

# SCHOOLS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The Covid-19 health crisis and lockdowns have shown that digital technology can play an important role in providing a form of “educational continuity”. They have also highlighted inequalities in internet access, as well as inequalities in terms of equipment for students, families and teachers, which reinforce existing inequalities in learning. This crisis has also shown the inadequate efforts on the part of the National Education System to use digital education, particularly in the day-to-day operations of the school system. It also revealed a lack of digital training, culture and skills in some teachers, as well as the disparate grasp that some students and families have over digital tools and content, often related to their social background. These difficulties have sparked a national debate and created momentum. In order to be part of this momentum and respond to these questions, the Council

has drawn up an opinion on digital technology in schools. This opinion contributes to critical reflections on digital education in public policy, which should not be approached solely from a technical point of view, but should also be in service of learning and academic success for all students, in an effort to cultivate enlightened, free and responsible citizens. The recommendations in this opinion promote the use of digital educational tools and content in a sensible, sustainable, ethical and inclusive manner. They see digital technology as a potential tool for pedagogical innovation which, however powerful it may be, remains one learning tool among others. They aim to support research and evaluation and strengthen public governance so that it is effectively shared between the main actors with jurisdiction over the issue. They recommend strengthening support and training for teachers and



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families and promoting an inclusive and sustainable public service for digital education, in particular by strengthening highly committed public operators such as the Pix certification platform, the National Centre for Distance Education (CNED) and Canopé.

## THE ESEC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The twenty recommendations of the opinion:

- Recommendation 1: The ESEC recommends stepping up basic and applied research and evaluation in the fields of educational science and digital education, including on the issue of screen use.
- Recommendation 2: The ESEC recommends that the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport and any local authorities that wish to participate should carry out joint evaluations on the public policies they pursue in the field of digital education, taking into account their respective responsibilities and with a common methodological reference framework for evaluation.
- Recommendation 3: The ESEC recommends that the national government and local authorities genuinely engage in joint public policies in the field of digital education based on clear and ambitious national guidelines that are compatible with the objectives of sustainable development.
- Recommendation 4: The ESEC recommends expanding the remit of the National Education Councils (CAENs) and the Departmental Education Councils (CDENs) so that they can also become governance and consultation bodies for digital education.
- Recommendation 5: The ESEC recommends that digital education be developed in a sensible, sustainable and inclusive way as part of local education projects (PEDTs), taking into account the expectations, needs and feedback of teaching staff, students, families and associations with respect to digital issues.

- Recommendation 6: The ESEC recommends that a code of conduct on digital tools and content be established for all public and private actors in the digital education sector, guaranteeing and heightening the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and taking better account of sustainable development objectives.
- Recommendation 7: The ESEC recommends stepping up initial training for teachers to help them understand and employ digital tools, content and practices, so that they can better incorporate them into their teaching.
- Recommendation 8: The ESEC recommends that, depending on individual needs and the needs of teaching teams, teachers should receive in-service training on the specific pedagogical and educational aspects of digital teaching, so that they can make sensible changes to their in-person and distance learning practices.
- Recommendation 9: When recruiting teachers, the ESEC recommends reintroducing the certificate of digital literacy, setting the minimum threshold for cross-curricular skills expected under the Pix scheme.
- Recommendation 10: The ESEC recommends substantially increasing the computer equipment allowance for staff in the Ministry of Education to better reflect the costs of computer hardware and software, maintenance and internet connections.
- Recommendation 11: The ESEC recommends that local authorities, in partnership with local associations, should be responsible for training and supporting families in the use of digital tools, content and practices, so that they can use them more effectively, autonomously and sustainably, and thereby better support their children's schooling.
- Recommendation 12: The ESEC recommends that the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport and its public operators, relying on research and the practical expertise of those involved, develop digital tools and content that are appropriate and accessible to students with special educational needs, including those who are ill or disabled.
- Recommendation 13: The ESEC recommends that the next version of the General Accessibility Guidelines (RGAA), developed to facilitate the implementation of digital accessibility, increase the accessibility of digital educational services and resources.
- Recommendation 14: The ESEC recommends that the national government and local authorities guarantee each school a basic digital equipment package (tools, maintenance, applications, networks and skills), including a digital workspace (ENT) that is comparable for all types of schools.
- Recommendation 15: The ESEC recommends prioritising the use of free software and equipping schools and higher education establishments with recycled or reconditioned digital equipment that is not obsolete and is compatible with sustainable development objectives, and encouraging equipment pooling and moderate use.
- Recommendation 16: The ESEC recommends reaffirming the role of digital officers in each primary school district and in each secondary school. The aim is to increase the number of digital officers and provide more resources to better assist teaching teams with using digital technology in their lessons.
- Recommendation 17: The ESEC recommends encouraging the creation of third places to develop digital skills, including educational skills, particularly for teachers, students and families, based on active education methods and peer-to-peer training and in conjunction with associations working in this field.
- Recommendation 18: The ESEC recommends increasing Canopé's human and financial resources so that it can continue to develop innovative digital education resources and solutions (based on the results of research and practical expertise), contribute its expertise and know-how to the teacher training ecosystem, and support local educational actors and the implementation of digital technology in schools.
- Recommendation 19: The ESEC stresses the importance of the National Centre for Distance Education (CNED) in the digital education ecosystem. It recommends increasing its human and financial resources so that it can pursue its traditional mandate in France and internationally, offer appropriate tools to ensure "pedagogical continuity" in the event of a crisis (due to weather or health conditions, etc.) and help school districts and teachers handle new requirements and educational arrangements so that they can adjust their teaching practices.
- Recommendation 20: The ESEC recommends increasing the human and financial resources of the Pix platform so that it can continue to assess, develop and certify young people's digital skills free of charge throughout their schooling. The platform's international development must also be supported.