Spotlight on People
Improving the Opportunity to Learn for All
Our Mission

Our mission is to spur innovation in education and improve the opportunity to learn for all through technology and research.

Our vision is that all people at every stage of their lives have access to learning experiences that help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and continuously learn in an ever-changing world.

Our four key beliefs that guide our work:

- We believe in the power of networks to connect us with each other and ideas.
- We believe in the power of stories to inspire and incent action.
- We believe in the power of research to ground us and inform our work.
- We believe in the power of engagement to ensure learning is for life.

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Since inception, the Digital Promise mission has been to spur innovation in education and improve the opportunity to learn, for ALL, through technology and research.

Throughout our work, we have been guided by four key beliefs. We believe in the power of networks to connect us with each other and ideas, the power of research to ground our work with evidence, the power of stories to inspire and incent action, and the power of engagement to enable lifelong learning. Across our initiatives, we seek to close the Digital Learning Gap by promoting equity and opportunity regardless of location, learning differences, or age.

In 2018, we doubled down on efforts to ensure we were seeking a more equitable education system—highlighting the need to create actionable, scalable solutions to the toughest challenges facing public school districts across the country, particularly with marginalized students. Our Research team collaborated with educators to discover shared challenges and assembled and published their findings in a Challenge Map. From there, members of our League of Innovative Schools network designed and led Challenge Collaboratives, comprised of committed district leaders and partners, to address some of these high-priority challenges head on.

Our work also included a particular emphasis on meeting each learner where they are, across varied needs and contexts. The Learner Variability Project utilized the latest learning sciences research in its updated web app, the Navigator, to offer evidence-based factors and strategies to help product developers and educators understand and address the full diversity of learners.

Our idea of “learners” is lifelong and lifewide, from K-12 students and young children, to aspiring adults in and out of the workforce as well as the educators who serve them and benefit from personalization of their own learning. In 2018, we launched our own Educator Micro-credentials platform, providing thousands of educators the opportunity to access more than 400 competency-based micro-credentials that capture research-backed skills.

Additionally, we released promising research findings on classroom coaching from the pilot year of the Dynamic Learning Project. Our Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative expanded to 100 schools, reaching more than 5,600 teachers who participated in customized professional learning and coaching as they supported the 87,000 students across their schools. We also launched the Maker Learning Leadership Cohort, a regional convening of teachers and administrators supporting each other in creating sustainable and equitable maker learning experiences for students.

As I look ahead to 2019, I am humbled and grateful for what we have achieved and excited about the work ahead of us. Our passionate team, in collaboration with our valued philanthropic and corporate partners, is committed to broadening our impact across the country and around the globe.

With the rapidity of technological advancements made in just the past five years, it is difficult to predict what the future holds. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure all learners receive the best opportunities that we as a society can provide, so that every student can gain the skills they need to succeed in an ever-changing world.

Karen Cator
President & CEO
Digital Promise works at the intersection of educators, researchers, and developers, and our 2018 Annual Report highlights the people who make up this education ecosystem. When all learners have equitable access to learning technology, when everyone participates, and when everyone learns, we all benefit from a more engaged, informed, and just society.
When the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative came to Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, principals and teachers knew things were going to change as their students experienced the benefits of technology in the classroom. What they couldn’t have known was how quickly those changes would occur.

In their first year as Verizon Innovative Learning Schools, Lassiter Middle School and W.E.B. DuBois Academy achieved tremendous growth on their Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test scores. DuBois, in fact, had the highest percentage of growth for African-American male students in the entire district.

Through the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative, Digital Promise collaborates with Verizon to equip every student and teacher at select middle schools across America with a device and a two-year data plan, thereby closing both the digital divide and the homework gap. In addition to technology and access, Verizon Innovative Learning Schools receive extensive teacher professional development, technical support, and the opportunities to use technology in powerful ways to support student learning.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS
Building brighter futures for underserved students through a technology-infused learning experience

180K STUDENTS AND TEACHERS SERVED
“I believe one of the largest contributors to our overall MAP growth and gains is the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative,” said James Unger, technology coach at Lassiter. “Not only do the iPads add to student learning, but throughout the year, teachers have begun to change their practice to integrate more technology and innovative lessons. This is seen in almost every classroom. I believe the technology and the change in pedagogy across the entire school have contributed to our increased scores.”

“It’s led teachers to explore some innovative approaches,” said Lassiter principal Jon Cesler. “[The technology] has increased the level of engagement, which has [led to] more time on task with academic work and more practice, which has ultimately led to more growth.”

“We’re so thankful for the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative,” said DuBois principal Robert Gunn. “It certainly has allowed us to reach further than just the classroom—we’re actually able to go into households to help our students out. It’s been a game-changer for us.”

“Students growing up in the 21st century are adept at using technology; having their own devices in the classroom allows them to use tools to learn in school the same way they do in their personal lives, which in turn increases relevance and student engagement.

James Unger
Technology Coach
Lassiter Middle School

“‘It’s difficult to teach students in a whole group because of their differing levels. You shoot for the middle, but you’re always going to miss somebody on either extreme,’ said Mary Leslie, an English/language arts teacher at DuBois. ‘I’ve been able to do more teaching in smaller groups without having to figure out what to do with the other kids. With the apps, I’m able to allow kids to work at their own pace.’

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Across the country, educators are seeking opportunities to advance their professional learning in relevant ways, beyond participation in traditional classes and sessions provided by their school. 

**Educator Micro-credentials** are a promising pathway to personalizing learning for educators. They provide competency-based recognition for the skills educators learn throughout their careers, regardless of where and how they learned them. They create the opportunity for educators to reach specific, action-oriented goals and direct their professional learning in their classrooms and on their schedules.

“...The power of micro-credentials, for me, is in the ability to reflect on my teaching, to really look at what I have done in the past, what I want to do in the future, identify my areas of weakness, and see how I can improve as an educator," said Karen Grimm, a teacher in Seminole County Public Schools in Florida.

Since 2014, Digital Promise has been building an innovative ecosystem of micro-credentials in partnership with educators, school districts, states, and professional development organizations.
On our Micro-credentials Platform, educators at all levels can access more than 400 competency-based micro-credentials that capture research-backed skills. These micro-credentials are developed, assessed, and awarded by more than 50 partner organizations—ranging from institutes of higher education to nonprofit organizations and county offices of education.

In 2018, we launched nearly 200 new micro-credentials. For example, the National Geographic Society introduced a stack of micro-credentials centered around geographic thinking. The Carey Institute for Global Good published a stack for educators of refugees, highlighting topics of social and emotional learning and trauma-informed approaches in refugee education. Advocates for Youth unveiled a research-informed stack which includes topics like creating inclusive classrooms for students of all sexual orientations, and improving educator comfort with teaching lessons about sexuality. And the National AfterSchool Association launched three micro-credentials focused on STEM facilitation.

“We hope teachers who already use these skills view micro-credentials as a chance to get the feedback and recognition they deserve,” said Dan Byerly, senior manager of digital learning at National Geographic.

“The power of micro-credentials, for me, is the ability to be reflective on my teaching, to really look at what I have done in the past, what I want to do in the future, identify my areas of weakness, and see how I can improve as an educator.”

Karen Grimm
Teacher
Seminole County Public Schools

District leaders across the country have begun to include micro-credentials in professional development policies, and we look forward to expanding the ecosystem and incentives in the years ahead.
SPOTLIGHT ON LEADERS
Creating solutions to education’s most pressing challenges

To discover shared priorities and to help address the many challenges that school districts face, we engaged districts in the League of Innovative Schools, a national network of 102 public school districts across the country. Root cause analysis sessions and in-depth interviews with district leaders helped us more deeply understand and articulate pressing problems of practice.

Based on what we learned, we created the Challenge Map—an interactive tool featuring 35 specific challenges relevant to superintendents, principals, coaches, and teachers. The challenges are organized within nine themes related to students, teachers, schools, and systems, and the topic areas range from improving equity to school culture and the need for better and broader assessments.

Among these challenges, preparing today’s students for lifelong learning by giving them authentic, real world experiences emerged as a critical priority. Rallying around this topic, 12 League of Innovative Schools leaders formed our first Challenge Collaborative to tackle real world learning head on.
Challenge Collaboratives are designed to create solutions to education’s most pressing challenges. The approach is uniquely powerful as district leaders and practitioners have the chance to directly engage with researchers, designers, and experts in the field to collaboratively design a scalable solution to an existing problem.

The League began this work in early 2018 with leaders from five districts. They met in Washington, D.C., to identify their guiding questions, investigate ideas and research, and begin to design tools to connect teachers with opportunities for their students to learn from professionals outside of the classroom.

After months of engagement, the participants in the Challenge Collaborative designed a web-based application to support real world learning. The resulting website went through three rapid-cycle iterations with nearly 100 educators involved in brainstorming, developing, and testing. The tool will be widely released in 2019.

Ann Linson, superintendent of East Noble School Corporation in Indiana, thinks the tool “will drive teachers to include more real world experiences in the classroom. We hope it will give them something more concrete to work with, something that motivates them as well as their students so that real world learning becomes a natural part of every day.”

In Rhode Island’s Bristol Warren Regional School District, Superintendent Mario Andrade said, “Through this Challenge Collaborative, we’re able to network with both big and small districts from across the United States to tackle a problem that can actually impact the nation. It’s about so much more than the seven square miles in my district.”

The power of these Challenge Collaboratives is growing. In 2018, Digital Promise launched four more Collaboratives on improving data interoperability, developing K-12 computational thinking pathways, developing deeper learning skills using open education resources, and designing computational thinking curriculum for Next Generation Science Standards.

“We hope [our new tool] will give [teachers] something more concrete to work with, something that motivates them as well as their students so that real world learning becomes a natural part of every day.”

Ann Linson
Superintendent
East Noble School Corporation
In 2017, in partnership with Google, Digital Promise launched the **Dynamic Learning Project (DLP)** to increase educational equity and powerful use of technology through classroom-based coaching. We provided a grant to 50 schools across five states to support an onsite, full-time digital learning coach for the 2017–2018 school year. Throughout the year, DLP coaches provided individualized support to teachers to help them select, tackle, and then reflect upon solving a classroom challenge. The school-based coaches received sustained mentoring and ongoing professional development.

Our findings from the pilot year showed that district leaders, teachers, principals, and coaches overwhelmingly believe digital learning coaching provides an engaging and impactful professional development experience. One DLP coach noted, “In my years at [my school], I’ve never seen any initiative or project so wholly embraced by such a large (and diverse) group of the faculty.”

**95% COACHES & 90% PRINCIPALS BELIEVED DLP ADVANCES STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**
Additionally, our data showed that after one year of working with their DLP coach, teachers are using technology more frequently and in more powerful ways—both to support what they are teaching as well as how they are teaching it. At the end of the year, more than 80 percent of DLP teachers agreed that they have the ability to use technology in powerful ways to develop student agency, collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills. Additionally, more than 95 percent of coaches and nearly 90 percent of principals and teachers surveyed believed the DLP advances student engagement.

In the pilot year, we also identified the core attributes of an effective coaching program—it’s a partnership, and it is personalized, non-evaluative, voluntary, school-based, and sustained. One DLP teacher expanded on the value of the personalized nature of coaching: “If you provide a one-size-fits-all model for teachers, that’s not going to necessarily address their strengths or weaknesses. The one-on-one aspect is the most important part; [the coach] can address each teacher individually based on their strengths and their areas for growth.”

Further, we learned more about the key qualities of an effective coach—someone who is a relationship builder, understands how tech supports learning, is a strong communicator, and has previous teaching experience, preferably in the school in which they are coaching. As one DLP principal shared, “A good coach is... innovative not only in her instructional strategies and what she can find and bring to teachers, but in the way she approaches teachers or staff members and builds relationships and finds the way in, even when the door might not be open.”

Overall, our findings from the pilot year of the Dynamic Learning Project suggest that coaching is a promising approach to help close the Digital Learning Gap, and ultimately improve student learning. We continued the program—and our research—in the 2018–19 school year, with 90 percent of Year 1 schools continuing their coaching program even without the grant. The Year 2 research report will be published in the fall of 2019.

“In my years at [my school], I’ve never seen any initiative or project so wholly embraced by such a large (and diverse) group of the faculty.”

Dynamic Learning Project Coach
SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS
Creating 360° media to inspire positive action worldwide

In the summer of 2018, students from Germany and Kenya worked together to create a MY World 360° film responding to UN Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities. Their goal was to raise awareness of identity and discrimination, highlighting how privilege (or lack thereof) shapes their lives.

MY World 360° was launched by Digital Promise Global and partners in March 2018 to support youth worldwide to create 360° media as a way to share their perspectives and advance positive action toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). MY World 360° is one part of Digital Promise Global’s 360° Story Lab, which works directly with young people to produce 360° media that goes beyond the frame of traditional media and journalism.

Through MY World 360°, participants across the globe learn about the SDGs and develop the skills needed to capture, edit, and share 360° media in order to represent their perspectives and their communities in an immersive and compelling way.

120+ SCHOOLS AND YOUTH ORGS in 6 COUNTRIES
PARTICIPATED IN 360° STORY LAB
Projects like MY World 360°, through which students are encouraged to collaborate across classrooms and cultures to discuss issues they care about, enable youth worldwide to unite behind a shared goal to inspire positive action on the issues that matter most to them.

One German student put it this way: “[Creating 360° videos has] really opened my eyes to this new technology, what you can do with it, and how you can include the viewer in the scene. 360° is a technology that can bring people and countries closer together.”

Since its inception, more than 120 schools and youth organizations from six countries have participated in the 360° Story Lab, creating videos on a range of topics that matter to them, including gender equality, relationship building, and the harmful impacts of pollution. Awards have been distributed to 29 student films through the 360° Filmmakers Challenge and MY World 360°, recognizing the exceptional work done by students all over the world.

“[Creating 360° videos has] really opened my eyes to this new technology, what you can do with it, and how you can include the viewer in the scene. 360° is a technology that can bring people and countries closer together.”

Student from Germany
SPOTLIGHT ON DEVELOPERS
Making research actionable to inform product design and serve the needs of all learners

New findings from the learning sciences research field give us a greater understanding of how students learn, with a focus on the needs of individual learners rather than the fictional “average student.” However, these findings won’t improve learning opportunities unless they’re put into action.

Our Learner Variability Project works to make research actionable by infusing the latest learning sciences research into the development and improvement of products, programs, and practice. Through this effort, we look to ultimately support each learner, their parents, educators, and the edtech product development community.

In 2018, the Learner Variability Project continued to uncover evidence-based factors and strategies to help product developers and educators understand and address the full diversity of students.
We translated ever-growing learning sciences research into easily accessible factors and strategies. The research-based factors and strategies comprise our Learner Models, which are free, open-source, and accessible for all audiences through our web app, the Navigator. In addition to the existing Reading PK-3 and Math PK-2 Learner Models, we launched the Literacy 4-6 Learner Model in 2018. In 2019, we are launching Learner Models for Math 3-6, Math 7-9, and Literacy 7-12.

“We were actively seeking research-based language and literacy instructional strategies to weave into our game-based learning framework,” said Ben Grimley, CEO and co-founder of Speak Agent. “The Learner Variability Navigator helped us quickly sort the hype from those strategies that actually have a proven basis and integrate well into authentic classroom practice. Teachers and students who use Speak Agent are already seeing a significant impact!”

We also began to create a hub of resources to improve awareness and understanding of learner variability, beginning with defining the concept in our paper, “Learner Variability Is the Rule, Not the Exception.”
SPOTLIGHT ON FAMILIES
Linking home and school learning to optimize learning opportunities for young children

Early childhood programs provide children with rich opportunities to learn and develop. In order for these programs to have strong and lasting effects, it is crucial to involve children’s families in the design process, along with researchers, educators, and developers. Our co-design process leads to programs and resources that are relevant to children’s everyday lives, responsive to the opportunities, needs, and constraints families have at home, and are more feasible to implement and likely to be adopted.

In 2018, our Learning Sciences Research team worked to extend a preschool science curricular program that we previously designed, along with preschool teachers, curricular developers, and media designers at WGBH-TV (Boston, MA), for free use in preschool classrooms. Our prior research indicated that the program significantly improved children’s science learning. Our work this past year aimed to integrate mathematics and engineering and design a home-school.

2 CURRICULAR PROGRAMS AND 9 APPS IN 2018

CO-DESIGNED WITH EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES
connection component to link STEM learning opportunities at home and school. The effort involved working with culturally and linguistically diverse families and co-designing science resources in both English and Spanish. Our partners included public preschool teachers and families in California, Boston, and New York; together, we generated and pilot-tested hands-on activities and app prototypes in classrooms and homes.

“Engaging with families in the co-design process really promotes the connection between school and home learning,” said Rania Rammah, a preschool teacher in Roslindale, Massachusetts. “Parents experience the hands-on activities, and it motivates them to play with their children in ways that support science learning at home and makes it fun! Children and parents learn together.”

Our work in 2018 also included co-designing a program to promote computational thinking across home and preschool, along with science and mathematics. Additionally, in partnership with the Jim Henson Company, we designed and evaluated an app to support parents as they engaged in conversations with their children while watching a video promoting understanding of ocean science. Moving forward, we will continue to refine all of these resources and release them for free public use, and we will also continue sharing lessons learned with academic and developer audiences.

“Engaging with families in the co-design process really promotes the connection between school and home learning. Parents experience the hands-on activities, and it motivates them to play with their children in ways that support science learning at home and makes it fun! Children and parents learn together.”

Rania Rammah
Preschool Teacher
Roslindale, Massachusetts
SPOTLIGHT ON ADULT LEARNERS
Providing digital skills training to thousands of adult learners

In 2018, our Adult Learning initiative worked with partners to recruit 39 organizations in 15 metro areas across the country to provide digital marketing skills training to job-seekers, career changers, entrepreneurs, and small business owners through in-person workshops and online modules, and offered micro-credentials as recognition of their learning.

The project is part of Facebook’s Community Boost program, an initiative designed to help U.S. small businesses grow and to equip more people with the digital skills they need to compete in the job market. We helped co-design the curriculum used by partner organizations implementing the in-person workshops and online modules. Learners can earn up to four micro-credentials on social media marketing through the Digital Promise Micro-credentials Platform.

Since launch, partners have provided digital marketing skills training to nearly 1,600 adult learners in both English and Spanish. At Baker Ripley in Houston, Texas, the Spanish language courses have been a great success with recent immigrants. Students learn how to use their smartphones to run analytics on their Facebook business pages, and they receive tips on how to run effective ads.

WE WORKED WITH 39 ORGS IN 15 METRO AREAS TO PROVIDE DIGITAL MARKETING SKILLS TRAINING
One student trained by Savvy Coders in St. Louis, Missouri, transitioned from volunteering at a local nonprofit to landing a job as a digital marketing specialist after impressing the leadership with her new skills gained upon completing the program.

In addition to recruitment and curriculum development, Digital Promise has provided ongoing support and technical assistance to Facebook Community Boost partners through resource development, need-based training, and thought leadership. The Adult Learning initiative has hosted webinars for partner organizations on a range of topics including marketing and recruitment, micro-credentials, and creating inclusive learning environments. The success of the project is a testament to what can happen when nonprofit organizations, community providers, and leading companies join forces to promote digital skills for adult learners nationwide.

The greatest lesson gained as a result of the partnership is that there is tremendous demand and diversity of interest. Celena Mancina, vice president of operations at Grand Circus, a lead partner in Detroit, Michigan, notes, “All of the organizations we partner with reach such different people, which makes it interesting to hear success stories after workshops are completed.”

“All of the organizations we partner with reach such different people, which makes it interesting to hear success stories after workshops are completed.”

Celena Mancina
Vice President of Operations
Grand Circus
Digital Promise

Digital Promise is an independent, bipartisan nonprofit, authorized by Congress in 2008 as the National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies through Section 802 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and signed into law by President George W. Bush. With an initial Board of Directors recommended by Members of Congress and appointed by then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, President Barack Obama formally launched Digital Promise in September 2011.

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McGraw-Hill Education
PowerSchool
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Steelcase
Verizon
Wonder Workshop
Digital Promise Financials

**Digital Promise Net Assets, by Year**

- Temporary Restricted Assets
- Unrestricted Assets

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**Digital Promise 2018 Revenue, by Source**

- Total Revenue = $54.9 Million
- $22.4 Million Cash
- $32.5 Million In-kind

- 31% Grants and Contributions
- 4% Earned Income
- 6% Federal Award Income
- 59% In-kind Contributions of Devices and Data Plans
Digital Promise Global

Digital Promise Global shares the mission of Digital Promise: to accelerate innovation in education to improve opportunities to learn globally. Our work reflects the vision that all people, regardless of nationality, should have access to learning experiences that help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and continuously learn in an interconnected world. We also seek to find, create, and facilitate examples of excellence in education that can be replicated around the world.

2018 Board of Directors

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Digital Promise Global 2018 Revenue, by Source
Total Revenue = $4.8 Million | $4.4 Million Cash | $360 Thousand In-kind

- 39% Earned Income
- 37% Federal Award Income
- 17% Grants and Contributions
- 7% In-kind Contributions of Professional Services

Digital Promise Global Net Assets, by Year

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