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The Guardian > Business

A stormy education



[Joe Sherren](#)

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Drifting through school



Two weeks ago I wrote about how businesses, people and governments can be more productive during storms and other unplanned interruptions. This week I would like to focus on schools.

Students have lost significant time this year due to snow storms. Missed days now have to be made up by students during other times or by cancelling important PD days for teachers.

Does it really have to be that way?

I believe it is now time for our education system to become much more productive as well. The paradigm of insisting all education needs to be

Education

in the classroom is an outdated concept, and is not always conducive to student learning.

Many of the more progressive educational institutions are now providing webinars, self-paced learning tools and on-line teaching methods so students who have transportation issues are able to keep up with the curriculum.

There are now many options due to technology advances to solve this problem. Technology has been exploding in the 21st century. It is time that our educators got up to date with these advances.

Computers improve classroom learning and the internet allows students to conduct comprehensive research and communicate with other education providers beyond the classroom. Computers can also run specialized programs that enable teachers to provide tutoring or personalized instruction for students who need advanced or remedial attention.

Almost every household (or individual) has a computer. If not, maybe it is time for schools to provide them when students enroll.

By using resources and methods that already exist, there should be no reason for students to miss learning time, or teachers to have to give up their personal development time which is critical to advancing educational techniques in the long-term.

Forbes Magazine posts that education technology personalizes learning, enabling students to deploy the medium that works best for them. Interactive smart boards, webinars, and online group discussions provide educational opportunities that teachers can't provide in a traditional classroom setting.

As well as increasing learning time, there are many other benefits to on-line learning:

- Flexibility: Students can attend classes and courses whenever and wherever there is a computer or internet access.
- Customized learning: Every student has his or her way of learning that works best for them. An online option may ensure that each lesson is completely understood before moving on.
- Study on demand: Course materials can be accessed 24 hours a day, every day. This means students can easily review lectures and discussion materials.
- Maximize Social Media: Online discussion groups can be set up for student interaction. Instead of students purchasing books each year which become obsolete, provide books online or for digital products. This way they can be easily updated when new versions become available.

There may also be one more significant benefit of moving towards technology. Parental involvement is a key ingredient in how well a student learns.

A small school in the Silicon Valley town of Saratoga, California, has taken this truism and run with it.

Christa McAuliffe Elementary School (named after the schoolteacher killed in the Challenger shuttle disaster) has a program that not only encourages parents to be active members in their children's education but "requires" it.

Parents with kids at McAuliffe are expected to spend two, 90-minute sessions (three if they have two or more children) every week in their children's classrooms. And they don't simply drop in. Rather, they are initially required to attend a seven-session S.T.E.P. (Systemic Training for Effective Parenting) class, designed to help increase their usefulness when they do appear in class.

But for workers with demanding jobs and single parents, this could prove difficult.

However, with technology in the home, parents could be involved with their child in many facets of their education. As well, the parent themselves may benefit from the increased learning opportunity.

My question is for Educators this week: What are you doing to bring teaching techniques into the 21st century and maximize efficiency and learning outcomes for your schools?

Joseph Sherren, CSP, CSPGlobal, HoF, Canada's Management Effectiveness Expert works with organizations and individuals helping them achieve their critical objectives.