



Proven Credentialed Digital Professional Development Open to All Teachers

Integration of technology training courses designed by Verizon Innovative Learning support distance and hybrid learning.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic closed school doors in March 2020. School closures continued through most of 2020 and the majority of schools remain in a hybrid of remote and in-person learning almost one year later. This profound impact to K-12 education has changed the way teachers teach and how lessons are structured, creating a demand for flexible, credentialed, professional learning for remote and hybrid instruction. This paper will focus on the Verizon Innovative Learning project; their partnership with its non-profit partner Digital Promise; how their professional development helped prepare teachers for the challenges of distance learning; and how those professional development resources will now be available to any educators outside the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools community.

“For the past year, our nation’s teachers have been working in an unexpected learning environment,” said Rose Stuckey Kirk, Chief Corporate Social Responsibility Officer, Verizon. “The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges, many of which remain as we transition to new learning norms. Verizon is working hard to use its advanced technology to build the systems and provide the resources that will help both teachers and students prepare for the post-pandemic classroom.”

Digital Learning Shift

Verizon Innovative Learning (VIL) is part of [Citizen Verizon](#), Verizon’s responsible business plan for economic, environmental, and social advancement. Through its school initiative, Verizon

Innovative Learning Schools (VILS), working with Digital Promise, leans into schools in underserved areas—eligible Title I middle and high schools must have a minimum of 65% of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. To help lessen the digital divide and to inspire student interest in STEM, the Verizon program equips students in schools selected by Digital Promise with devices and connectivity. The schools create more equitable learning environments as they successfully train and coach teachers to use technology effectively. The investment in these schools has a direct impact on improved student outcomes.

VILS build teacher capacity by installing an instructional coach to help teachers acquire the technology skills they need for blended learning environments. Schools see an increase in:

- Student engagement
- Student and teacher tech and STEM proficiency
- Student interest in STEM
- Student problem-solving skills
- Student collaboration skills
- Student communication skills
- Student confidence

VILS have a full-time instructional coach dedicated to providing pedagogical support for teachers to effectively leverage technology in the classroom. Digital Promise designs the professional learning customized to each school based on intensive planning and collaboration with school leaders. Digital Promise builds capacity in each school-based coach to lead instructional change throughout the school. During the first two years as a VILS participant, educators receive extensive in-person and online coaching.

After receiving instructional technology professional development prior to the pandemic, VILS teachers reflected in June on how well they made the shift to distance learning.

- **93% of teachers** agreed that there were aspects of teaching remotely that were easier to implement because of their role as a VILS teacher. 92% of teachers agreed that the VILS professional development they received helped prepare them for the shift. [1]

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[1] Moving to Virtual Instruction: Views of VILS Teachers, Principals, and Coaches. Westat. 2020.

- **84% of principals** and **88% of instructional coaches** agreed that their experience with the VILS program positively impacted the guidance they were able to provide teachers in their district's shift to remote teaching.

One of the middle school principals felt that they had a better foundation to take on the challenges of remote learning, because of the school's involvement in VILS.

As a district we ended up requiring all assignments to be done in our learning management system as we worked with VILS on the shift to remote learning...I think it made it easy for us as middle school teachers to do what we should have been doing all along and kept it seamless so the transition for students didn't feel as abrupt.

Voices from the Field

When school closures loomed in March 2020, many VILS coaches were tapped to lead the transition efforts in their districts because of the technology-focused professional development they had received through the VILS program. Many coaches reported that they felt more valued by teachers and administrators than before the pandemic. Here are several of their stories:

District administrators in a Polk County, Tennessee school district told VILS coach Danielle McClary that they were going to close schools and switch to online learning due to the pandemic, and asked her to support teachers as they shifted to virtual learning. McClary was well prepared as she had spent the previous three years immersed in Verizon's digital instruction culture. She prepared a program to help teachers make the shift to 100% virtual learning. Many of the county's teachers were not yet comfortable with digital tools. Based on her VILS experience, she connected her tech-savvy middle school teachers to elementary and high schools not part of the VILS program for mentoring and began having "tech talks" twice a week. Without the VILS training, the district would not have been as successful in making the shift.

Five of the 130 schools in an Austin, Texas school district were VILS schools. The teachers and students at these schools transitioned to virtual learning well as they had devices,



access, and practice with digital tools. As the blended learning champion in her district, Sharon Laidlaw and her team offered technology professional development to the other 125 Austin schools and began to see how it will continue to benefit learners after the pandemic is over.

In an Irving, Texas school district James Tiggeman, Digital Learning Coordinator, was able to leverage the expertise of their VILS educators to share knowledge and mentoring with colleagues across the district. "We've been using distance learning tools for years. We had the knowledge, skills, and teacher training. It was a huge advantage to keep using them."

[All three educators are grateful](#) for the VILS training and their abilities to spread the knowledge and support the professional development of other educators in the district when the pandemic crisis occurred.

VILS coaches demonstrated their ability to support more teachers when the pandemic made technology mandatory and teachers looked for help to engage students in distance learning environments. Coaches provided virtual professional development for teachers on effective practices, strategies, and technology tools for transitioning to online instruction to help ensure learning continuity. VILS coaches and teachers were prepared for the sudden transition as a result of the professional development they received. These teachers were called to step up and share technology integration strategies and resources with other educators in their districts who had not participated in the VILS professional development.

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The Impact of VILS Professional Development

Instructional coaching is one of the principal elements of the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools initiative. Coaching promotes educational equity, providing the support teachers need to close the gap in technology-use in the classroom. [Research shows](#) that when teachers have access to instructional technology coaches, they and their students use technology more frequently and more impactfully, which in turn improves student engagement and learning.

As Verizon continues to expand its network of VILS, they are opening their professional learning courses, designed by Digital Promise, to educators outside the VILS network. In order to help prepare more students for a technology future, Verizon Innovative Learning is making these courses freely available to educators so that districts can build their capacity for teacher technology integration. The online courses are aligned to Digital Promise's digital badge credentials. Not only will teachers learn how to integrate technology into their instruction, they will be able to demonstrate their competence through the credentialing process.

Introducing Teacher Training Pathways

The new blended learning environment will last far beyond COVID. There is a general understanding now that educational technology is a critical component of preparing students for their futures, particularly in light of its ability to differentiate instruction. To expand their impact, Verizon Innovative Learning and Digital Promise have launched the first five online professional development courses for teaching effectively with technology and opened them to all educators for free.

Open to any K-12 teacher anywhere, Verizon Innovative Learning's [Teacher Training Pathways](#) focus on technology integration through free online courses. Verizon Innovative Learning wants to share these successful courses with as many administrators and teachers as they can. These timely topics are aligned to Digital Promise micro-credentials:

1. Introduction to Instruction Technology Coaching

This course defines instructional coaching and provides depth on initial coaching strategies used by instructional technology coaches as they develop/expand their roles within a school. It is designed to build coach capacity to strategically and purposefully improve teaching and learning with instructional technology. Participants will also learn how to reinforce interpersonal relationships among educators and administrators leading to increased student achievement. This course may serve as a supplemental resource to pre-existing coaching models.

2. Evergreen Tools for Blended and Remote Learning

This course offers teachers an opportunity to explore powerful tools for creating online classroom spaces and meaningful blended and remote learning experiences. While exploring the potential of these edtech tools, teachers will learn and apply a framework that will help students to be thoughtful about the tools they select. Teachers will have the opportunity to earn the [Choosing Evergreen Technology Tools micro-credential](#) upon the successful completion of this course.

3. Transitioning to Remote Learning

The Transitioning to Remote Learning coursework is designed to help educators address learning challenges in remote instruction through a process of needs assessment, course design, and implementation of critical elements of developing an equitable and inclusive learning ecosystem that meets the needs of students of all backgrounds and identities in a remote learning environment. This course will provide you with a pathway to transition your pedagogy to a remote format that provides students with a researched and logical pathway of learning in a remote instructional environment. The Transitioning to Remote Learning course is aligned to [five micro-credentials](#).

4. Creating Digitally Inclusive and Accessible Learning Experiences

(Available beginning April 2021)

In this course, teachers learn about various aspects of creating inclusive and accessible learning experiences. Teachers will identify steps of the design process for creating inclusive learning assets, which includes accessible learning assets that engage learners and optimize their learning experiences.

5. Moving Forward with Hybrid Learning *(Available beginning April 2021)*

In this course, teachers will explore various educational models for remote learning as well as best practices for preparing resources, activities, supports, and assessments to determine the best way for students to learn in an impactful virtual learning environment.

This course will provide you with a pathway to transition your pedagogy to a remote format that provides students with a researched and logical pathway of learning in a remote instructional environment.

Earning Digital Promise Micro-credentials

[Micro-credentials](#) are an increasingly popular way to personalize, recognize, and document professional learning. Traditional professional development may no longer meet the needs of today's educators. Digital badges are competency-based digital certifications that allow educators to continue their professional learning anytime, anywhere. The flexibility for teachers to continue professional development [without leaving their homes](#) is a critical element while mobility is limited due to the pandemic. Because they focus on a discrete skill or set of skills, educators can [select topics](#) that are most relevant to them at a given time.

"The credentials are embedded within the [Teacher Training Pathways](#). By the time teachers complete the courses, they will have the knowledge they need to submit the micro-credentials," said Lydia Logan, Executive Director of Verizon Innovative Schools at Digital Promise.

"Teachers will take evidence or artifacts from their job to submit for the micro-credential to show that this is something they know, but also something they do."

Micro-credentials are a natural extension of the formal and informal learning activities individuals engage in every day. They empower individuals to drive their professional learning and give employers the tools they need to personalize learning for their employees and meet their broader goals.

- Micro-credentials articulate a discrete skill that supports professional practice and the specific evidence a teacher submits to demonstrate competence of that skill.
- Each micro-credential is grounded in sound research that illustrates how that competency supports positive professional impact.
- Educators select micro-credentials aligned to personal goals, student needs, or schoolwide instructional priorities.
- Micro-credentials are portable. They can be added to the educator's resume and online profile and shared with current and potential employers.

All micro-credentials earned on [Digital Promise's Micro-credentials Platform](#) are Open Badges, which are:

- **Verifiable:** open badges can be verified for authenticity by the earner and by those providing recognition for the badge.
- **Portable:** open badges can be transferred between any Open Badge standard-compliant system without losing or mishandling any achievement data.

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- **Controllable:** the earner of the Open Badge can control with whom they share their Open Badge and in what systems it lives.

Educators can earn micro-credentials in four easy steps:

- **Select** a skill you have developed or would like to develop.
- **Collect** the required evidence demonstrating your competence in the selected area.
- **Submit** your collected evidence.
- **Share** your accomplishment once you've earned a micro-credential. You can download a shareable digital badge or share directly via social media or email.

“This is not one-size-fits-all professional development,” said Logan. “It gives the educator a choice to dig in a little deeper into concepts that they feel they need support in. Or it could even be an entire school that is transitioning to remote or hybrid learning, and they go on this journey together. This program provides the option to personalize the learning for one person or an entire school.”

On the micro-credential, Logan said “You have proof through this digital badge that you have earned competency in this area. It's a whole different level of knowledge transfer.”

Conclusion

The instructional technology coaching that Verizon Innovative Schools provided teachers was critical in the success of their sudden shift to remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic. VILS teachers shared their training with non-VILS educators across the district, which helped all district teachers expand their capacity to integrate technology into instruction for more effective distance learning. Now Verizon Innovative Schools is making these courses available for free to all educators.

Don't miss this opportunity to enroll in one of the first three courses at [Teacher Training Pathways](#) today. Additional courses will be added throughout the year.

About Verizon Innovative Learning

Millions of students nationwide lack the access to technology and the skills they need to succeed in the digital world. Since 2012, Verizon has been working to solve this problem through [Verizon Innovative Learning](#). Verizon's non-profit partner Digital Promise collaborates with Verizon to equip every student and teacher at select middle and high schools across the country with a device and up to a four-year data plan, and provide students without reliable home internet access with a mobile hotspot device. In addition to free technology, support, and

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the opportunity to engage in a unique, immersive curriculum to leverage technology in their classrooms, educators are provided with coaching to help them effectively integrate technology across their curriculum.

Digital Promise selects the schools that are part of [Verizon Innovative Learning Schools](#) (VILS) and selected schools join the program in cohorts. Each cohort begins their journey together and has the opportunity to collaborate, share, and learn from previous cohorts. As schools progress through the second year of the program and beyond, they offer mentorship, best practices, and resources to schools new to the program. The focus is to provide students the technology education they deserve to prepare them for the digital world.

Verizon is making a difference in communities by continuing to expand their commitment to education. They are investing in bridging the educational divide by addressing barriers to digital inclusion. By supporting a new paradigm of digital learning, Verizon is inspiring students with cutting edge technology, including through innovative learning labs that will be powered by 5G technology. Verizon works with nonprofit partners to build STEM-focused programs that create the kind of transformations that change lives.

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