



Digital Aspirations in Education Podcast S1E4 (transcript)

Welcome to Part 2 of our conversation with Dr. Amy DelCorvo, CEO and Executive Director of NYSCATE. You can listen to [Part 1](#) at Digital Aspirations in Education Podcast S1E3.

Adapting to Greater Reliance on Education Technology

Jared Heiner: My question to you is this. We're going to see much more of a reliance on technology regardless of what happens, even if there is the decision that everyone goes back to school. Let's just pretend that's the case. We now have instructors and teachers support folks that are saying, "Hey, I found value in this technology." What kind of pressure do you think that'll put on the physical organization and motivate the school itself to say, "We've got to look at this"? What are some of the pieces that could be the fallout of increase in technology?

Dr. Amy DelCorvo: Well, I think that we may be over the largest hurdle right now, which was access to devices, because I think that the argument about should we be or should we invest in a one-to-one environment, is done and past. You mentioned earlier about the devices, and the one-to-one, and all those terms. We used to refer to that as the technology merit badge, where you would have administrator, and they receive all of these awards, have a nice school, have one-to-one, and it had no effect on learning whatsoever.

And, in fact, I remember very clearly, I won't mention the district, when I was working in a BOCES, where the district bought, it was actually five-to-one, put in the classrooms, and the teacher said, "You can work only on that table because we're not touching it." And I thought, "Oh, you've got to be kidding." Those instances are over, thank goodness, and regardless of

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what the device is. And the key is that everyone does need a device, but it doesn't have to be the same device. But I think that we are already there.

And the procurement of the hundreds of thousands of devices when this first hit—that March to April period—I would love, in a few months, to look back at the data of how many devices were actually procured during the first two months of COVID, because it's tremendous, and because it's very clear that the students must have access, period. It's no longer a debate. And with that access you must have the support to support that internally. You must have your, obviously, your technology team, your network directors, not to mention the network itself. And, on top of that, as you know, I'm from New York State. This is a New York State-based discussion today, with student data privacy being such a huge, huge concern and priority. We need to make sure that those networks are rock solid. And that's where the help of Aspire and Cisco come into play, which is wonderful.

JH: Yeah, you're right. And I think this is where it's fascinating. We see the instructional technology blending in with the infrastructure technology, but, at the same time, there's a conversation about that digital citizenship piece where, all of a sudden, I think we're going to see a transformation from the teachers and the learners regarding conversations. We're going to have to hit the pause button during the middle of class, sometimes, to say, "Hold on a second. What can we use? How can we use it? If a student might want to share something, a teacher might want to have access to a different application," and that's going to create a shift in our thinking.

Dr. DelCorvo: I would agree completely. I was on a call this week regarding the new digital literacy standards that were recently released in the spring by the State Education Department, and I believe they're up for full adoption in the fall. And digital citizenship is one part of that, but it is so important—the whole digital literacy standpoint and the importance of digital footprint. And it is very different now than it was five years ago, ten years ago of what we're looking at.

So, I think what you're going to see also is updated certifications. Right now, we're running the CTLE credit. You must have so many professional development hours. But I think it's going to be much more than that because, as technology changes, and the community changes, and the

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usage rate changes, I think we really need to stay on top of that. And we must be responsible citizens, but we also must protect students. And we're giving them a device. So, when students have a device, they must have some type of license to go with that because, otherwise, it's like giving a five-year-old keys to a car.

JH: No doubt. In fact, we both know plenty of adults that probably shouldn't have keys to the car. But, to that point, it's interesting. When we think about students going home with devices, I see that there are two pieces to that protection, which is helping them understand how to help themselves, but then also acting as kind of supervision. The best example I can give you is my daughter's a 5th grader, and they're using Google to do their meets; but yet, there's the ability to go in and have chats on the side. And someone must be able to have the conversation.

And, again, I think, for some of the teachers, they don't even understand that that might be happening till there's a whole lot. You got to be careful. All that stuff lives forever. Even if it's not bad or nasty, it's beginning to formulate habits and practices that allow us to remember the stuff that once it hits the internet, it's there forever.

Dr. DelCorvo: Absolutely. And that is the start of the digital footprint. And, again, this goes back to having teachers that did not necessarily embrace technology from the onset. Now, they are using the same technology as a primary mode of instruction delivery. And the advent of Zoom in the beginning of all this, with the whole Zoom bombing, and you have to use password protection, and the reality is that the kids are 5 and 7 years old, and they need to have that instruction. And, sometimes, 15 and 17-year-olds are worse than 5 and 7-year-olds. So, it's our responsibility, as teachers, to know that, to learn that, to model that, and also to hold people accountable for it.

And it's one of the things we're talking about with the remote learning. There's been a lot of empathy, and it's wonderful to see, but in this standpoint, I think you also have to have accountability because it is very easy not to be accountable in this environment. And I know a lot of schools chose to go to a pass/fail instead of a grade area. Some still grade. I have two daughters in high school, and they're in a graded district. And I'm really glad that they are, but I'll tell you, everybody feels sorry for this world that we are in right now, but the reality is this is not going to be going away. I do not believe. It will stay in some form.

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And I think, as responsible educators, we must hold the students accountable with the assignments, with the appropriate behaviorisms, the appropriate verbiage when they're commenting, the respect for others, et cetera. So, it's the new norm with whatever that looks like. As you said, I don't think technology is going to remove itself from this at all. If anything, it's catapulted into that next level, which is it could be such a phenomenal, phenomenal tool.

In the beginning, I mentioned, Jared, that we were a little bit worried. We're a nonprofit, and what does that mean with our PD and in working with our collaborators from the BOCES systems and SAANYS, but we've actually never have been busier, and we are getting multiple calls from districts to provide individual instruction, customized instruction to their districts, to teams of groups of students in their districts. We're doing an awful lot of customized work for New York City right now. And I think that districts are recognizing that and pinpointing where those lessons are and talk about teachable moments right from a district's perspective because the past two months have been a teachable moment for administrators and teachers alike.

The New Normal: Preparing for the Unpredictable as Inevitable

JH: Well, in a demonstrative cultural shift too. And I think the value in the work that you folks are doing at NYSCATE is that when I go all the way back, and I'm going to start dating myself here, but when I first stepped into the classroom, I think it was 18-20 years ago, the reality was we were teaching based on what we were familiar with. And that's why I liked your comment about this being the new norm. And, by that, I think it's preparing for what you can anticipate because we didn't used to have to do that. For us, for those of us that are adults, we look at this and go, "Wow! We made it to a pandemic." It's entirely probable that the kids were teaching are going to be in multiple pandemics. So, preparing them for that and the value of technology to overcome the obstacles, I think, becomes hugely important. And that's that area that you're in. Then, I think the value that you provide.

Dr. DelCorvo: After all the years, as I shared, I have the best job in the world without question. And the past two months, though, in week one, we hit all our capacity limits, and all the tools, and we knew we were onto something, so we had to expand across the board. I must tell you,

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week one, there were names that I had never heard of, districts I knew the names of, but these were not necessarily our members. These were teachers that just needed help. And it was clearly a deer in the headlights look. And deer in the headlights is an understatement. Moving into week two, it was, "Oh, I could see where this could be helpful." I was on a couple webinars yesterday. I cannot even tell you how extraordinary the teachers are. Not only did they learn something brand-new, they completely embraced it, and they've also learned that what they're doing, I mean, is empowering them to be better at their profession, and it's given them a huge jolt of confidence, and it puts them, right now, on a virtual Network.

One of the webinars yesterday was on a tool, a Flipgrid piece, and there are online resources where one was a collaboration of AP biology teachers. Well, these AP biology teachers were really teaching on an island. You would have one or two per district. And, now, they're in an ocean of many AP biology teachers. And so, it provided them a professional network. It provided them collegial support with a ton of learning resources. And so, now, they get it. And again, that's what I said. NYSCATE, from where we were, and this goes with every other organization in the state that deals with education technology, it catapulted from where we were to where we always wanted to be. It threw us into that mode within a two-month time frame.

And, really, I'm trying to look forward to next year where we had 30,000 folks in the state that were utilizing technology to enhance their education and their teaching practices. So, imagine, we're going to have a couple hundred thousand in a year from now. And that part excites me.

Looking Forward to the NYSCATE Annual Conference

JH: Listen, you know I'm a huge supporter. And again, I've had the benefit of accessing NYSCATE back as a teacher, and then as an administrator. It's fascinating for me to watch. I know that there's still a lot of uncertainty around the future. Any peek behind the curtain in terms of what may or may not be happening with the annual conference that takes place in?

Dr. Amy DelCorvo: Sure. So, we've been cautious. We've been sitting back and watching other educational institutions and seeing what is going to play out. Our committee met last week, and

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I'm beyond thrilled to tell you that, of course, it's all based on the Governor's actions, but we are planning on holding a physical presence in November for our annual conference in Rochester, New York as planned. We're also going to enhance it with a virtual component. One of the things is we got a lot of different variables right now. We have, obviously, our state budget, and we know our education is going to take a hit depending on what happens federally. So, we do have to be responsible and recognize that.

We know that not everybody would feel comfortable traveling, and staying in hotels, now. So, we are working with all our hotels and the convention center. I'm actually leading up the committee of all the hotels in Rochester right now, which is a bit ironic. But, from my perspective, it's as important to me as it is to anybody that we hold a large event in a very safe, responsible environment. So, we are taking the traditional NYSCATE annual footprint, and we're spreading it out amongst five properties. We are providing many more options than we normally would because, now, obviously, space will not be our sole barrier. And so, yeah, we are going to have it live, and we're in the planning phases now.

I'm thrilled to report our RFP process closed on Friday, and we received just under 200 proposals to present at the conference, which is, I think, record-breaking. It is tremendous. We're doing certification strand. And, again, recognizing some districts may not be able to support the physical presence, and we'll be able to pull them in virtually. And then, to kick-start that, we have two conferences coming up in October: one in Oneonta and one in North Country. North Country will be physical, and Oneonta will be virtual. And we're going to be combining some of the sessions on that same day with those two events. So, yeah, Jared, it is happening, and I couldn't be more excited about it.

JH: Well, I will have you know that Aspire is looking forward to both the virtual and physical presence and our contributions there. And I will tell you that, of those 200 submissions, I think you'll find, at least, two that we put in. So, we are certainly excited. And, Amy, I think it's really cool that, not only are you offering all these services, but you just described what your mission is in the sense that you offer learning, but you're doing it in hybrid sense. You're leading by example.

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And I think that our state, all of our educators, and everyone else who has access is certainly going to be in a much better situation because of the work that you folks are doing and the fact that you're working so hard to make sure that everyone has, I think, a gigantic professional learning community where they can go, and essentially take their practice, and make it even better. So, thank you. I appreciate the time. I see that we've reached our limit, but I look forward to having future conversations and maybe even circling back at some point and seeing what changes have taken place. So, thank you so much for your time and all the work that NYSCATE does.

Dr. DelCorvo: Jared, I appreciate the time today. And if you don't mind, one last shameless plug is NYSCATE is a no-cost membership. We open our arms. We do have some services for a fee, but an awful lot of what we do is no charge whatsoever, and it's really just to build that network. And, for more information, if you don't mind, our URL is www.nyscate.org. And we're proud to partner with Aspire, one of our corporate council members as well.

Jared Heiner: Yes, and no shame in that plug. It's worth saying again and again. But again, thank you very much, Amy. I appreciate it. Thank you, NYSCATE. And everyone, thank you for tuning in to the Aspirations in Education podcast, brought to you by Aspire and Cisco Systems. We look forward to talking to you again.

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