



**D2L**

# **Please, Not Another Tech Tool!**

A Guide to Coaching Your Educational Staff  
Through Technology Adoption

By Kassia Gandhi

# Introduction

Change is essential. We can fight it or we can embrace it, but either way it will come. Nowhere is this a bigger truth than in education. We prepare our students for an ever-changing world using evolving curricula and strategies, pulling from the newest pedagogical writings and surrounding them with a kaleidoscope of new educational technologies. At the same time, we draw constantly from our past—sometimes out of necessity, sometimes because we know old ways work best and sometimes because we’re scared to change.

D2L has spent years working with school districts, departments of education and education organizations on change management, and we’ve seen a spectrum of reactions to the process. Adoption of new educational technologies typically happens in one of two ways: **as a local decision** (by the educator or a group of educators) or **as a central decision** (by a school, school district or centralized body). There are many benefits to adopting technology as a central body, including:

- more consistency in instructional delivery
- more equitable access to technology for students
- economic savings
- better control over data and security

But to ensure that large organizational change will really result in better outcomes, educational organizations need to have a clearly articulated strategy for change.

The three-part approach to change management outlined in this guide is designed to support educational leaders as they plan large-scale change and coach staff through the process in a way that maximizes success and minimizes pain. The guide focuses specifically on technology adoption and implementation, but the principles can be extrapolated to many different types of change.



This guide is accompanied by the D2L-hosted webinar **“Please, Not Another Tech Tool!”** The webinar is facilitated by Kassia Gandhi, academic affairs director at D2L, and Stephanie Kelly, senior manager of instructional technology at Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

# Step 1: Lead With a Strong Vision

The biggest and most critical mistake educational organizations make when they adopt new technologies is failing to lead with a strong vision. If you don't start with a compelling vision aligned to the change—and communicate it to your stakeholders—you'll be fighting a losing battle before you even begin.

Here's why: How people react to change is not a mystery. There are several well-established models that describe how change impacts people. A well-tested favorite in education is the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, which was developed by a group of researchers at the Research

and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas in the 1970s and 80s. This model looks at the step-by-step process your staff will work through when they learn about a change:

1. First, they will worry about self-concerns.  
How does this change impact me?
2. Next, they will consider task concerns.  
How do I do this change?
3. Finally, they will focus on impact concerns.  
How does this change impact my goals? >>>

## Know How Change Impacts People

### SELF CONCERNS

### TASK CONCERNS

1

2

3

#### Information Concerns

- What is the change?
- Why the change?
- When will the change happen?

#### Personal Concerns

- How will this impact me?
- Can I still use the tools I've been using?
- What's in it for me?
- How much time will it take?

#### Management Concerns

- When is training?
- When do we get access?
- How do I do it?
- Can you show me that one more time?

### IMPACT CONCERNS

4

5

6

#### Consequence Concerns

- How do I use this to achieve \_\_\_\_\_?
- How do I do it better?
- When can I have some help refining this?
- What can I do to improve my results?

#### Collaboration Concerns

- How do we do it better together?
- What can we do to improve our results?
- Who else is using/wants to use these approaches?
- Where can we meet to exchange ideas?

#### Refocusing Concerns

- What needs to be true for widespread innovation to happen?
- What systems and processes help faculty succeed?
- How do we systematically improve quality/engagement/persistence/retention/etc.?



A mistake that leaders sometimes make is to approach their staff first with concerns focused at the district or central level (i.e., “How is this change going to help us meet our goals as an educational institution?”). Of course, as a leader, you need a strategic vision that guides your change and is transparently and consistently communicated to your stakeholders. But the bigger picture won’t be the first concern for your staff. Their initial questions will be centered on how the change impacts them personally and why they should be invested in making this transformation. When communicating your vision, start at the individual level (i.e., “Here is how this change is going to impact you specifically”) before you share higher-level thinking. So, what does this look like in practice? >>>



## CASE STUDY

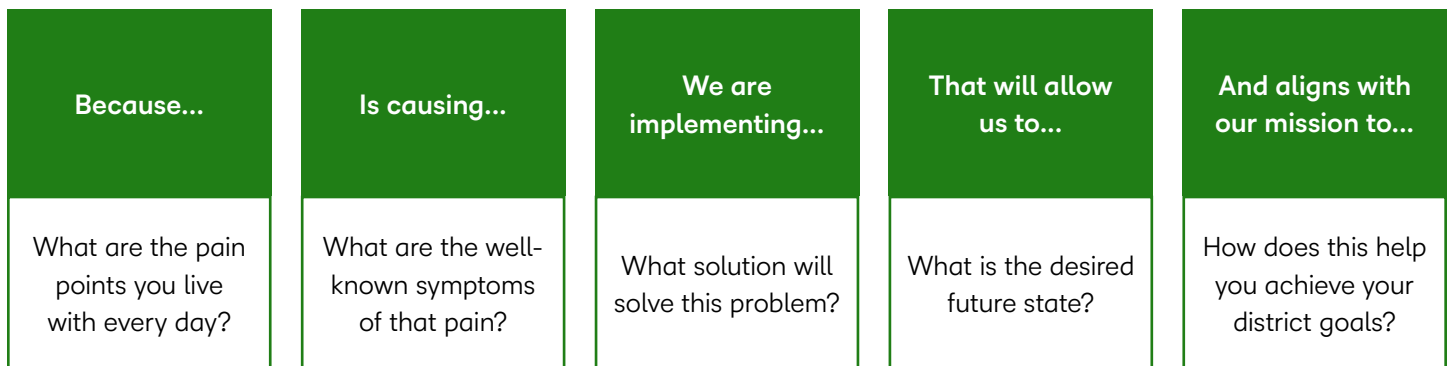
### Anne Arundel County Public Schools: From Google Classroom to D2L Brightspace

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) in Annapolis, Maryland, has **83,000 students and 6,500 staff**. As a district, AACPS decided to implement a very significant technology change: transitioning teachers, students, and parents from the technology they had been using for virtual learning—Google Classroom—to a new learning management system (LMS), D2L Brightspace. Guided by a strong vision for a learning platform that could support blended or virtual learning, parent communication, and data-driven teaching decisions, AACPS completed the initial rollout of Brightspace in 2021.

“I came from the days when we were using so many tools, and it was an impossibility. It was hard for professional development, for teacher support, for parents to understand, and for students to stay organized. It goes back to that one system of truth. It’s so much easier.”

Stephanie Kelly, Senior Manager of Instructional Technology at Anne Arundel County Public Schools

# Develop a Strong Vision as the Guiding Light



## A STRONG VISION, IN PRACTICE:

Our parent community is integral to the success of our students. **Because** our current method of communication via weekly emails **is causing** parents to feel disengaged while creating a lot of work for our teachers, **we are implementing** Brightspace for Parents, a tool

**that will allow us to** open a window into the classroom for parents and guardians, a tool that **aligns with our mission** to enhance communication between school and the home, and a tool that will ultimately will support student outcomes. >>>

## CASE STUDY

### Portland Public Schools: Managing District-Wide LMS Adoption

Portland Public Schools is a small public school district serving 2,000 K–12 students in Portland, Michigan. In 2020, Portland Public Schools adopted the Brightspace LMS to support learning across the district. Three goals underlaid the district’s vision for technology use:

1. to give students ownership of their learning;
2. to reimagine the way content was delivered to students; and
3. to create one central technology hub for teaching and learning.

“Teachers see first the work involved with a new initiative. By creating a culture of collaboration, we can overcome those initial barriers. Teachers can own and share out what they are good at and work together to learn from others, building a professional learning community.”

William Heath, Superintendent at Portland Public Schools

## DO:

- Start with your strategic plan and consider why you are making this change. How is this going to improve student learning? Improve teacher outcomes? Support our community?
- Then, create a vision that guides your staff through the concerns-based adoption model by addressing first how this change will impact their lives, then what this change is and how it's being implemented, and finally the impact this will have on your collective and individual goals.

## DON'T:

- Implement a change without creating and communicating a vision.
- Forget to explain to the people impacted by change how the change will affect them and how they will be supported in this change.

“As we were developing our vision, we also had to develop our why, and we came up with a story. We had Google Classroom during virtual learning. It provided what we needed at the time, but we needed more. We needed data and parent communication—things that Brightspace offered. So we made this analogy: While we were in virtual learning, we were in a tent that provided everything we needed. But now it's time to move from our tent to a house with all the amenities: the smart home, the refrigerator, the electric lights—all the things we needed in order to make things better. During our professional development with teachers, we were showing them all of these amenities—not to overwhelm them, but to show them this is the art of the possible as we move forward.”

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Stephanie Kelly, Senior Manager of Instructional Technology at Anne Arundel County Public Schools



# Step Two: Enable With Adoption Types in Mind

The enablement and empowerment of your staff is the longest stage in change management and can take months or even years. The second biggest mistake districts make when implementing new technology is to assume that change is a linear process. Our people will adopt the technology, and then they will adopt it better, and then we will see results. This line of thinking is logical, but it has one fatal flaw: It assumes all people embrace change in the same way, which we know is not true. >>>



## CASE STUDY

### Traverse City Area Public Schools: Aligning Tech Tools to a Teaching and Learning Vision

Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS), located in Traverse City, Michigan, supports almost 10,000 students. In 2020, the district became a Brightspace client, using the platform to support blended learning for students in kindergarten through grade 12. TCAPS approached change by aligning the technology tools to its vision of teaching and learning.

“From my point of view as a learning coach, we had the greatest success when we attacked new Brightspace skills in small chunks that were tied to larger goals and concepts. Teachers appreciated when we would connect a specific Brightspace skill or tool to the ISTE Standards or to good teaching concepts like giving better feedback, gamification, personalized learning, etc.”

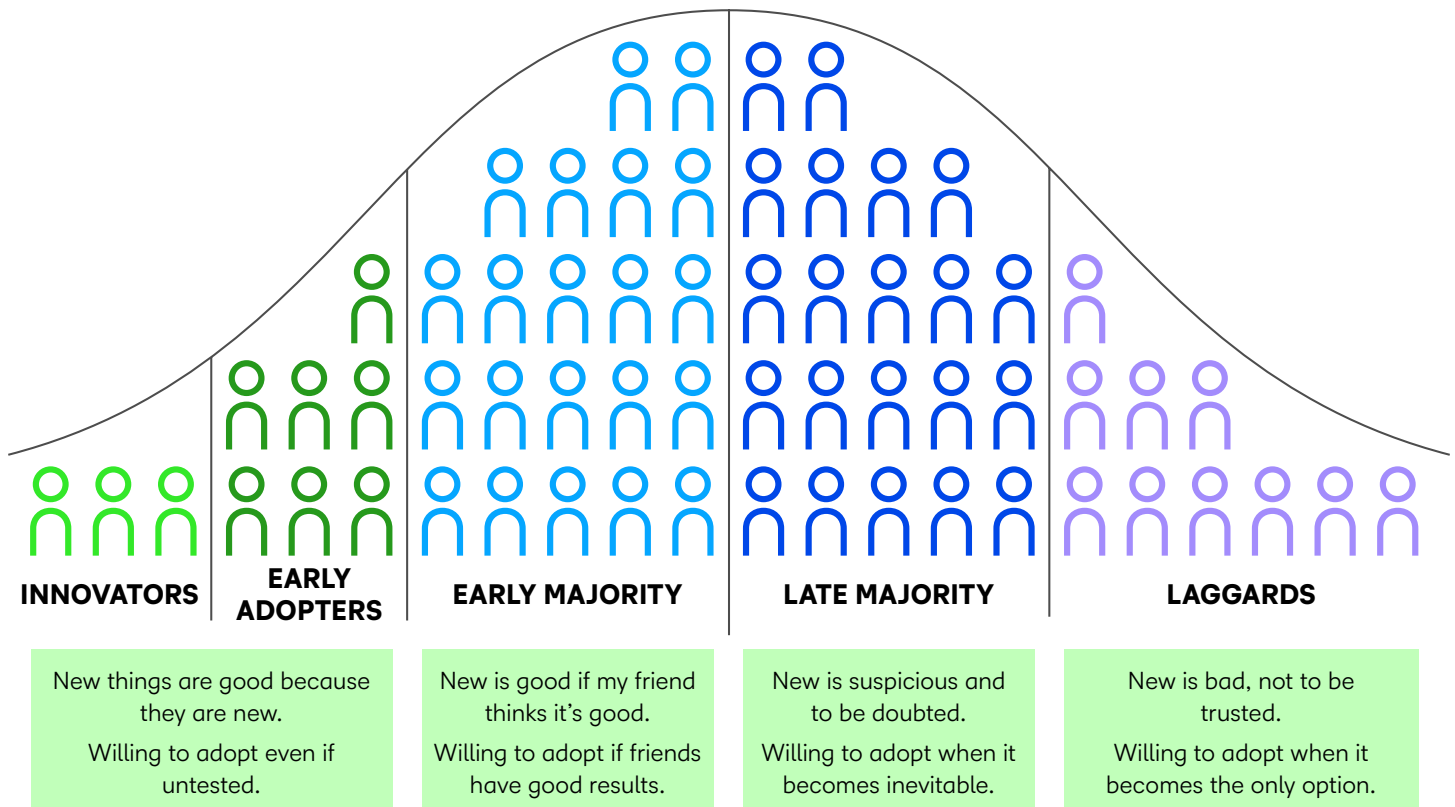
Danielle Brostrom, Educational Technology Coach at  
Traverse City Area Public Schools



The **Rogers Adoption Model** teaches us that people adopt technology in different ways at different times, based on their “adoption type.” We need communication and enablement plans that continuously empower people at different stages in their adoption journey, ensuring that no one is left behind while also making sure that those further along in the change can continue to develop and grow their new skills. >>>



## Understand the People of Change





## DO:

- Enable your early adopters to be champions in their schools or local sites so they can mentor the early and late majority adopters.
- Invite a variety of voices to the planning table, considering not only types of roles (principals, students, teachers, parents) but also types of adopters.
- Publish and regularly update a single source of truth with all the information needed about change.
- Know your people and how they approach change.

## DON'T:

- Use your early adopters as the only exemplars of change. They can seem too far away from the experience of late majority adopters and laggards.
- Assume that the loudest voices are the majority of voices. Just like with Yelp reviews, people who feel the most strongly (positively or negatively) about something will be the most motivated to share their opinions.

“When we decided to open the second phase of our pilot, we used our current users to help us teach the next implementation. The first group were holding office hours, answering questions and showing best examples. Then we continued to grow. We took both the first and second pilots and decided that teachers needed some support in their schools. So, we came up with the Brightspace Champion program and included those teachers who had already been through the process and were in the schools.”

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Stephanie Kelly, Senior Manager of Instructional Technology at Anne Arundel County Public Schools

## CASE STUDY

### Elk Island Public Schools: Adopting Brightspace for Blended and Online Learning

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) is located in Alberta, Canada. Supporting 17,000 students across 43 schools (which range in size from 15 students to 1,100 students), EIPS is one of the largest school districts in the province of Alberta. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, EIPS transitioned its K–12 teachers from Google Classroom to Brightspace to support the district’s evolving need for blended and online learning.

“Teachers really value their independence and believe in their ability to make independent decisions for themselves and for their students. This is a good thing on one hand, but when managing [change for] a large school or district, it creates challenges. This idea of choice and professional judgement has to happen within the context of professional standards, which have to be rooted in knowledge, expertise and policy. [Technology adoption] can’t be a free-for-all.”

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Jon Thomas, Educational Technology Consultant at Elk Island Public Schools

# Step Three: Evaluate Results With Care

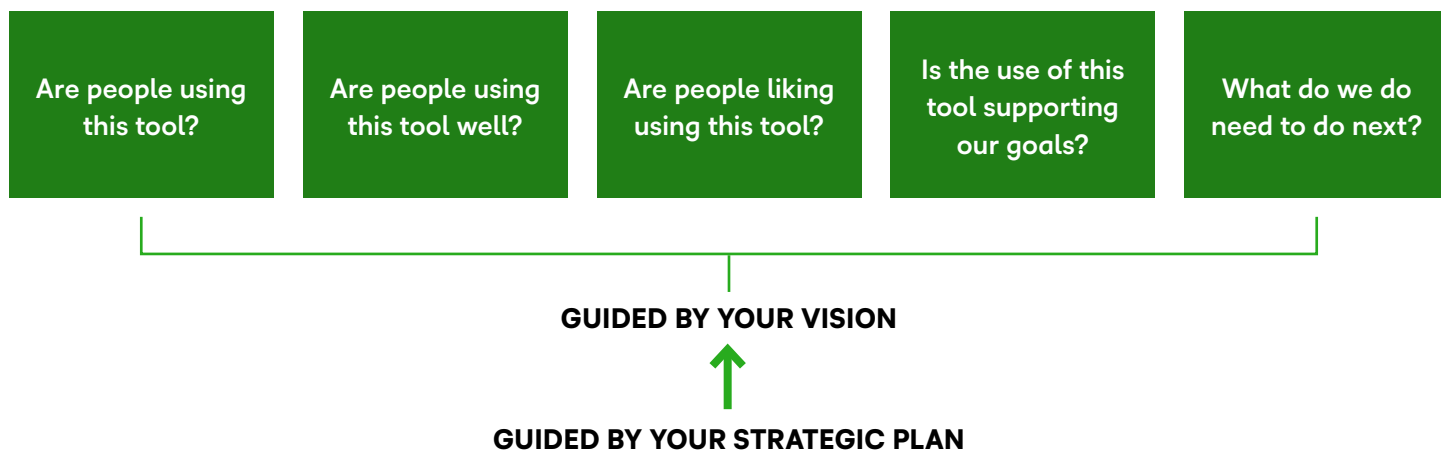
When planning a change, it's natural to immediately reflect on the anticipated outcomes and how you'll prove a positive return on your investment. The desire for improved results is the typical driver for change, and it's important that we measure our success. But how do we ensure that we're being realistic, purposeful and adaptable when it comes to measuring and evaluating the impacts of change?

When you planned your vision, you had a clear idea of the impacts you were expecting as they related to your strategic goals. Now's the time to come back to your vision and look for outcomes that align to your original objectives. Keep in mind that change is not always fast, and effective use of new technology takes time. You should plan to achieve your goals gradually and evolve and adapt your strategy based on the results you see. >>>

“When we shifted to Brightspace a couple of years ago, there were some very strong, emotional reactions...Part of this was how fast we were shifting, but even a slower change would have brought out similar conversations over time. For teachers, my job is a part of my personal identity. This adds a really complex layer to change management. It's not just about training—it's about values and having that conversation about these values.”

Jon Thomas, Educational Technology Consultant at Elk Island Public Schools

## Consider Concerns and Results

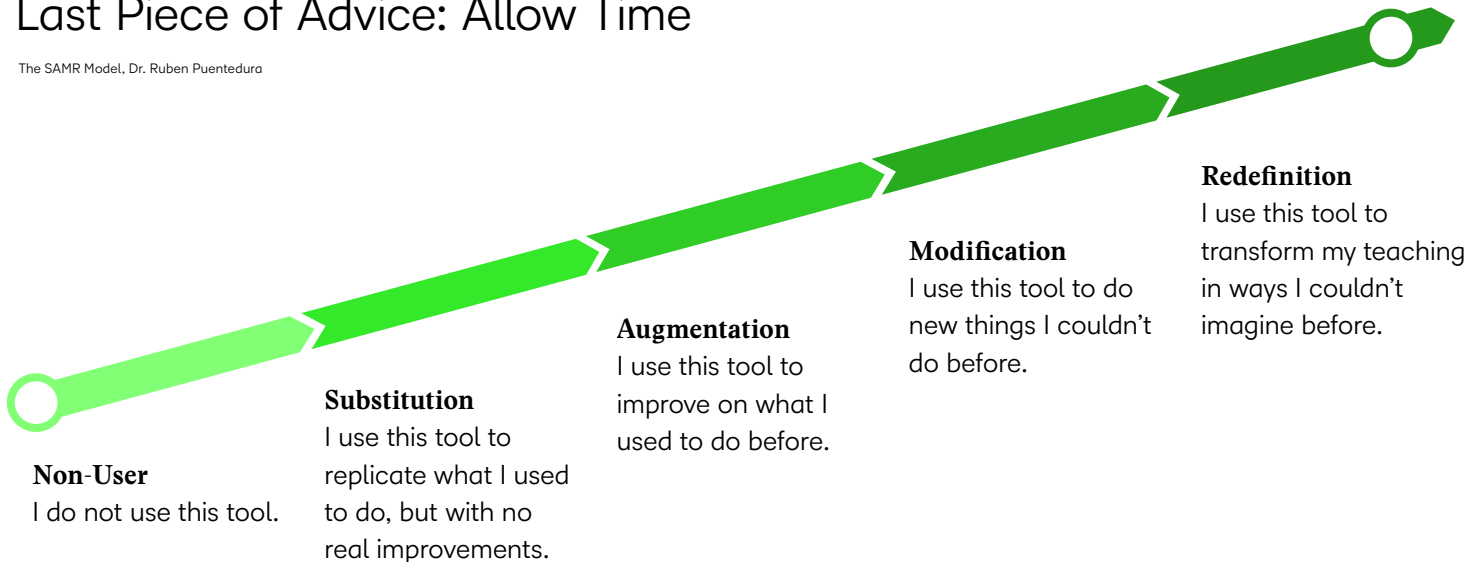


The good news is you don't have to guess at how technology adoption works. There are plenty of established models that provide a foundation you can use to anticipate how your staff and students will work though change and what these results will look like. A well-known and tested model is the **SAMR Model**, developed by Dr. Ruben R. Puentedura. It reminds you that users of new technology will evolve from

**non-users** ("I don't use this technology") to **substitution users** ("I use this technology to replicate what I used to do but with no marked improvements") before becoming **proficient users** ("I use this technology to augment, modify or transform the way I do things"). This means that to see true improvement and transformation from technology, you need to wait for your users to be ready for this type of transformation. >>>

## Last Piece of Advice: Allow Time

The SAMR Model, Dr. Ruben Puentedura





## DO:

- Use existing technology adoption frameworks to set realistic expectations around change and adoption.
- Regularly review multiple types of data related to the implementation of your change, evaluating data points that align to your outcomes and analyzing ways to evolve and adapt your change strategy.

## DON'T:

- Get tricked into only looking at technology usage as your key result. This is an important metric, but it is the simplest form of adoption. Make sure to also collect results around how people are using the technology, the outcomes of this usage in terms of your goals, and teacher and student sentiment.
- Rush true transformation from technology—remember that change takes time.

**“Go slow to go fast.** I know that’s an old adage, but it’s absolutely true. Consider and embrace all feedback, and talk to the people who are giving it to you so you fully understand it. **I’m really glad that we chose one system with all of our tools implemented in there.**”

“At first, we just gave the minimal requirements for teachers: You have your [virtual] class, explore, enjoy the professional development, and build at your own pace. But the minimum was to communicate with students what you were doing that week, so if they were absent or missed class, there was something in there that they could make up. Now that we’ve been through a year of implementation and teachers have had some time to explore, and we’re looking through classes and seeing such great growth, this year we’re going to have a few more requirements. They’re minimal, though; **we’re just building capacity little by little** so they can move forward.”

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Stephanie Kelly, Senior Manager of Instructional Technology at Anne Arundel County Public Schools





# Conclusion

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Change is inevitable in education—the world is changing, and so must our systems. Even though it can be hard, there are steps you can take to create an effective change management plan that will result in meaningful, productive change for your staff, students and local communities. By starting with a strong vision that understands the way individuals embrace change, developing enablement plans that meet your staff where they are throughout the implementation journey, and focusing on realistic results and feedback, you can empower your staff and students to be successful in their technology adoption. ■

## LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES?


- Accompanying Webinar: [“Please, Not Another Tech Tool! Guiding Your Staff Through the Technology Adoption Process”](#)
- Teacher-Facing Guide: [“Please, Not Another Tech Tool! How to Safely Adopt New Technologies as an Educator”](#)

## ABOUT D2L


D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We're leading the way into a new era of personalized learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of their age, ability or location. Our signature technology products—D2L Brightspace and D2L Wave—enhance the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the working world.


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