



TAP, CLICK,
READ

Early Literacy in the Digital Age: A Modern Action Plan for States and Communities

To make progress in solving America's reading crisis and to strengthen family-centered approaches that will endure over time, states and communities will need to act with urgency and update their strategies. Based on our research in Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens, we offer these 10 steps:

1. Develop a Modernization Plan

Every state and community should conduct its own **"modernization plan," starting with an early learning and technology audit.** The audit, conducted and published by an existing early learning alliance or an appropriate community planning entity (e.g., the United Way), should include an assessment of broadband access and the availability of digital tools to support teachers in early learning programs, documentation and promotion of professional development opportunities, a tally of financial commitments made to technology-supported early learning programs, and recommendations for redirecting existing assets from less effective programs.



2. Leverage New Policy Opportunities

States and communities will find **key opportunities in the newly enacted federal education legislation [Every Student Succeeds Act](#)**, which includes provisions for expanded family engagement activities as well as technology use and planning. ESSA also emphasizes the importance of research-informed practices in early literacy development. In May 2016, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services published a [joint policy statement on family engagement](#) to encourage better connections between programs for children from infant-toddler through third grade. A guide to help states strengthen pre-K program connections to families has been developed by the [Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes](#) (CEELO). Another great resource for how to use ESSA to drive early literacy learning is [Knowledge Matters Issue Brief #4](#) by the Knowledge Matters Campaign.



3. Partner and Build Infrastructure for Digital Equity

States and communities need to work closely with tech industry partners to help promote digital equity. Corporate and nonprofit partnerships have created helpful momentum in expanding technology access for low-income students and families, including national commitments from the [ConnectED](#) program and the [FCC's Lifeline](#) program. However, these **programs have not yet covered early learning centers or low-income housing in a comprehensive way**. Vital infrastructure is lacking to both wire and support Head Start, child care, preschool, and family child care settings so that educators can gain access to online learning communities and collaborate

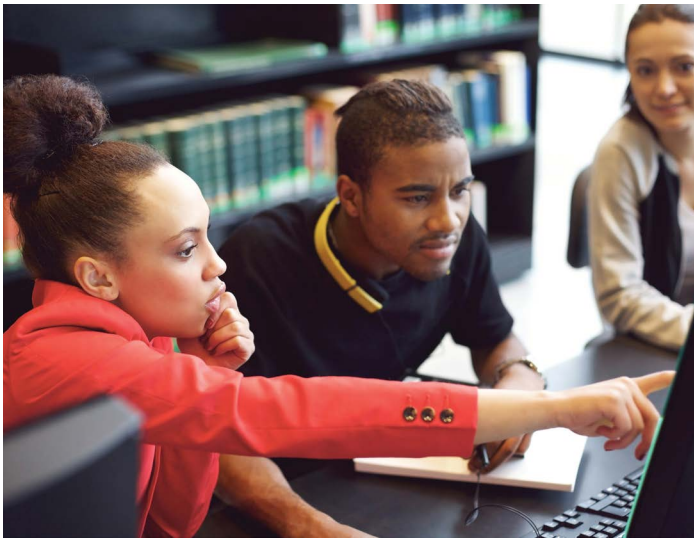
digitally with colleagues in libraries, public media stations, and independent organizations. Digital literacy is now required of all 21st-century educators, and the early learning field needs focused attention and new expert partners to catch up.

4. Recruit and Leverage Public Media

Every state and many communities have public media stations whose charters require outreach to, and support for, early learning programs as well as public schools and homeschool parents. **Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on developing curriculum-based media of robust educational value**, and hundreds of studies have been conducted on the value of educational programming such as [Sesame Street](#), [Between the Lions](#), and [Super Why!](#) on early learning and literacy development. Public media stations and schools should explore opportunities to use these materials more readily. Public media outlets also provide online tools such as [professional development courses for teachers](#) and [parent support apps](#) that can be used to engage parents and caregivers in promoting key literacy and language skills.

5. Modernize Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

The report [Take a Giant Step](#) from the Cooney Center and Stanford University establishes that early educators cannot capably teach with new tools they themselves have not been properly prepared to use. Every community should convene its teacher training institutions and involve early reading specialists and digital entrepreneurs to **reimagine the “early literacy training pipeline”** by exploring new topics like the neuroscience behind [early reading/language acquisition and the importance of building children's background knowledge](#), new theories of [adult behavioral change](#), and the emerging uses of technology to [personalize literacy learning](#). Communities should consider the creation of a cadre of [media mentors](#) or a [Digital Teacher Corps](#) to help mobilize educators' talents in schools, libraries, museums, and other settings.



6. Mine Cultural Capital

A careful mapping of the community will include **a deep dive into the cultural and social capital that too often go untapped**. Adults who might contribute to modernizing early literacy and family engagement programs are found in many places, from businesses, bodegas, and beauty salons to churches, synagogues, and mosques, not to mention libraries and rec centers. [Each community gathering place is an important potential ally](#) in helping children and families to establish what researchers refer to as "[meaningful connections](#)." Digital media can help cement these relationships too. Using cultural assets to promote early literacy and digital equity is especially [critical for immigrant and second language learners who do not always have reliable access](#) to high speed broadband and may then fail to gain access to vital online learning experiences.

7. Create a Place for Modern Learning in Every Community

To ensure digital access and cultural sensitivity, every community should identify and **build out at least one place where young children can learn from adult media mentors** and gain confidence in their interactive skills, and where parents feel welcome to learn new skills too. Communities should tap into the assets of libraries, museums, places of worship, recreation centers, and community organizations (such as Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs) that offer treasure troves of materials that may currently be underused or disconnected from each other. Great examples exist at the [Children's Museum of Pittsburgh](#) and at the [Boston Children's Museum](#) in nationally recognized programs which focus on developing strong foundations for both early language development and STEM literacy skills.



8. Help Parents Navigate the Digital Wild West

Communities should make use of local media outlets, online educator networks, parent teacher conferences, and the credibility of community leaders such as pediatricians and librarians to **create access to rating systems and curation tools that are easy to navigate for busy parents**. These tools should take into account evolving research on what works best and children's developmental stages; they should also help parents become savvy about commercial interests and privacy concerns. A list of review sites and other tools can be found on [tapclickread.org](#). Preschool, child care, family support, and elementary school educators should create customized materials for parents through online platforms that link home and school. Several communities are using [family friendly text messaging](#) to help parents encourage early literacy skills and to understand changes in how their children are learning to read, write, and get ready to succeed in school.

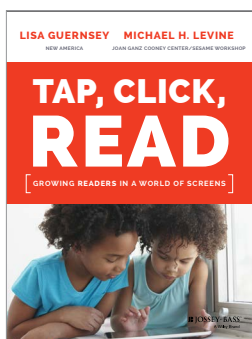


9. Keep Learning

As the great pitcher [Satchel Paige](#) put it: "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." In the field of digital technologies and children's literacy learning, our knowledge is growing rapidly every year, but we have a long way to go in applying that knowledge. We should treat the advances of digital learning products and platforms with both caution and a healthy respect for what we may learn next. The interactive touch screen, a breakthrough in user interface design, for example, is less than a decade old, as are Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. Every community should **set aside funding to stimulate independent and peer-reviewed research and investigation about what works and what does not** in the digital media and literacy learning arena. By encouraging open and collaborative development of research inquiries, and sharing findings across disciplines, communities can update their policies, practices, and investment strategies in accord with the best available science.

10. Invest Early

Finally, to ensure that these modernization steps will have sustainable impact, every state and community must invest public dollars and other public resources to help build a high quality early learning system that supports families in their earliest years, when young children's brains are rapidly developing and their parents are creating new routines to help them succeed. Leaders must create systems that bridge home, school, and community. To be sustainable, those **systems need to include financial supports, shared professional learning opportunities, and an approach that holds everyone accountable** for children's successes. Without such a commitment, efforts to promote early literacy development for vulnerable children will likely fall short. If you are unaware of how your community stacks up compared to others in this domain, check out your state's rankings on birth-through-third-grade policies in [From Crawling to Walking](#), an interactive database published by New America that focuses on early literacy policies. To compare states on their ability to provide children with access to preschool specifically, see the annual [State of Preschool Yearbook](#) published by The National Institute for Early Education Research.



This is part of a **SET OF TIPSHEETS AND TOOLS** free to all at [TapClickRead.org](#) and free to educators serving children in need at the First Book Marketplace, where those educators can gain access to low-cost and free books and resources. For more, see [fbmarketplace.org](#).

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