

California Adult Education Digital Learning Guidance Reader's Guide

Chapter 7: Fostering Healthy, Equitable, and Inclusive Digital Communities Chapter Summary

Community Building – Creating a healthy and inclusive online learning community requires intentional effort from adult educators. Strategies include fostering relationships among learners, encouraging collaboration, and promoting positive digital communication. Building a supportive classroom community goes beyond academic content and helps facilitate deep learning and meaningful connections.

Social-Emotional Learning – Social and emotional learning (SEL) is crucial for successful learning, and adult educators play a vital role in fostering SEL skills. SEL encompasses goal setting, empathy, positive relationships, responsible decision-making, and emotional management. Integrating SEL into the classroom environment, whether physical or digital, helps learners feel supported and accepted. Educational institutions can address learners' social-emotional needs by providing resources and creating safe and supportive learning environments. Building positive relationships is key, and educators can engage in self-reflection, be culturally competent, communicate positively, have high expectations while providing support, apply adult learning theories, involve learners in goal-setting and self-regulation, and create healthy, equitable, and inclusive learning environments. Adult educators should also facilitate opportunities for learners to connect with peers through collaborative activities. While addressing systemic inequalities and the effects of past negative educational experiences or chronic stress may pose challenges, schools can empower learners and support their social-emotional well-being. By prioritizing SEL, educators contribute to a positive and enriching learning experience for their students.

Cultivating Educator Well-Being – Adult educator SEL is crucial for building relationships, managing classrooms, and modeling SEL skills. Institutional support is important for educator well-being, including gathering data, providing time for relationship-building, considering digital learning impacts, offering support and access to mental health resources, integrating SEL in professional development, and providing well-being activities. Regular check-ins and communication are essential. Appendix A of the Guidance offers additional resources for cultivating educator and staff well-being.

Digital Citizenship – Digital citizenship is essential in today's digital world. Adult educators can promote positive digital citizenship by fostering inclusive, equitable, and culturally aware practices. ISTE's SkillRise and DigCitCommit programs provide frameworks for adult and K-12 learners to develop digital citizenship competencies, such as expanding perspectives, using technology safely and ethically, engaging in civic activities, making informed decisions, and being mindful of online actions and safety. The classroom serves as a supportive environment for cultivating digital citizenship skills and modeling positive behavior.

Guidance Engagement Questions

Community-Building – Keeping course design predictable (consistent layouts and schedules) actually helps build community. Why does a confusing or constantly changing LMS layout act as a barrier to belonging? How does a stable structure allow learners to focus on connecting with their peers rather than just surviving the navigation?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) – SEL can support digital resilience when learners encounter technology challenges. When learners face issues like a frozen screen, a lost password, a confusing form, or an unfamiliar tool, what do you notice about how they respond? Which troubleshooting behaviors do you want learners to practice, such as pausing, asking for help, trying another approach, explaining the problem clearly, or deciding when to stop and seek support? Where could you model or teach those behaviors during a real digital task?

Cultivating Educator Well-Being – Digital teaching and support work can feel isolating when staff are solving problems alone. Where do staff currently share technology questions, curriculum ideas, learner support strategies, or small wins? What recurring structure would actually fit your schedule, such as a short staff huddle, shared troubleshooting document, peer visit, group chat, or monthly PLC, and what topic would be useful enough to start with?

Digital Citizenship – Adult learners often balance personal, professional, and community identities online. How do you help your students decide which parts of their lives belong on a public LinkedIn profile versus a private messaging app? What is one strategy for helping them clean up their digital presence before a big job interview?

Integrating Frameworks for Digital Citizenship – If you are working with a student who is preparing for a job search, which two competencies are most critical for them to master first?