STRATEGIC POLICY PLAYBOOK

DRIVING INNOVATION IN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

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digiLEARN, a nonprofit organization, seeks to narrow the nation’s persistent achievement and skills gaps by accelerating the meaningful use of technology in education.

**Vision**
All learners are fully prepared by an innovative culture of lifelong learning to flourish as productive citizens and workers in an increasingly digital-driven world.

**Mission**
To accelerate personalized learning opportunities by cultivating an innovative culture of collaboration between students, teachers, other educators, entrepreneurs, and policymakers.
WE ARE TELLING OUR DIGITAL LEARNING STORY TO HELP GUIDE OTHER STATES THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF THEIR OWN STRATEGIC POLICY INITIATIVES.
OUR STORY
THE PROBLEM

Access to high-quality education was not equal.

Many students living in rural North Carolina didn't have access to the same quality of education as students in Charlotte or Raleigh simply because of their geographic or economic circumstances.

Without state intervention, these students had no shot at achieving the American dream.
In 2005, government leaders in North Carolina saw an opening to combat educational inequality in their state. They believed technology could:

➤ Level the playing field.
➤ Remove barriers to learning.
➤ Personalize learning.
➤ Create a workforce that could impact every community.

What must we do to fully integrate technology into the education system?
THE RESPONSE

The Business Education Technology Alliance (BETA) was formed with a diverse team of partners from the business, technology, government, and education communities.

BETA’s vision was to use technology as a way to provide an equitable, personalized, and high-quality public education to every learner. The group embarked on a journey to change the education system, working with players both inside and outside of the system.
THE RESULTS

After more than a decade of work, North Carolina has achieved many milestones.

➤ Digital learning remains a top education priority today.
➤ All 115 public school districts voluntarily connected to the NC Research and Education Network (NCREN) by 2009.
➤ The NC Virtual Public School saw nearly 60,000 enrollments by 2016.
➤ More than 70% of schools have a digital-learning ready Wi-Fi connection, expected to reach 100% by 2018.
HOW DID WE GET HERE?
THE STRATEGIC POLICY PLAYBOOK

1. Prepare for the initiative.
2. Ensure consistent, qualified leadership.
3. Establish a shared vision.
4. Understand the key partners and players.
5. Create a strategy to reach that vision.
6. Assess the work and remain focused on the vision.
PLAY 1: PREPARE FOR THE INITIATIVE.

The public sector must understand its capacity to act as a strategic partner and establish a level of authority within the state system.

BETA’s formal reporting structure lent credibility to its initiatives and allowed the group freedom to implement change.

Key Questions

- What entity is responsible for managing the partnerships?
- Does a new entity need to be established?
- What level of authority does this entity have within the broader system?
- Does this entity have the expertise required to negotiate with the private sector and other partners?
- How is information communicated through this system?
- What information will be shared, with whom, and by what means?
Identify the leader who will champion these initiatives. The leader should have the authority and responsibility to:

- Assign work
- Evaluate progress
- Be accountable overall for the success or failure of the project
- Bring the right people to the table
- Facilitate the right discussions at the right time with the right people
- Leverage her prestige to draw attention to the work
- Develop and advocate for a shared vision

**Key Questions**

- Who is the primary leader?
- What level of authority does the leader have and to whom do they report?
- How is the leader held accountable for outcomes?
- How does the leader hold the team accountable?
- What other experts and parties are needed to support the work?
PLAY 3: ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION.

The leader must identify and gain consensus around the vision of the initiative. She must be able to understand the players involved and establish a middle ground that everyone can support.

For North Carolina, the vision was simple:

“Everyone should have access to a high-quality public education and technology could make this happen.”

Key Questions

➤ What is the ideal outcome?
➤ Does this vision reflect the interests and needs of the public?
➤ Will all necessary stakeholders get behind this vision?
➤ If not, who or what could impede progress?
➤ How may this vision evolve over time?
Strategic policy change requires thoughtful public-private partnerships and bipartisan support. Leaders need to be able to cut across party lines, align the interests of other sectors, and persuade the beneficiaries to support the work.

North Carolina strategically brought all groups to the table to generate buy-in and continuous support for digital learning through:

- Cross-sector collaboration
- Bipartisan collaboration
- Stakeholder collaboration

**Key Questions**

- Who are the partners and parties involved?
- What are the concerns and hesitations of each party involved?
- Does the vision create the opportunity for mutual success?
- Is the political environment friendly to bipartisan collaboration?
- Are the parties willing to come to the table and contribute meaningfully to the work?
- What conflicts may arise? What is the best way to prepare for them?
- Are the rewards compelling enough to encourage participation?
PLAY 5: CREATE A STRATEGY TO REACH THAT VISION.

No one step leads to the vision and there may be multiple intermediate outcomes or milestones achieved throughout the process.

During this phase, all players should agree on a formal decision-making and evaluation process to hold actors accountable and ensure progress.

Key Questions:
- What is the current state of the project?
- What are the intermediate outcomes?
- What steps must be taken to get there?
- What is the desired future state?
- What is expected of each player?
- Can the players agree to a strategy?
- Are any players overburdened?
- How can the effort build on the existing system and leverage available resources?
- What is the best approval and evaluation processes?
- How are actors held accountable?
PLAY 6: ASSESS THE WORK AND REMAIN FOCUSED ON THE VISION.

Identify what data will be required to prove impact, and how it will be collected, analyzed, and used to move the initiative forward. Use this information to demonstrate progress and justify continued legislative support and funding.

Key Questions

➤ What data will need to be collected?
➤ When and how will the data be collected?
➤ Who is responsible for collecting and analyzing data?
➤ How will the data be used?
➤ What are the benchmarks?
➤ How will data and outcomes be communicated?
CONCLUSION

North Carolina’s digital learning initiative has been successful for over a decade because of these six principles and an enduring vision for the future of education.

➤ Play 1: Prepare for the initiative.
➤ Play 2: Ensure consistent, qualified leadership.
➤ Play 3: Establish a shared vision.
➤ Play 4: Understand the key partners and players.
➤ Play 5: Create a strategy to reach that vision.
➤ Play 6: Assess the work and remain focused on the vision.

Although every state is structured differently, leaders can apply this same process to guide them through the development and execution of their own strategy.
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