

A FIVE-PILLAR TOOL FOR K-12 LEADERS

The Recalibration *Framework*

A five-pillar recalibration tool for school district leaders who want to move from reactive 1:1 management to purposeful, evidence-based, family-centered technology programs — starting this summer.

01

Purpose Before
Platform

02

Active Over
Passive

03

Audit, Plan, &
Report

04

Teacher First,
Tech Second

05

Communicate the
Why

THE MOMENT WE'RE IN

Recalibration, not *retreat*.

Pulling devices out of classrooms is a headline. Building a 1:1 program with purpose is the work. This framework is for leaders ready to do the work — and to bring families along as collaborators.



The Problem

Most 1:1 programs were stood up in an emergency. Devices arrived. Pedagogy didn't change. Families never heard a coherent why. Now legislators are filling the vacuum with bans, and the students who depend most on school-issued devices are the ones who lose the most.



The Opportunity

Summer is the rarest gift in K–12: a quiet stretch of time. Use it to articulate the purpose of your 1:1 in one sentence, audit how devices are actually being used, invest in the teachers you've under-supported, and rebuild the conversation with families.



What TRF Is

A five-pillar framework grounded in research from UNESCO, the U.S. Department of Education, peer-reviewed studies on device use, and a decade of in-district experience. Designed to be readable in one sitting and actionable across one summer.



How To Use It

Read the five pillars together as a leadership team. Work through the Summer Recalibration Checklist. Use the Family Conversation Starters at your back-to-school night. Then build the next three years of decisions on top of the same foundation.

THE PREMISE

The failure of 1:1 was never the device. It was the absence of pedagogical purpose behind the device — and the absence of an honest, ongoing conversation with families about why the device was there in the first place.

AT A GLANCE

Five pillars, one *recalibration*.

Each pillar answers a question that most 1:1 rollouts skipped during the post-pandemic scramble. Together they form the foundation for a defensible, family-trusted, evidence-aligned technology program.

01

Purpose Before Platform

Lead with the learning goal. The device follows. If you can't articulate the why in one sentence without the words "21st century" or "future ready," the program doesn't have a purpose — it has a budget line.

02

Active Over Passive Always

Technology should let students do something they couldn't do — or couldn't do as well — without it. Thirty kids watching a video on thirty screens isn't 1:1. It's a thirty-screen movie theater.

03

Audit, Plan, and Report

"About two hours" is not an answer. Build screen time into lesson plans. Make device use a standing item at department meetings. Trade defensive averages for specific, child-level practice.

04

Teacher First, Technology Second

No tool outperforms a well-prepared teacher. If your district's hardware budget is fifty times your PD budget, the math is the program. Invest in the human in the room.

05

Communicate the Why to Families

An AUP signature is not a conversation. Bring families in as collaborators — explain the purpose, the practice, and the parts you're still figuring out. Trust is built by showing the work.

HOW THEY CONNECT

Each pillar makes the next one possible.

Without purpose, there's nothing to plan for. Without active use, there's nothing worth defending. Without an audit, there's nothing specific to share. Without teachers, there's no one to make it real. Without communication, there's no trust to build on.

1

PILLAR ONE

Purpose Before Platform

Every device, app, and platform in your district should be in service of a defined learning goal. The order matters: **purpose, then platform**. When schools reverse the order — buying first and figuring out the use case later — the program drifts toward whatever vendors are loudest, not what students actually need.

IN PRACTICE THIS SUMMER

- Write the why of your 1:1 in one sentence. No jargon. No "future-ready." Show it to your teachers, your board, and your parent advisory.
- Audit every platform with an active license. For each: name the learning purpose, the evidence base, and the educator who owns implementation. Cut what fails the test.
- Adopt a "purpose statement" requirement for any new technology procurement. No purchase order without one.

2

PILLAR TWO

Active Over Passive Always

Research consistently finds that **students who use devices for learning purposes outperform students who use the same devices for non-learning or multipurpose use**. The variable isn't the screen. It's the task. Active use means students are creating, investigating, collaborating, problem-solving. Passive use means students are watching, scrolling, or completing low-rigor tasks that look productive in a hallway walkthrough but produce little learning.

IN PRACTICE THIS SUMMER

- Walk through your most-used platforms and label tasks active or passive. If the active-to-passive ratio is upside down, your 1:1 is being used as a delivery mechanism, not a learning tool.
- Build a "default to off" classroom culture: devices come out when the task requires them, and go away when it doesn't. Make this an expectation, not an exception.
- Replace "screen time" metrics with "screen purpose" metrics in your internal reporting. What students did on the device matters more than how long they were on it.

3

PILLAR THREE

Audit, Plan, and Report

"About two hours" is not an answer — it's a deflection. The fix is upstream of the conversation, at the lesson plan. Teachers should be planning for screen time the way they plan for any other instructional move: naming when devices come out, what specific skill is being practiced, what digital literacy skill is being layered in, and when devices go away. Department and grade-level teams are where that work gets discussed, refined, and reported out.

IN PRACTICE THIS SUMMER

- Build a "screen time line" into your lesson plan template. Every lesson that uses a device names the learning purpose and the digital literacy skill being layered in.
- Make device-use practice a standing agenda item at department and grade-level meetings. Teachers report out on what worked, what didn't, and what they'll change next time.
- Build a specific, child-level answer template for screen time questions — and train every staff member to use it. "About two hours" is the answer that loses school board fights.

4

PILLAR FOUR

Teacher First, Technology Second

Effective digital integration depends on **collaborative learning environments, hands-on training, ongoing mentorship, and institutional support** — not one-off August workshops. If your district spent \$1.2M on devices and \$40K on professional development, the imbalance is the program. The teacher in the classroom is the variable that determines whether technology becomes a learning amplifier or an expensive distraction.

IN PRACTICE THIS SUMMER

- Calculate your real ratio: total hardware/software spend ÷ total PD spend. Set a multi-year target to bring it into balance.
- Replace one-shot trainings with sustained models — coaching cycles, peer observation, embedded job-time learning. The research is consistent that durable change requires duration.
- Make pedagogical fluency, not platform fluency, the goal of every PD session. The point is not how to use the tool. The point is when, why, and whether to use it at all.

5

PILLAR FIVE

Communicate the Why to Families

Parents are not the opposition. They are **collaborators in a shared project** — raising children who can use technology purposefully, set it down when it doesn't serve them, and recognize when a tool is using them instead of the other way around. That work fails when adults on both sides of the school door are saying incoherent things to the same child. The annual AUP signature is compliance theater. Real communication is continuous, transparent, and two-way — and it depends on the work of Pillars One through Four already being in place.

IN PRACTICE THIS SUMMER

- Draft a one-page "Family Brief" for the start of the year: the purpose of your 1:1, what a typical screen day looks like, what's still being figured out (AI is the obvious one), and how to give feedback.
- Build at least one structured listening session into the fall calendar. Not a vote. Not a town hall. A conversation. Bring teachers, not just admins.
- Be honest about uncertainty. Schools that pretend to have AI "figured out" right now will repeat the social media trust collapse of the last decade. Saying "here's what we know, here's what we're working on" is the trust-building move.

THE THROUGHLINE

When Pillars 1 through 4 are in place, Pillar 5 stops being defensive. You're not justifying screen time — you're describing a practice. That's the difference between a school board fight and a school board partnership.

RECALIBRATION CHECKLIST

A summer worth *spending*.

A leadership–team checklist organized by month. Designed to be finishable. Begin next year with a 1:1 program your team can defend, your teachers can use, and your families can trust.

JUNE · AUDIT & ARTICULATE

Get honest about where you are.

- ☐ **Write the one-sentence purpose** of your 1:1 program. Workshop it with your leadership team until it survives a skeptic.
- ☐ **Inventory every active platform license.** For each, document the learning purpose, the active educator owner, and the evidence base.
- ☐ **Walk three classrooms and time the screens.** Not to judge — to know. Build the real screen-time profile of your district before you describe it to anyone else.
- ☐ **Pull your spend ratio:** hardware/software vs. professional development. Set a written target for the next three years.

JULY · PLAN & PREPARE

Build the program your audit revealed you don't yet have.

- ☐ **Cut platforms that fail the purpose test.** Reallocate the dollars to PD or to platforms with demonstrated impact.
- ☐ **Add a "screen time line" to your lesson plan template.** Every lesson that uses a device names the learning purpose and the digital literacy skill being layered in.
- ☐ **Make device-use a standing agenda item** at department and grade-level meetings. Teachers report out on what worked and what they'll change.
- ☐ **Design a sustained PD model** for the year — coaching cycles, peer observation, embedded job-time learning. Not one August workshop.
- ☐ **Draft your AI guidance for the year ahead.** Be honest about what's set, what's pilot, and what's still being figured out.

AUGUST · COMMUNICATE & LAUNCH

Bring families in before the year begins, not after.

- ☐ **Publish the one-page Family Brief** on the district homepage. Translate it. Send it home before the first AUP signature.
- ☐ **Draft a child-level screen-time answer template** — specific moments, specific purposes, specific literacy skills. Train every staff member to use it instead of an average.
- ☐ **Calendar at least one structured family listening session** into the fall — with teachers present, not just administrators.
- ☐ **Brief your school board and train your staff on the new norms** before students arrive. The recalibration only works if every adult can explain it.

Recalibration is a cadence, not a project.

- ☐ **Share audit data with the school board quarterly.** Specific, child-level patterns — not aggregates. Show that purpose is being measured, not assumed.
- ☐ **Refresh the Family Brief every semester.** Update it with what changed, what was learned, and what you're piloting next. Trust compounds when families see iteration.
- ☐ **Run the five-pillar audit every spring.** Make recalibration an annual rhythm of the district, like the budget — not a one-time response to a news cycle.

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

Bring families in *early*.

Eight questions schools can put on the table at back-to-school night, in family newsletters, or in district listening sessions. The goal is a real conversation — not a defensive one.

ON PURPOSE

Why is your child using a device in this classroom — today?

Frame the answer as a learning goal first, then the tool. If you can't tie a screen moment to a learning purpose, name it openly and reconsider it.

ON BALANCE

When does the device come out — and when does it go away?

Share the "default to off" classroom norm. Help families understand that purposeful tech use also means purposeful non-use. Both are pedagogical choices.

ON SPECIFICS

Can you tell us — in specifics, not averages — what our child did on a screen yesterday?

"About two hours" is the answer that loses school board fights. Schools that audit and plan can answer at the lesson and skill level — naming the moments, the purposes, and the literacy practices being built.

ON EQUITY

Who depends on this device most — and what happens to them if we take it away?

Be candid about which students rely on school-issued devices for accessibility, connectivity, or coursework. Decisions about access affect them disproportionately.

ON TEACHERS

How are we supporting teachers to use this technology well?

Share your real PD model. If it's still a one-shot August workshop, say so — and say what you're changing. Honesty here builds more trust than spin.

ON AI

What is — and isn't — settled about AI in your child's classroom?

Distinguish what's policy, what's pilot, and what's still being figured out. Pretending to have AI "solved" will cost you trust within a year.

ON HOME

How can what we do at school and what you do at home line up?

Invite the home half of the equation. The most powerful lessons about purposeful tech use happen when adults on both sides of the school door are coherent with each other.

ON ITERATION

When something isn't working for our family, how do we tell you?

Name the channel and the cadence. Recalibration is a practice, not a project — families are the early-warning system that tells you when the practice needs to change.

A FINAL WORD

Pulling the devices is a headline. Recalibrating the program is the *work*.

Schools that do the work this summer will be ready for whatever comes next. Schools that don't will be back at this same conversation, on someone else's terms, in twelve months. Choose the work — and bring families with you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ready to recalibrate your district's 1:1 this summer?

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