselves.

So a Clever enabled app is something that they've worked together to make sure that they can work with LMS without a ton of integration responsibility that falls to, usually would typically fall to the district or the school.

Right.

The nice thing about Clever is it's free.

They actually charge the company that has the app

to do the work, but it's (indistinct) that's how it gets its money, which is fine, but what they solved for us early was the rostering problem of applications on the web that were hard to roster, hard to get students into those easily.

And they solved that problem when they came on the scene.

So it's also not an LMS, it's just a way to get the roster information in.

And of course, then you also have the catalog for your school.

So it becomes a launch place for a whole plethora of apps.

And so again, not a Learning Management System, but a launch place where you can have your rostering done.

But if you are a district leader or someone who works at the district level, Clever, knowing that apps are Clever enabled can help you implement them in a much faster way, especially that rostering piece, our integration piece, there's definitely can streamline that aspect.

Kelly, any thoughts? Yeah, I think you both covered it really well, and Clever, isn't something that we tend to have a lot of experience with in higher ed and that's where the bulk of my experience has been.

But I think the caution that you have in terms of looking at what an LMS does for you, I kind of acquaint the LMS with looking at the classroom itself, the physical, when we talk about accessibility and how we get students to that, that teaching and learning that needs to happen in the physical setting.

The LMS for me is usually one of those, the things the correlation is with the physical buildings.

So the LMS becomes your virtual classroom and I think Monte you hint on that before, but I want to highlight that, that when we look at, from an accessibility perspective, which we will talk more about later on, getting into that classroom is kind of akin to your ramps and elevators that you have on a building.

So when you thinking about, the accessibility considerations, it's not just what do you do to get to the classroom, but then what you put into the classroom.

And we're going to talk more about that in a few slides as well.

Did you both want to comment at all about LMS for K-12? Because there was a question about that as well.

For primary? K- 12, two, sorry, I keep saying 12, but I meant two.

Yeah. what are your thoughts, Monte for primary LMS, you have much experience with that.

I've got a couple of thoughts.

I mean, I would just say that this is gonna be part of the decision-making process that happens at the district level to include those aspects.

As we said before, I think most LMS has started in the higher ed and kind of moved to K-12, but we've been at this now, the LMS providers have been at this now for sometimes upwards of 20 years, longer in some cases, frankly, and they're getting better about this.

And so, I wouldn't specifically choose an LMS unless you happen to just be in a cape to district or school.

I wouldn't specifically choose one just for that, but I would definitely put that on your list of what you want to consider when you're doing it.

If you're looking for something that provides something cohesive for your entire district.

Yeah, I would say that there was a question about Seesaw, and I've seen Seesaw be very effective in primary grades where other LMS have failed.

It is one that is more targeted towards that demographic.

It's true that most LMS, especially the ones you have listed here started I think three of the four started in higher ed and in their work have worked their way into K-12.

As that happens most target, it's an interesting time because for the most part, target has been maybe seventh or eighth grade, but for the most part nine, 10, 11, 12 online schools, online options.

Maybe flipping classrooms and this situation we have just entered in March of really everyone having to go remote has created a situation where an LMS has become really much more critical because that's where the lesson plan resides, that's where the resources reside.

And it's difficult for teachers who have not been using it very frequently to suddenly just adopt that.

So in our district, we have an online school that's mostly taught by high school teachers.

They're pretty familiar with our LMS.

We have some primary teachers that have used it, but I'd say the vast minority of them have used it, even though it's a really great product for their grade level.

So to some degree there's customization that the companies need to create to make it better for primary I think this is true across the board.

I think they're all in high gear right now doing that and to some degree there's a lot of work that a teacher needs to do to try to make that remote or online, and we've used these different terms.

They do different things, these different types of options, but to to an LMS and expect it to have a lot for primary that is still a bit of a long shot.

It takes a lot of work to get there.

I know my wife is an elementary teacher and she found working in LMS a challenge.

I've taught in it for 20 years, I find it easy (laughs)

but I was a secondary teacher.

And so I think it is a ramping up that's still happening a little bit long answer, but I think that it's very much something that's going to look a lot different in the next year or two.

And one final note before we move on from the LMS, I would say specifically for those young brains.

I mean, we recognize that I hope most of you knew too that if those students are working at home, they're gonna need the support of an adult alongside them.

So specifically those grades may not actually make perfect sense in all cases for an LMS.

So it may make sense to have a more cohesive one that works across all grades, knowing that you're probably not likely to have the K through second graders working directly in the LMS on their own without the help of an adult or at least an older sibling or something.

Yeah, and Monte I think that- And just recently LMS, Learning Management System, people are still asking that question.

So that's a Learning Management System where all that content resides.

I'm sorry to cut you off there, Kelly.

That is quite all right.

I think that was a good call out.

I was just going to say that I think Monte's comment there at the end is a really good segue into talking about some of the essential communication tools.

And this is likely a place where a lot of you who are attending today have a lot of experience, right.

You know, you're sharing emails.

You may be using Remind which remind was something that as my teenagers, my youngest child is 16 and my only one that's still left in the K-12 system.

I started hearing about Remind I'm like, "What on earth is that?" I hadn't heard of that before, but there are a lot of, you know, various communication tools that we have out there that we can use, not only with our students, but also with the parents.

And I think that has absolutely critical when we think about this transition.

So why are we using communication tools? Well, we need to share resources and information.

We have to foster connection and engagement with our students and their families.

I think that for me in thinking about this, as someone who's worked primarily in higher education, it's been a really long time since I worked with a preschool population, but also thinking about my own experience as a parent and someone who feels pretty good about kind of navigating the school system with my three kids and getting them through, this was a whole new world for us as well.

And really relying very heavily, even with high schoolers on those communication systems and not only from the teachers themselves, but from the district about what are you doing? What are the safety protocols? How are we going to make sure that our students are learning? And I think, being able to provide that clarification and guidance regarding those class activities and expectations is a really critical piece of why it is that we use those communication tools.

And I think this one is probably pretty standard in terms of understanding what it is.

But in terms of using those emails, announcements that might be available in the learning tools that you have, whether it is the LMS, or if it's in any of those parent and student apps.

I know as a parent I've used those applications quite frequently, especially for my kids going into quarter four after spring break when we went virtual, I had a senior in high school who turned into a true lazy boy and being able to kind of, senior-itis kicked in big time, and being able to look at that parent app and to elevate my nagging of him in a little bit of a different way, because I was able to see what he was doing and what he wasn't doing.

And having that communication was really critical.

But let's contrast that a little bit with the webinar tools that are available.

And someone had asked earlier about Microsoft Teams and whether or not Teams is a Learning Management System.

And, you know, I certainly don't consider it a Learning Management System.

I think it has, and for all of the reasons that Pete and Monte talked about before, when we were specifically talking about the LMS, but it has a lot of features and it has a lot of tools that you can be able to use to foster some of those synchronous communication with your students, with their parents, with their guardians, whoever those adults are that are helping them with managing their schoolwork.

Again, it's fostering that connection and engagement.

We, at the university of Phoenix, I've been working from home full-time since this started in mid March.

And I have a team of about 25 people that report to the different offices that I work with.

And we've been using Teams to foster that sense of connection and engagement because when you go from being connected in a physical place where you're all in person to then having to disperse to your own homes, sometimes you kind of get with those blinders on, in a very narrow focus on, the screen in front of you and forgetting that you actually have other supports in place.

And so I think it's really critical for that.

And then also, being able to not only clarify content, but also have the students work together in group work in a way that you may not be able to do it right within your Learning Management System or some of the other tools that you have.

And so these virtual meeting tools, GoToWebinars is a good example, that's what we're doing here today.

In terms of sharing content, and then also having some conversations around it.

Zoom is another one.

And this is where I think some of the ecosystem that Pete talked about to kick us off today, is really important for us to think about because there are concerns with that.

You know, there are concerns with introducing tools that you're gonna be using with your students, whether it's because of data privacy, whether it's because of information security.

I think, as we got into the end of March, beginning of April, a lot of us were hearing about Zoom booming, where you're using the free version of Zoom and folks get ahold of that link.

And you give them a moment they use their skills for not so great reasons and they're jumping in and crashing photo bombing, Zoom bombing your video conference.

And so, there are a lot of considerations that we have to take into mind when we're thinking about using these tools.

Accessibility is one of them as well, and certainly that's my expertise and what I bring to the conversation.

You're looking at, what do you need to do to make sure that, things are captioned appropriately.

What are some of the other things that you have to consider when sharing documents, and we have a list of that, that we're gonna share with you before we end today.

So I'm gonna save that for a little bit later, but also I think it's important to keep in mind that not every student and their families are going to have access to broadband internet.

You know, certainly that I think has improved greatly in the last five to 10 years, but we still have pockets of places where people don't have access to internet at all, or that the access isn't going to allow them to participate in something like a Zoom video conference.

And then also we need to be mindful that when we're all turning on the cameras, you're looking into our homes and you're looking into your students' homes.

You know, we're all doing that today as we're presenting here, but that's something that we need to be mindful of.

What are the ramifications of that as well.

So Monte, I think we turn it over to you next, but I don't know if either of you wanted to add anything to that.

No, I think that's great.

I will just say, I think, we talked about what we consider these essential tech tools.

That's your ecosystem may still be lacking something that you need.

And Pete mentioned this in the very beginning, specifically, these sort of classroom or independent apps and what I will clarify in those are, they usually have a singular purpose, whether it's a content purpose or capability purpose, they absolutely may be essential to your coursework or your curriculum, but they're not necessarily ubiquitous that everyone uses all the time.

So we believe that these are important, but we just want to point out that, and some of these are...

there's a billion of them and you've heard them throughout this entire academy.

There's been mentioned of several tools that people use.

And one of the concerns is that if individual teachers are off deciding those things without the support and the support of the district or an implementation strategy, they may not integrate with your LMS.

They may have the rostering concerns, students getting in and out.

And it's a lot of cases, they may be introducing student data, privacy concerns or information where you're providing data to a vendor that may not actually be consistent with the expectations that are district or frankly, the regulatory expectations.

So there's some caution there, we're gonna get to some other strategies, but encourage you to think about those and in consultation with your district.

And hopefully you actually have an implementation plan in place that allows...

I would say we definitely would want teachers to be able to have access to the right things in order improve their students' experience or their classroom experience.

But we also would want you to think about those using them in the right way and making sure that you've considered all of those other angles.

I'd only had that as a teacher, one of the things you need to do is to artfully design your course as most appropriate for all of your learners.

And so part of that much like if you are a woodworker and you're deciding whether you're going to use a mallet or you're going to use a screwdriver, it depends on what the objective is.

With the screw, you might want to use the screwdriver, with the nail, you can use a hammer, right? I mean, so on.

So teachers have the opportunity today to choose from a whole myriad of products.

And it's important to understand what those do.

So as Kelly was talking about webinar and web really conferencing applications like Zoom, many teachers just jumped to them this year because they're so familiar with the synchronous form of delivering.

And so as we look at more and more opportunities to do asynchronous delivery, then you start realizing that there's an appropriate time to do synchronous.

And then the rest of it should be asynchronous.

Face-to-face like this is important.

Live face-to-face, if you can pull that off is also important.

But then also having an opportunity for student agency, students to move at their own pace and in their own place, that's critical as well.

And so that's one of the keys to success that kind of underlines all of the things we're talking about here is the choice of the teacher to be able to use the tool that is best for the purposes they're trying to achieve.

And so I'd say that's, that's my only other thought.

And sometimes your district hasn't provided that tool.

You need to go out and find something.

But it's always important to check the library, if you will, of what resources does your district have or your school have before you go out finding one that might be harder to operate if you will.

I think that's a good segue into what I've been talking about is the technology use of strategy.

I think this has been really important, especially as schools and districts across the country are racing to address the virtual school issue.

And in some cases have introduced technology.

They may have already had the technology, but they didn't necessarily have a plan in place upfront for a consistent experience across all classrooms and what that might look like.

And importantly, I think we touched on these pieces where you may have pieces of technology in place, but what are the guidance or rules from the school and the district in order to make sure that each individual teacher isn't necessarily doing something different than the others, and it's okay to be different, but it's also important to have some consistency.

So when I say tech use of strategy, for example, this has come up many times.

We know a lot of schools immediately went, you know, did the shift.

And then they used their synchronous platform webinar.

And they asked students to sit in front of a webcam all day long, just as if they would in a regular classroom.

We in the virtual school world very much don't think that that's the best strategy.

Frankly, most of us as adults can get exhausted from just sitting in Zoom sessions.

Even, you know, happy ones, like happy hours, there's joins with conversations with friends.

It can be exhausting.

And so I would highly recommend a school sit down together and in combination with teachers and frankly, maybe even parents and maybe even some student representatives and establish technology usage strategy.

So some questions you...

next slide, some questions you may ask one to address or include in that are how are we going to consistently measure student engagement? What does that look like? What tools do we have and how are we going to leverage that? How are communications expected to be tracked with students and families? It is okay if I emailed them separately or if I text them or use Remind? What are the rules in place? Does it matter from a tracking perspective over time? What does that look like? What if the student has an IEP, does it change anything? What are the sort of the min-max expectations for synchronous sessions, right? So we've touched on that here, do we expect students to always be on camera? I know that there have been lots of discussions about that.

"Well, how will they know if they're learning or they're there, if they're never on camera, I force all my students to be on camera." We only have specific opinions about that.

And there's definitely people who have done research in these areas.

And I would encourage you, these are just leading questions for you to think about what the experience should be across the board for students in your schools.

How do we handle academic integrity issues that might be different when students are working both physically in a classroom and also virtually? How are teachers supposed to handle tech support questions? This is a new world.

And ideally we wouldn't want teachers handling tech support questions, but we know the teacher's had that the phase, and they're gonna get them from both students and parents, especially in the new world.

Is there a strategy in place at the district or school level to support them in a different way? And can you create a strategy and create those mechanisms to free teachers up, you know, so that they can actually focus on student learning and student support and student success.

And how do we handle behavior that may be tied to academic integrity and frankly it may not be.

So there may be all kinds of other things.

These are just some leading questions for you to think about as a school or a district across the board.

Like, how are we gonna implement these things and what are the rules? You want lots of freedom and for individual teachers to do what they need to do to be effective within the confines of rules, but you also probably want a cohesive strategy for your entire school.

So you don't have, especially if families have multiple kids are in multiple different classes and they've got teachers who expect completely different things that can be very disheartening and disruptive for them individually.

Kelly, Pete, any, other comments there? Sounds good. You can read.

I don't think this is a onetime.

This is not a one time discussion, but it is probably important, especially now to think about what your tech usage strategy is going to be.

And frankly, and I'm not suggesting, you know, a big written handbook or anything, but frankly, some guidelines for everybody to follow.

So you're all on the same page with how you're using the technologies and what they're used for.

Okay.

Right.

So one of the questions that's come up that kind of relates a little bit to tech procurement, I'll address it first 'cause I think it's a good lead in to this conversation and that is, "What, if I'm a teacher I'm on my own, I've done my due diligence.

I've looked, my district is really kind of trying to catch up with the times.

Or I'm in a really small school.

I don't even have a district.

What should I do? How do I get started?" And I think, obviously by being a part of this program, the Virtual Teaching Academy, I hope that you've learned a lot in terms of the types of considerations.

You have to have some professional development, that's a critical part of getting started.

Then you get to the artful decisions I was talking about, of how do you know what's the right product for what you're trying to teach and the best modality that you're going to use.

This gets to pedagogy, right? It's all about how are you going to present the information and the way you present that information might be to use a different type of a tool.

In a normal classroom, you know, that might be well, I'm going to do a handout and they're gonna fill out this information for five minutes and then we're going to go over that in the class and then...

So you have a progression that you're using your pedagogy much like that.

You're now shifting that to this online world.

So now you need the online tools.

You're gonna need a webinar tool like Kelly was talking about.

I think the Zoom offer ran out yesterday (laughter)

So you're gonna need to go find something that works.

If your school does have Google, Google Meet is a product that works really well.

It can't do some things, but they are quickly catching up because they are very competitive over there at Google.

So that's a product that might be free and already a part of your calendar that you could send out information and invitations to that.

So that might already be something you have access to without having to look around.

Always look at what your district has first.

Again, if they don't have anything, then hopefully you've heard some things that might work here and you're going to have to go out and do your due diligence to try to find products.

Here's some things to think about whether you're that single teacher in a really small school that has to figure it out on their own or whether you are a district person that's trying to get up to speed and trying to understand what are the things I should be thinking about.

Well, what we do in the district of our size and we're 17,000 students.

So we're fairly large, at least for Indiana.

But some of you may be in districts that are 180,000 or larger.

You know, your district, I guarantee you has not only a procurement system, they have a department (laughs), and that department has created ways for things to be purchased.

So procurement is really about how you get something and how you in most cases will pay for it.

And then how has it maintained over time and is it sustainable to pay for over time? And all those types of questions are asked by the procurement team.

In some districts and most districts that are small, you won't have a procurement team, you'll have a person that writes POS and you send them something and you say, "Hey, I need one of these, or I need a class set of those." And they write a PO, that's procurement.

Every school system has some sort of a procurement system.

What they don't always have is some way to vet technological purchases.

Those should typically, I would say, always and I go across the desk of someone who can take a look at it from a curricular perspective, someone who could take a look at it from a technology perspective to make sure it fits your ecosystem.

And then someone that could take a look at it from a special needs perspective to make sure that accessibility is considered.

Because all three of those are pretty critical.

We have a PDF system that we use.

That's pretty rudimentary.

You can create something like this, even with a Google form.

So there's a lot of ways to do it if you're building it from the ground up, but your district probably already has something.

One of the things that people often ask is, "Well, I don't have to pay for it.

I'm getting it for free.

I just signed up and my students are all signing up or I put all their information in there and there is no procurement involved.

"Well, there's no payment involved." I'll just say yet, (laughter)

because everyone's in this, not...

Even those who are in it for the best of reasons they have to pay their employees, programmers cost money.

And so there has to be some mechanism to get them paid.

The freemium product often is intended be something that gets you started and then you want more.

So yeah, it's like when you're walking through the mall and that guy gives you a little bit of taste

of a bourbon chicken (laughs)

and all of a sudden you're hungry for lunch.

It's that type of thing.

So you have to understand that freemium is an entry, it's a gateway into a product.

It might be the best product or maybe it's not.

That's, again, it's dependent on what your students need, what you need, what your district has set up.

So freemium isn't really free, it's an entry path into some type of a paid product almost all the time.

I know Kelly mentioned Remind.

Remind started I think if I remember correctly, two college students just trying to create a way to get in touch with a whole bunch of people.

And it was free until they got bought (laughs)

and now it's not free.

And so pretty much every company starts with a story like that, right? I mean the, the concern there mostly is about the data.

student data privacy is really important.

It's really critical, and your community members are going to ask an increasing number of questions about what happens to their students' data.

Do you know when it gets delete? It should get deleted at some point, it shouldn't be there forever.

It shouldn't be sold.

And so these types of considerations when you sign up for freemium product are not really developed, asked.

And so who controls the data of your students is a very critical question.

It's something that when we sign contracts with companies, it's one of my responsibilities to review that contract and then to come to an understanding and agreement, we have a set of standards and there's a number of organizations out there.

I'm a part of the Consortium of School Networking, or CoSN.

We have a whole series of questions you should ask about your contracts.

There's a number of student data, privacy initiatives that are out there that will give you good information about things you should have in your contract.

And part of that is an expiration of the data.

Part of that is who has control of the data.

Part of that is that the data is not sold, and so on and so forth.

Those are important considerations when you're going into a purchase situation with a company.

The other things to think about is sometimes in most cases, a district has a strategy.

They have a student information system, maybe they have a Learning Management System and they have a strategy for what they'd like to do.

So for example, when we buy a product from a vendor that is giving us some digital content, we wanna integrate that into our LMS, through a product through interoperability platform, I'll get a little technical.

Interoperability is something that says, no matter who you buy your product from, it should be able to go into your LMS and there's ways to make that happen.

Your provider just needs to agree to do it that way.

So in our contracts, we also want to include something that says, "Hey, our strategy is to get everything into the library in our Learning Management Systems.

So when we buy your product, how are we going to do that?" common cartridge, that's one of those that can happen.

So not to go any deeper with interoperability, but that's part of our district strategy.

And then when we do that, that changes how we do professional development, because that product is inside the LMS.

So we're teaching about the LMS.

We're teaching you about the library.

We're teaching you how to do the searches there, and that's how you get to the product.

In some cases, we can't do that so we might use Clever or some other way to get students in a rostered in the system to get students access with an easy sign in.

But again, that's part of a district strategy and we do professional development to help teachers understand how to get their students there.

And in this day and age is fast as COVID-19 happened, had we not had that strategy, had we not had the professional development, our teachers would have been just left out in the cold.

So all of these things, the district strategy is really critical because it helps teachers.

It helps students understand what's going to be the way that they can approach the professional development, the way that they can approach how to do classes and so on and so forth.

So we talk a little bit about accessibility and integration with three ecosystems.

So I think I've already talked about those things for the most part.

Rostering, I guess I talked about that too.

Anything else? Monte or Kelly, dimension on that? I would just add one thing.

When Pete's talking about some of these things about, and I would say we're probably all is individual users used to just clicking, okay, in terms of use without even looking at them and you know, we know that that's habit, that's not necessarily the case when it comes to a district level procurement process.

In fact, oftentimes they're renegotiating the contract, including the terms with them to establish what the rules are gonna be for that particular engagement, that piece is really important, but that really has to happen at the district level.

And I know there was a question earlier about what should teachers do if they're not receiving direction from their district or administration and you still have to prepare for the fall.

Of course you do.

I would say you're in a tough spot, but I would encourage you.

My answer to that would be ultimately, that's what you need to go to your administration.

We just lost them.

Yeah, Monte, your audio cut out and you froze there for a second.

So we can't actually hear you.

And it doesn't look like he's hearing us, Pete, can you hear me? I can hear you just fine.

Okay.

Why don't we go ahead to the next slide and we'll get Monte up to speed in a minute.

Okay, but before I do that Pete, actually, there was a question that came in the chat about, "The district has moved to Synergy as their SMS, but it's being touted for its grade book capabilities.

And they've been told that they are integrated with our Google Classroom.

Where does that fall?" So I don't know if you have any experience with Synergy? Unfortunately I don't.

And I think Monte may be realizing that, you know, we lost his audio there for a second, but if you have any experience with Synergy you can comment on that, that would be great.

Yeah, I have no experience with Synergy.

I'm aware that they're a Student Information System and they also have an LMS option, I believe.

So the question, I think in terms of that was whether it is whether it is an LMS or I don't understand the question.

I'm sorry.

So as I understand the question it was that there are being told...

let me just scroll back up here for a second, sorry.

That it integrates with Google Classroom, so that it's being touted as the question says, SMS, which suggests to me text messaging.

I'm not sure if the attendee met LMS, but then it's being touted for its grade book capability.

So I think we can assume that they meant LMS because unfortunately we use a lot of those same alphabets, right? In SIS, a Student Management System and Student Information System are sometimes used interchangeably.

Okay.

So then it's probably, and as I said, that Synergy is in SIS that's where grades are kept.

It has a great grade book.

And they have developed an LMS.

And honestly, probably about five or 10 years ago, all SIS companies were trying to make an LMS as well and be one.

Some of them tried to buy some not to get specific, but it would be great if they were already tied together, and I'm not familiar with Synergy.

I know that LMS companies have been developing Google as well as Microsoft integrations.

I can't speak to any detail of how good synergies are, and I'm not sure that that's appropriate for this conversation anyway.

So I think we've answered it as best we can.

Monte, did your system get fixed? I'm back again.

You're back.

It's great you're back.

Well, I don't know what's going on.

Well in the interest of time, gentlemen, I'm actually gonna be a little bit of a bossy New Yorker here and move you on to the next slides because we have 23 minutes left.

Right, so for rostering of users and for just integration here is a system of flow chart that our school district developed Oh, golly, four years ago, maybe in terms of how it works in terms of a integration of a new product.

So each of those colors is a different person on staff.

Yellow is a vendor.

It doesn't really matter what they say.

This is complicated (laughs).

That's really what the point of this is, this is page one of a two page integration product process.

If someone really wanted to have the best integration possible, that white square there is what we call the hub integration.

It's our sweet spot.

We call our product that the learning hub, this is where all we kind of relabeled our LMS.

And so the best type of integration is going to happen on this page to the left.

If we go to the next page,

this is the worst kind of integration (laughs)

things that are on the right here as we move from left to, right.

The way we set this up is the more it goes to the right, the more challenging it's going to be, the more people that have to be involved, the less automated it is.

And so we had this way of trying to communicate to our adoption teams.

So if you're a social studies and you're adopting some new curriculum products, we wanted them to know that when you make a decision, it's going to fall someplace along this graph or chart, and that will create the complexity that we're going to live with for the next seven years.

And so just wanted to make sure everyone was up to speed with that.

So for us, procurement also is a little bit of a learning curve to help everyone that...

Because teachers do this every seven years, maybe they talked about what they wanna adopt in terms of their materials, in state of Indiana, at least.

And so this was a way to help it.

This is just a way to illustrate that we have many difficulties in getting things into systems and that they're easy and difficult ways that you will have to proceed based on your decisions.

It's really kind of what I'm getting at.

So let's go to the final slide for me, which is really kind of, the focus of this was not putting the cart before the horse.

And I wanted to draw on that a little bit and say that when we're doing procurement well, you're feeding the horse and hitching the car, okay.

Tech support, your integration with other systems, professional development, rostering.

These are all easier when you have a thought out ecosystem and you're trying to align your purchases, your new products with that.

And so with that, I'll just say that I think I've made

my point in a couple of different ways (laughs).

Thanks, Pete.

And I'm gonna talk specifically about how we kind of bring in accessibility into this conversation.

And I saw it in our question pod, some of you are feeling, there's a lot of information, feeling overwhelmed with the information.

Monte and Pete, I think you know from our conversations, you're trying to figure out how to narrow this down into 90 minutes worth of content, where we could still address your questions is really challenging.

'Cause I think we could do 90 minutes on any of these topics.

So I know that you'll have access to the recordings after this, you'll have access to our slides, certainly our contact information will be there.

So please, kind of take a moment, digest this information and then feel free to reach back out to us if you have any specific questions and you know, as you kind of digest this information, 'cause it is a lot.

And I think that we all need to recognize that it's a lot, but let me give you some practical things that you can do, even if you're a teacher and not involved in a formal procurement process that kind of Pete outlined with all of that infrastructure, but let's talk about what are some things that you can do.

And I think for me, it always comes back to making sure you're asking the right questions.

I've worked in higher ed for 20 years.

I've worked with faculty you know, that entire time.

And I am one of those people who kind of hates conference season because what will happen is my faculty will go to an exhibit hall, they'll get swayed by all the latest and greatest tools that are out there as they should.

You know, there's some really great tools out there, and they come home and they're like, "Oh my gosh, we have to do this." But no one has asked any of the accessibility questions or almost worse asking the wrong ones.

So what are some of those questions that you should be asking? First I like to tell folks really to kind of avoid using the abbreviation for the Americans with Disabilities Act with the ADA, leave those out of your questions.

And I'll explain why in a second, but you'll see on the column on the left hand side of the screen here, these are the questions I recommend that you do ask.

What accessibility standard has your company adopted for your products? And we are very intentionally not talking about accessibility standards, cause that's a rabbit hole that would be really difficult for us to come back out of.

But you know, there are accessibility standards that are both at a national level and also an international level that your district can and should look at adopting.

And that's something that we recommend that you take a look at and it's really important to know where your vendor partners and the suppliers have actually adopted accessibility standards as well, because it gives you a sense of how aligned might they be with your district approach.

How has the company verified the accessibility of their product? You know, this is usually one that the sales rep may not be able to answer very well.

So I think it's important to know who you're asking from the company as well.

But at least asking this question can set them down the path of getting that information from the people who work in product development, who are specifically charged with looking at the accessibility if they have them.

So that would be you know, fantastic that way to be able to know, can you get more information on it? One of the questions I always ask is whether or not they use screen readers and testing their products.

And if you have no idea what I'm talking about when I use the term screen reader, a screen reader is a piece of assisted technology that allows someone who is blind to navigate through using their computer.

And so what it does is it works in the background and narrates to the individual user, what those menu options are and allows them to choose and to select an option from the desktop, the way that you and I would point and click on an icon and open up a product or a program.

So there are a lot of compatibility issues between screen meters and technology because of the way that the screen reader has to work in the background.

And there's some, you know, really specific programming.

So I like to ask whether or not, they've done any screen reader testing, do they have anyone who used, an expert in using a screen reader that can actually evaluate their product? And then what accessibility documentation do they have for their products? You know, that may be a voluntary product accessibility template.

So you'll see VPAT here on our slides.

And I think I forgot to kind of spell that out for you.

So when you see VPAT that means, Voluntary Product Accessibility template.

Or that could be an accessibility roadmap from the company, it could be a statement about how they infuse accessibility into the development of their products.

These are all really important steps that the companies can take to show how they are addressing accessibility concerns.

And what I say that you shouldn't ask is whether or not the product is ADA compliant.

And the reason that we avoid that reference in my field is because there are actually no standards in the Americans with Disabilities Act that tell companies what they have to do to ensure that their product is accessible.

And so, that's kind of a question that...

And I actually love it when a vendor will say to me, "Oh my gosh, don't worry.

We're ADA compliant." I'm like, "that doesn't mean anything to me because there are no regulations." So does your product meet ADA regulations? That also is a question that they can't answer because there are no regulations for them to comply with.

And I also avoid saying, can you provide me with a statement that you meet ADA requirements, because I want to be able to critically think about how they're meeting that accessibility requirement that I might have, not just that they are committed to looking at it.

So I know we only have 15 minutes left, so I'm gonna go on to the next question here of how do you evaluate this information? And these are some quick steps that you can be able to look at? First and foremost before you can do anything, is that you need to know how that product will be used and what it is designed to help your students do.

We talk a lot about in my office with our staff, what are the learning objectives? what do they have to learn and how is this tool gonna help them get there? Because that's how I can figure out whether or not the tool being accessible or inaccessible is actually gonna be a fundamental requirement and how I can be able to modify the use of that tool or put in an alternative assignment.

Also looking critically at the documentation, as we just mentioned, do they conduct testing using assistive technology? Have they contracted with an accessibility vendor to do their documentation? There are a lot of companies now that are hiring accessibility consultants to come in, evaluate that tool pro you know, produce the VPAT or other accessibility documentation for their clients to be able to review that.

It gives me a little bit more confidence in what I look at in that template then something you know, that they might be creating themselves.

We talked about an accessibility roadmap.

That's an important thing I wanna know.

Can you see when you're looking at the actual product alternatives for non-text content? So videos, are there captions? If you see an image, if you hover over it, do you get an alternative text? Can you right click on it and see alternative text for that image? That's something that's really important.

We wanna be sure that anything that's presented visually, that someone who's using a screen reader can actually access that because we took the time to describe it.

Also what is the user interface look like? You know, sometimes when you look at it at face value, you can say, I can not figure out how to actually make this work just by kind of getting in and jumping around and playing a little bit.

Well, then your students with disabilities might get a little bit lost too.

And so you want to be looking at that, how intuitive is it, how user friendly is it from a usability perspective? How has color being used? Are there you know, places where information is conveyed only through the use of color, and is there sufficient contrast between the background and the foreground so that you can actually detect what's there? Also, are there a time to elements that trigger any activity or inactivity warnings? That's something that can be really, really critical for your students who might be using alternative keyboard inputs.

Whether they're using mouse pointers, whether they're using screen readers and keyboard display navigation, those are things that we want to keep in mind.

And then also, what about using keyboard navigation? I've included a link here where you can go and learn some basic keyboard shortcuts, and that's a good information for all of us to have, because that gives you kind of a quick way of looking and saying, "Will this work for my student that can only use the keyboard?" Because there are a lot of students and even maybe their parents now who cannot use a mouse because they cannot manipulate the mouse or because they can't see what they're pointing and clicking on.

I'm just going to chime in really quickly.

Sure. 'cause I think

You're hearing a lot of probably, you know, terminology and critical things to think about when it comes to accessibility.

This is really, I think driving home the point that deciding on which tech to implement can be very complicated and hard.

And that's why ultimately we want that decision-making process to ultimately be escalated to the district.

And these are considerations that should be included in their decision making procurement and implementation processes.

So they're not necessarily something that every individual teacher needs to be thinking about if you and your district have a right strategy in place for making those decisions.

Thanks Monte.

Yeah, I think that's a really great call-out.

And then, but let's talk about how that fits in.

Pete talked about the ecosystem.

Monte was talking about your tech use strategy.

Let's talk about what is your digital accessibility strategy.

Your district may or may not have one.

You know, I think that this is a place where a lot of school districts are being kind of caught up with where we were in higher ed a few years ago with a lot of enforcement activities and regulation and investigations from the Offices for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education of specifically about digital accessibility.

And so a lot of folks are kind of saying, "Oh my gosh, what do I need to do?" I think we have to remember the different times that we're in right now.

And if you don't have some of these things in place, the best thing to do is to get started.

You know, you don't have to have it completely figured out.

The most important part that you probably need to know is who is your audience? Who are the people that are gonna be consuming what it is that you do? in K-12, you have a little bit more of a benefit from us in higher ed, because for your students at least you're tasked with identifying and actually getting those students into the special education system.

So sometimes those needs are a little bit well better well known at the outset than what we have in higher ed as we wait for those students to come to us.

But even still it's who, what, when, where and why.

what standard will you follow? When will you ask those key accessibility related questions? The reason we wanted to talk about this in connection with the procurement strategies, that that's an excellent place to start.

One of the things that, you know, I hope that you take home from this is that, infusing accessibility through all of these conversations through all of these decision points is really the most critical aspect of it.

Because when you start with building that and embedding that into what you do, then it becomes second nature and you have better results in the long run.

How are we going to provide alternative formats as needed? And what sort of involvement will your vendors or suppliers have in providing those resources? At the university, we do a lot of work with our vendors and ask them specifically when something doesn't meet accessibility guidelines, how are you going to help us with that? What sort of alternatives can you provide to us for students who may not be able to access it? Where are your stakeholders accessing your resources? And how does that influence accessibility? We spend a lot of time talking about LMSs today and your Learning Management System.

As we talked about, that's your virtual classroom, you can have a perfectly accessible LMS that is going to meet all of the accessibility guidelines, and then you put one video in there that doesn't have captions, and you're not now having a class that isn't as accessible.

And so it's something that we need to be, keeping in mind, where do they need to go? How accessible is that container? And then how accessible is the content that we put in there.

And who's responsible when something is not accessible? I think we're talking a lot, you know, there's probably a lot of you who are sitting out there going, "Oh my gosh, I'm just a teacher.

What am I supposed to do with all of this?" And there is a lot here and there's a lot that you can actually start some conversations maybe with your entire school building.

Maybe it is a district wide conversation that you can start, but at least starting to ask the questions and trying to figure out where all of this is going to go, is really important.

And then why is this important for your class, your school or your district? I know that answer for me and for the University of Phoenix, but who are those stakeholders? Are there students without obvious disabilities who may benefit from this? And then what about those parents and guardians that are working with your students right now.

You may not know what their needs are and there may be some needs that come up because of the way that they have the help their student right now.

And consistency is the key, knowing the standards and how your school is going to meet them is critical to the student and parent experience.

We need them to know what to expect.

Two more slides and then will you see if there's any other questions that we can get to before we have to wrap up? And it almost seems like a little bit weird to put aside about building a culture of accessibility at the end, but I think we've talked about a lot here and I think you a lot of what we've been looking at with the status of K-12, through the pandemic, you need to understand your current climate number one and the culture of your school or your district.

There are certain things that I am able to deal with at the University of Phoenix, with my faculty that is very different than things I've done at two other institutions where I've worked in terms of training for accessibility, because the culture is different.

Because there's different emphasis placed on different parts of that experience.

And then I can tap into and say, "Well, I can do this here, whereas I couldn't do that at my last institution." And then again, you hear me talking about this a lot.

What is the standard? We all have to know what it is that we're marching towards, and then because the standards allow all of the teachers and leaders to know what you're asking for.

And especially from your vendors and your outside partners.

One of the things that we hear a lot from our outside partners is, "You're the only institution asking me for this." And I know that's not true, but we may be asking for it in a different way.

And the last thing I want is for anyone from the university to be asking for this stuff in a different way than what we're asking for it, we all need to be aligned on that.

What's in it for me? Why are we doing this? You know, there are benefits for students without disabilities by using accessibility features.

And I'm gonna talk about those in a second.

Professional development opportunities, where are they? If you don't get them from your district, where can you go to look for them? And one of the resources that I frequently refer people to is WebAIM, and there's a few links on the last slide that we have to go over here.

And then really a reminder, policies and procedures aren't enough.

A policy that isn't followed is really kind of an empty promise.

It doesn't do anything for you.

The resources are what's really important, and infusing accessibility questions and considerations into all of the activities is gonna help you move that needle so that your students have what they need.

And as I mentioned, I from New York, so I talk super, super fast, but I wanna make sure I give just a minute or two to talk about this before I throw it back over to my co-presenters or to Pam to wrap up here today.

But these are essential accessibility steps that everyone who's on this call today can do.

So if you're a teacher, if you're a leader, if you're a principal, whoever you are, you can do these things.

Share videos that have captions and transcripts.

Automatically generated captions have improved quite a bit, but they often still are inaccurate.

And so I have a link here that you can look at for YouTube on how they walk you through correcting captions that come up on their videos.

Include a transcript for all of your audio files and podcasts.

So again, remember if you're emphasizing the content in one sensory motor reality over another, you have to have an alternative for that, for someone to access it without hearing it or for someone to access it without seeing it.

And there's a great information about that from WebAIM and that link is there.

Images and graphics just need to be described.

They have to have effective alternative text descriptions.

When a screen reader encounters in image, it can not interpret that for the user without having that description.

And so you have to write it for it.

And there's a place there where you can upload that.

And we've got a link here for you to look at that as well.

And creating accessible documents, I think the biggest takeaway that I would take from this bullet point is that there are style guides and templates that are built into many of the Microsoft office products that you are probably using that do a bulk of this work for you.

Following those styles and using those templates is gonna get you both of the way there.

But if you need more information, there are links there for you to refer to as well.

And then just sharing descriptive hyperlinks instead of long web addresses.

As you see on this slide, I don't have a single URL written out here because the screen reader is going to read that URL for the user character by character.

And if you think about those URLs, like sometimes take up like three lines, think about listening to that and trying to figure out where do I need to go.

But when you're using a screen reader with having a hyperlink that's described by keywords, then it allows them to navigate by link and know exactly where they're gonna go when they activate that link.

So that's a really important thing that's super easy to do.

And again, as I mentioned earlier, don't use color as your only means of conveying meaning and make sure there is sufficient color contrast.

When you start providing feedback to students on documents, where you say, "My feedback's in red," well, what if your student can't perceive that color? Now, colorblindness is one thing, but also it could be that they have, you know, kind of a low visual acuity and they can't actually detect that red is different from black.

So being able to have some other text way that can be read aloud to the student, that this is your feedback.

I always start with my initials.

And so I'll put in something, you know, feedback from K.H, and then I put my feedback.

And I may also put it in red because then my student who can see it, can see it, but at least then I have a non-color way of communicating that meaning.

So those were all of the accessibility tips that I had.

Monte and Pete, I don't know if there's anything that you wanted to share before we, in two minutes, throw it back over to Pam to wrap up.

No, I can talk about this forever, but I think just passing me back to Pam now is a good idea.

Yeah.

Okay. Wow, what a great session.

Kelly, Monte, Pete, thank you so much.

Everybody who's listening today is July 1st.

I know we as teachers, we look at the month of July as if it was Sunday night on the weekend because we know the beginning of the school and back to school is looming.

I think the great news is we will all do better because we know better.

And the virtual learning that we bring to our kids, I think this is just gonna be the beginning of a huge watershed moment.

And I'm so proud and grateful that Blackboard and University of Phoenix thought it was important enough to bring this to all the K-12 educators for free.

I wanna send a huge thanks to Pat Hoge and to Heath Morrison for helping us lead this charge.

And folks who are listening, the Virtual Alliance for Learning is not over.

We have planned events that are gonna continue to happen, and we will make sure that we use the same channels to promote these free opportunities for you all to grow in your knowledge in this area as we begin to create them.

And again, I just wanna end this one note.

I wanna thank you all for choosing to teach.

I know that you're all brilliant and you have talents in a plethora of areas, but every day you wake up and one more year you say, "I would like to teach." I'm super grateful for what you've done for my own children.

I'm grateful for what we do for kids states.

I think this back to school is going to be a community effort like none other in the history of education.

And I'm super excited that all of you have made the pledge to be a part of that.

Thank you all for choosing to work for our kids and look for future Virtual Alliance activities.

Thank you.

Thank you everyone.

That was great.

Thank Monte, thanks Kelly.

(indistinct)

You guys, that was such a good session.

Thank you.

That was such a good session.

Thanks everyone, I actually have to rush to another meeting.

Super important and I think- Of course I have another meeting, Pam. Sorry.

Oh my God.

I love listening to it.

You guys did a great job.

Thanks so much.

Appreciate it.

Thank you, Pam.

Bye-bye.

(upbeat music)