Educators Believe
Educational Technology
Can Personalize Learning— And Want Additional Support in Training and Professional Development

Results of a National Survey
By DreamBox Learning, PBS, and
The Education Week Research Center

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers and administrators say educational technology can be an effective tool for differentiation — which they largely agree helps to improve student outcomes. But they want more professional development in pedagogy and instructional methods, as well as more training in using tech tools. And they could use more and better devices, according to a new survey from DreamBox Learning, PBS, and the Education Week Research Center.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said differentiation and/or personalized learning is "very valuable" for improving student outcomes. Nearly all respondents (93 percent) agreed that using technology for instructional purposes is an effective way to provide differentiated and/or personalized learning experiences that adapt to student needs.

Still, 42 percent of respondents said teachers in their school community or district do not have the support they need to effectively use educational technology, and 69 percent of respondents indicated they need more training in using technology tools.

The survey also found that 52 percent of PreK-2 teachers do not feel teachers in their communities have the support they need to effectively use educational technology, compared to 45 percent of teachers in grades 3 through 8.

Seventy percent of PreK-2 teachers call for more/better devices to more effectively utilize technology in classrooms, versus 56 percent of teachers in grades 3 through 8.

Additional findings show that educational technology plays a major role in classrooms across the country.

- More than half (61 percent) of respondents said their students use a digital device/technology at least a few times a week for differentiated and/or personalized learning.

- Forty percent of respondents said that at least half of all student work is completed digitally.

Nearly all respondents (93 percent) agreed that using technology for instructional purposes is an effective way to provide differentiated and/or personalized learning experiences that adapt to student needs.

INTRODUCTION

Educational technology has the potential to help teachers differentiate and personalize learning in novel, effective, and efficient ways. But it is not always clear how educators are using new digital tools, how they view their capabilities, or what kinds of support they need to use them effectively to improve student learning. In the spring of 2018, DreamBox Learning and PBS, in partnership with the Education Week Research Center, set out to explore these topics with a survey of school and district leaders and PreK-8 teachers.

Topics addressed in the survey included:

- Is personalized learning/differentiation perceived to be an effective means of improving student achievement?

- Do teachers find educational technology to be a valuable or effective way to personalize learning?

- How often do teachers use digital technologies to personalize learning or differentiate instruction?

- To what extent do teachers and administrators perceive that teachers have the support they need to effectively use educational technology?

- What other needs do educators have around educational technology usage and implementation?

ABOUT THE SURVEY

WHO: 553 educators, including 90 district leaders, 89 school leaders, and 374 PreK-8 teachers

WHAT: A 22-question survey
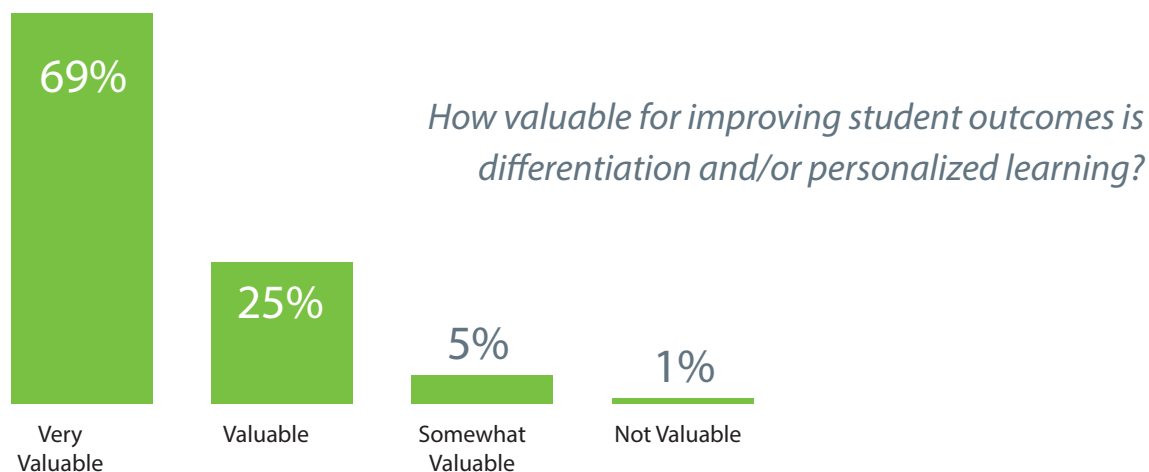
WHEN: Spring 2018

WHERE: Educators hailed from 47 different states and the District of Columbia

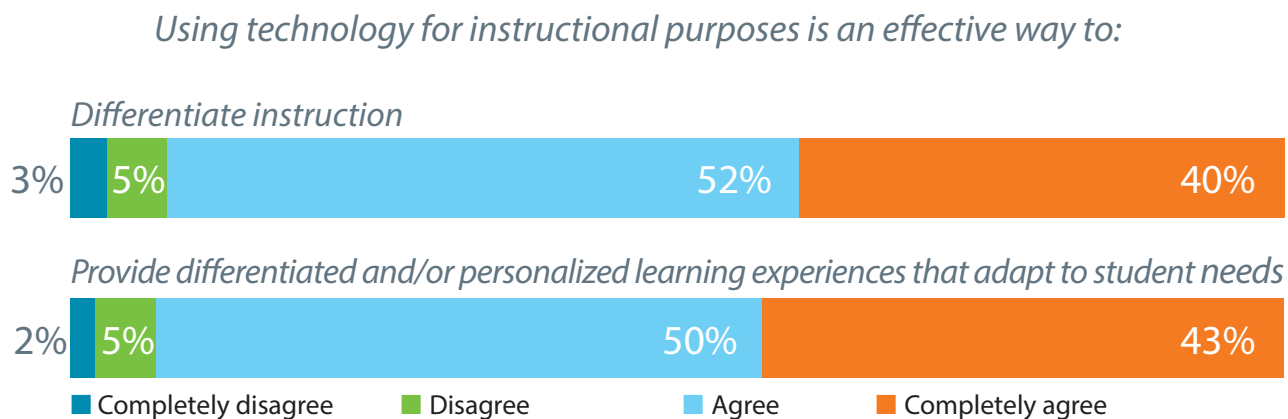**WHY:** To learn more about habits and perceptions related to educational technology

HOW: The survey was administered online

THE VALUE OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING

The vast majority of educators surveyed perceive that differentiating instruction and personalizing learning are effective ways of improving student outcomes: 69 percent say differentiation/personalization is very valuable. Only 1 percent of educators say it is not valuable.

How valuable for improving student outcomes is differentiation and/or personalized learning?

Very Valuable	Valuable	Somewhat Valuable	Not Valuable
69%	25%	5%	1%

The vast majority of educators surveyed — 93 percent — also perceive that using technology for instructional purposes is an effective way to provide differentiated and/or personalized learning experiences that adapt to student needs. Ninety-two percent say these technologies effectively differentiate instruction, and 95 percent perceive that students benefit from engaging with educational media for instructional purposes during math classes.

Using technology for instructional purposes is an effective way to:

Differentiate instruction

3%	5%	52%	40%

Provide differentiated and/or personalized learning experiences that adapt to student needs

2%	5%	50%	43%

■ Completely disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Completely agree

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS USING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The teachers and administrators surveyed clearly perceive that personalized learning improves student outcomes. They also perceive that technology is an effective means of personalization, thereby improving student achievement.
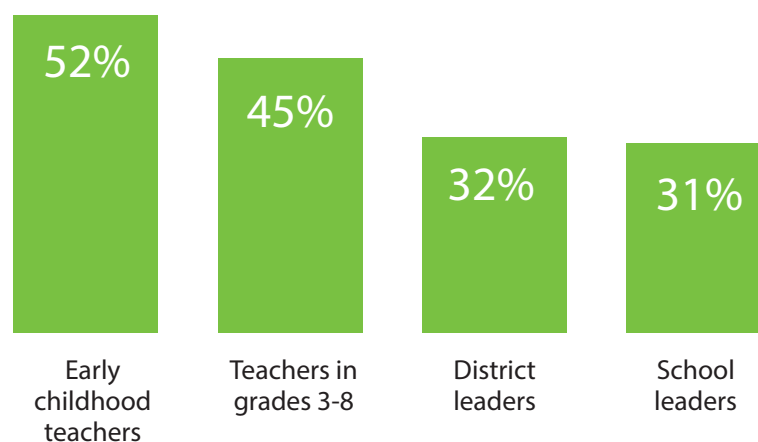
But do they have the support they need to harness technology for this purpose?

Survey results suggest that they may not.

Close to half of educators (42 percent) say that teachers in their school community or district lack the support they need to effectively use educational technology. Teachers are significantly more skeptical than administrators: 48 percent of PreK-8 teachers surveyed say educators lack the support they need as compared to 31 percent of school leaders and 32 percent of district leaders.

Early childhood teachers report having the greatest need for support: 52 percent say teachers lack the necessary supports to effectively use educational technology. By comparison, 45 percent of teachers in grades 3-8 indicate teachers lack the necessary supports.

Teachers in my school community or district lack the support they need to effectively use educational technology.*

52%	45%	32%	31%
Early childhood teachers	Teachers in grades 3-8	District leaders	School leaders

*Indicates percentage who disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: Teachers in my school community or district have the support they need to effectively use educational technology.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF EDUCATORS
WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT

What kinds of support do teachers need in order to effectively use educational technology?
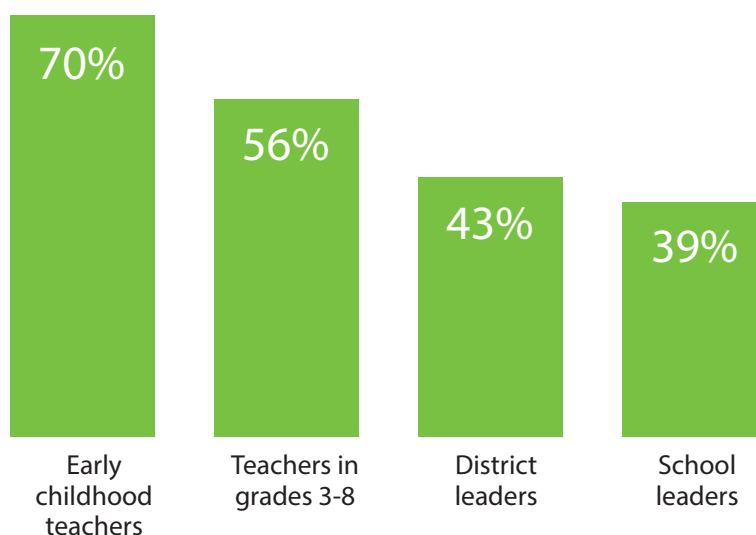
More than two-thirds of teachers and administrators say teachers could use more training in using technology tools. Sixty-two percent say they need professional development in pedagogy and instructional methods while more than half (55 percent) call for more and better devices.

What kinds of support do teachers in your district or school community most need to more effectively utilize technology in their classrooms? Select all that apply.

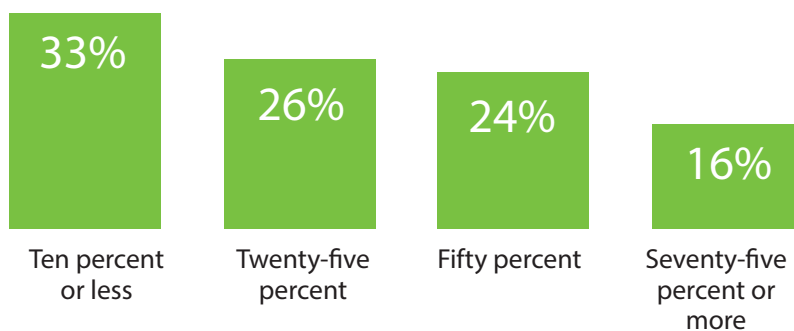|	
More training in using technology tools	69%
More professional development in pedagogy, instructional methods	62%
More/better devices	55%
More support from IT specialists	53%
More strategies around implementation	53%
More professional development in content areas to support all levels of learners	52%
More opportunities to learn from peers/access to community	51%
More/better digital curricular content	48%
More/better software	42%
More support from administration	33%

The need for more and better devices is especially acute for teachers in the early grades. While 56 percent of teachers in grades 3 through 8 call for more or better devices, 70 percent of PreK-2 teachers cite a need for more or better hardware for students and classrooms.

Teachers need more/better devices

Early childhood teachers	Teachers in grades 3-8	District leaders	School leaders
70%	56%	43%	39%

This shortage of devices could have a significant impact on the classroom practices reported in this survey. Perhaps because they need more devices, just 40 percent of educators report that at least half of all student work is completed digitally versus via pen and paper.

Please indicate how much student work is completed digitally instead of with paper and pencil.

Ten percent or less	Twenty-five percent	Fifty percent	Seventy-five percent or more
33%	26%	24%	16%

CONCLUSION

Educators clearly value personalized and differentiated learning, survey results suggest. They also strongly believe that digital technologies enhance these classroom practices that improve student achievement. In addition, 67 percent of the educators surveyed say that differentiated instruction to support diverse learner pathways and pacing, specifically in math, is achievable if effective curricular resources and the right technologies are available. And, if schools are to truly personalize learning, they need to invest in the educational technology support that teachers need to differentiate more effectively in today's classrooms.

Despite the optimism about the effectiveness of digital tools, teachers in particular face challenges with educational technology. They need more training specific to using educational technology tools. They also seek professional development related to pedagogy and instructional methods. Survey results indicate they need more and better devices, especially at the PreK-2 level. These challenges may be keeping teachers from realizing the true potential of educational technology in their classrooms. While analog tools are valuable and essential in many classroom and learning situations, teachers without access to technology resources have fewer tools at their disposal. This lack of options and alternatives creates barriers to equity, access, and differentiation to meet the needs of every learner.

The Education Week Research Center produces independent, objective, non-partisan research and analysis. For more information, contact us at RCinfo@epe.org.