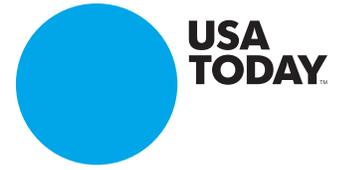




AS SEEN IN:



# Learning Without Limits

Ed-tech is booming, spurred by remote learning

By Jennifer Bradley Franklin



**N**CESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF invention, or so the saying goes. While technology has long been a part of education, when many schools around the country switched to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, technology in education – or ed-tech – became more vital than ever. The resulting ed-tech boom has some feeling optimistic. In a recent report from Cambium Learning Group, a global education technology company, 75 percent of educators believe, as a result of the pandemic, they're in a better position to solve problems than ever before.

Jaime Favorite, who teaches seventh and eighth grade math at La Mesa Arts Academy in La Mesa, Calif., acknowledges the pandemic highlighted some challenges, namely that not all of her school's students had

their own device or reliable internet access. Pre-pandemic, there was approximately one device for every five students. "We are now a 1-to-1 ratio student-to-device district," she says. "Every kid has a Chromebook or iPad at our schools now."

Favorite utilized Google Classroom, Kami (an app to create interactive assignments) and Pear Deck (to create engaging custom presentations), and she discovered some key elements she plans to use even as things return to pre-pandemic "normal."

"I don't think I'll ever go back to doing paper and pencil handouts of tests or quizzes," she says. Instead, she uses a program called Jupiter Ed that allows her to grade assignments digitally and share feedback with students more quickly. That shift alone saves her hours of work each week.

Parents have also played a big role

in helping students stay engaged and plugged in. Dorie Taylor had no idea that remote learning would have such a profound impact on her parenting and her kids' learning. Thanks to Taylor's role as producer of an education festival, her 9- and 12-year-old sons had years of experience visiting libraries, science centers, businesses and parks and already knew that learning can happen anywhere. "This year, because we tuned in virtually to organizations across the country, they discovered new tools and methods for learning," says the Pittsburgh based mom. "I showed my kids what was available, and they followed their curiosity." That inquisitiveness is likely to serve them well, whether they're learning remotely or back in a physical classroom.

Here are a few of the companies and technologies that helped educate kids when COVID-19 changed the game, and are primed to continue to shape the landscape moving forward:

### CLASSTAG CONNECT

ClassTag, the parent-teacher communication platform used by 25,000 schools across the country, launched ClassTag Connect in November 2020 to help make it easier for educators to connect with students' families. The platform enables school leaders to send messages in more than 100 languages via the format selected by the parent (SMS, app, web or voice) and see whether families are engaging with school communication.

Educators can learn if a family is likely to fall out of touch, and parents can access all of the vital school documents and assignments via a virtual student backpack, helping streamline communication.

### HOMER

Experts know that brain development starts early, so home learning company Homer focuses on children ages 5 and younger. The subscription-based program creates a journey designed to grow with the child with apps, toys and classes designed by experts. The Learn & Grow app, with subjects presented in fun, age-appropriate ways, is shown to increase early reading scores by up to



The eGlass writing tool

74 percent, according to the company, and the Explore Kits offer hands-on educational game sets that kids receive by mail.

### EGLASS

The chalkboard or mark-and-wipe whiteboard is so old school. The nextgen way to write and share is eGlass, a transparent writing surface with a builtin camera and software that captures the teacher's face and writing in the same window. Launched in 2021, the product is useful for in-person, virtual and hybrid classrooms, as it can cast to either an in-room or virtual screen. "When you're at the whiteboard, you're constantly turning around, your body is always in the way, and certain kids can't see unless you move," says Favorite, who acquired the tool this spring. "The eGlass has bright colors. It's really engaging to the kids, and I never have to turn my back.

My kids on Zoom and the kids in the classroom can see me the whole time."

### LEARNING A-Z

Owned by Cambium Learning Group, this literacy-focused tool is designed to help pre-K through grade six educators create programs that work for their students. Teachers can choose from tools to boost writing, reading comprehension, vocabulary and more, each designed to adapt to individual student needs. The brand recently partnered with UNICEF.

Kid Power on a program that allowed students to read books and convert their stars (awards for books read) to donate water and meals to families in need.

More than 63,000 meals were donated, and kids read three times the number of books when they were donating.

### OUTSCHOOL

This online platform offers more than 100,000 live online classes designed for kids ages 3 to 18. With a wide range of subjects like coding, a Harry Potter book club, Minecraft and guitar for beginners, students are connected with a live instructor and a small group of classmates who share their interests to help encourage engagement and learning. Parents who need financial assistance can sign up for free classes via the company's nonprofit arm, which has provided more than \$1 million in gratis education.

### SORA

While in-person trips to the library were on hold during the pandemic, the Sora reading app kept students from more than 48,000 schools worldwide supplied with engaging reading material on their digital devices. Owned by parent company OverDrive, the app allows students to check out e-books and audiobooks through their school and local public libraries, sometimes without a library card. Whether the material is assigned by a teacher or just for fun, the app is designed to encourage a love of reading.