S.I.P

STANDARDS IN PRACTICE

OCTOBER 2026 - ISSUE 49

STANDARD HIGHLIGHT

National Standards for Digital Learning L eadership

Standard C: Advocacy for Digital Learning

Indicator: C1: Digital learning leaders build coalitions and partnerships to advance digital learning.

STANDARD OVERVIEW

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Last school year, Brandywine Virtual Academy launched the Chester County Online Learning Leadership Collaborative (CCOLLC), a quarterly gathering that brings together school district leaders from across our county to strengthen our virtual programs and advance digital learning.

Since a countywide online learning leadership collaborative had not been launched in Chester County before, we knew that leaders serving neighboring communities, facing many of the same challenges, knew little about each other's programs. That gap shaped how we launched CCOLLC in November 2025: we opened with introductions and virtual school spotlights, so leaders could get to know each other and the qualities of each district's virtual program. We then facilitated small-group SWOT analyses to chart strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats across programs. We closed by asking leaders to identify topics to explore and expertise to share as part of future meetings. Subsequent meetings focused on AI in course design, and building an attendance system for online learning that captures student progress over seat time.

Upon reflection, we felt these activities were successful in introducing our shared mission, building relationships, and forming a shared understanding amongst the group for future work.

A key lesson learned from this first year is that the leaders in the collaborative came in at very different points. Some had years of experience in virtual education and real authority to shape their program's direction, while others were newer to the role or operating with less control over their program's design. The varying ranges of experience and knowledge of virtual learning strongly shaped the direction of year two.

This year, we chose CCOLLC session topics any leader can act on regardless of their role or years of experience. Each session blends outside expertise with participant-led work: presenters introduce frameworks, then leaders apply them through discussion, discovery, and creation activities such as storytelling exercises, case studies, and panel discussions. We also aligned every quarterly session directly to the NSQ Leadership Standards to show how the collaborative's work fits into a national perspective of quality online leadership.

Together, these choices aim to build a shared foundation and turn individual district efforts into a unified leadership network, pooling partnerships, program knowledge, and stories to advance quality, sustainable digital learning for every student across the county, not just their own.

You can see our 2026-2027 CCOLLC draft agenda in RESOURCES.

WHY THIS MATTERS

NSQ Indicator C1 centers on building partnerships and coalitions to strengthen digital learning.

That work matters because a student's access to quality virtual learning shouldn't depend on which school district they happen to enroll in, yet without a shared standard, it often does.

Some virtual programs are led by veteran leaders with years of experience and real authority to shape their program; others are led by newer leaders still building that capacity, or teacher leaders with varying levels of influence on the district's virtual program.

That range in leadership experience is exactly what CCOLLC is built to grow, so every leader, regardless of where they start, can raise the rigor of instruction, the consistency of support, and the speed at which problems get solved for their learners.

In a collaborative, when a leader gains a new skill or fixes a structural problem in their program, that improvement doesn't stay contained to one district; it spreads, strengthening the whole network.

Through this work, we're building a shared, countywide expectation for what quality virtual learning, leadership, and program design looks like.

HELPFUL HINTS

- **To start our collaboration, we asked county Superintendents to nominate one or more participants from their districts.** Another way to engage participants would be to send a direct invitation to local virtual school leaders inviting them to a short introductory meeting to learn more about the initiative and how it will benefit them and their district.
- **Focus on relationships before moving into learning activities.** Give your coalition time to understand each other's contexts before pushing toward collective goals. Leaders won't trust each other with real problems until they've built that foundation first. Treat relationship-building as the actual first phase of the work, not a delay before the real work starts.
- **Highlight the concrete ways members can help each other.** Specific help is what makes a coalition worth showing up for. Watch for moments when one member's solution or resource can transfer directly to someone else facing the same problem.
- **Keep the connection to student outcomes visible.** Focus on what the coalition's support actually provides for their programs, and make sure that connection stays part of the ongoing discussion.
- **Repeatedly frame the collaborative's work as coming from the group, not from any one person's leadership.** This framing reflects a shared collaboration and set of values that are bigger than any one leader.

Check out the NSQ Professional Learning Portal and NSQ Website for more resources at www.NSQOL.org

RESOURCES

- Resource 1 - Create a **scope and sequence** for monthly or quarterly meetings aligned to **NSQ Quality Digital Learning Leadership standards** to connect learning with leadership skills and practices.
- Resource 2 - Before your first meeting, **Use Pre-Meeting Surveys** to learn about each other's programs in advance to guide relationship-building activities.
- Resource 3 - During your first meeting, inventory each district program's strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats using a **SWOT analysis protocol** (Canva) to find commonalities and differences across programs and elicit topics for future meetings.
- Resource 4 - Use the SWOT analysis results to develop structured **table talk activities** (Canva) to frame future discussions around complex topics. This table talk activity was structured around the use of AI in online learning, a topic that was top of the list in the SWOT analysis.
- Resource 5 - Invite **experienced practitioners** to introduce topics and share their experiences and stories, helping leaders envision solutions and strategies beyond their own professional lens. Polling your leadership group for topics they feel they are strong in and would feel comfortable sharing is a great way to get started!

Author/Organization Bio

Dr. Jeanne McCarthy serves as Division Director for Brandywine Virtual Academy (BVA), the K-12 online learning program powered by the Chester County Intermediate Unit. Over 30 Pennsylvania school districts partner with BVA, so students can benefit from their local school's opportunities and services while earning a district diploma through an innovative, holistic, student-centered online program. Jeanne leads efforts to build online learning experiences that produce exceptional outcomes for schools, educators, students, and families across Pennsylvania.

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