

Managing Learning Materials in a Post-Pandemic Environment

Today's schools face unprecedented challenges around remote learning, accessibility and document management. **Jenny Li, president of the Educational Division of Foxit Software**, discusses how teachers and administrators are forging new solutions in a chaotic environment.



Q: The COVID-19 crisis forced schools to move instruction online quickly, and many will continue to operate remotely this fall. What kinds of problems are teachers and school administrators experiencing with remote instruction?

Li: One challenge is unequal access to technology. Some students have inadequate bandwidth or unstable network connections. Hardware ranges from handheld smartphones to personal computers. And access to software tools can vary.

Teachers may require students to print out assignments, work on them by hand, then scan and upload them — but not everyone has a printer or scanner at home. Some school lab and library computers are pre-loaded with educational software, but because of vendor licensing agreements, it often can't be used remotely on student devices.

Going forward, some schools are choosing software vendors that allow remote access. They are digitizing homework assignments and other documents and using simple PDF tools to make them fillable and editable. This streamlines workflows and eliminates the need to use peripheral devices or physically deliver printed documents.

Q: The lack of personal interaction with teachers and classmates can be tough on kids attending school remotely. What can teachers do to improve engagement?

Li: Teachers are using tools to digitize content into PDFs and to make those PDFs collaborative. They may also use PDF

files as containers for course materials, including audiovisual materials. Schools already have access to free PDF readers, but they gain a much richer set of features with PDF editors, which allow students to assemble different materials into a common document and share comments and revisions. Teachers are also using PDF editors for quizzes and tests. Some vendors, including Foxit, provided these tools to educators at no charge when the pandemic broke out. Foxit will continue to offer its PDF editor web app cost-free for the rest of the calendar year, and its shared device license supports remote learning.

Q: What are some of the challenges schools face in achieving compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the updated federal Section 508, and state and local accessibility regulations?

Li: All school districts want to provide equity in education and make their materials accessible to students of all abilities. But it's not easy. Schools have mountains of paper and digital documents, almost all of them designed for consumption by people with normal eyesight. Visually impaired students can access them with assistive technology such as a screen reader, which translates text and visual elements to voice. To make content accessible, paper documents must be digitized. Digitized documents must be remediated to enable screen readers to access text content in its logical order and to access non-textual visual elements like

graphs, charts and tables. That can be done with PDF tools.

Q: What other issues do schools have with managing documents?

Li: Documents exist in a wide variety of formats. The lack of standardization makes it difficult for teachers, students and school administrators to organize, aggregate or extract information from them, and it prevents sharing and collaboration. Documents created in one format may not be accessible to those who lack the software that produced them. A unified document standard allows students and teachers to access the same content no matter where they are, what device they're using or where the material originally came from. The PDF file format is a good choice for a standard. PDF conversion software is readily available at no or low cost. Free PDF readers come with all major operating systems and browsers. PDFs also contain security features, including password protection and encryption, and are searchable, fillable, annotatable, sign-able and editable. The more schools unify their document sharing format into PDF, the better prepared they will be for an inclusive, digitally empowered future.



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