

# Digitability™

**Preparing students with  
cognitive disabilities for our  
tech-driven workplace.**

*[digitability.com](http://digitability.com)*



c|net



SILICON VALLEY  
SOCIAL  
INNOVATION  
SUMMIT

n p r

TechCrunch

MSNBC



T1

# SELF-INVENTORY

EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.1

**Directions:** Write a paragraph describing the behaviors you have that will make you successful in the workplace.

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**Directions:** Write a paragraph describing the behaviors you have that can be problematic in the workplace.

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## T2 SELF-INVENTORY

EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.2

**Directions:** Complete the sentence starter to evaluate behaviors you need work on.

I have \_\_\_\_ behaviors that will help me be successful in the workplace.

These behaviors are \_\_\_\_\_. I can use  
these behaviors in the workplace by \_\_\_\_\_.

I have \_\_\_\_ behavior(s) that may be problematic in the workplace. Examples  
of these behaviors are \_\_\_\_\_. One  
behavior I will work on is \_\_\_\_\_.

**T3 TRACE 'N' LEARN****EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.3**

Successful Workplace  
Behavior

Sharing, helping,  
encouraging,  
following directions,  
staying on task,  
greeting a guest





# MY DIGITABILITY EARNINGS TRACKER

## Workplace Behavior Unit | WB.1.4

**DIRECTIONS:** Keep this page safe! After each lesson, mark down the date and the dollars you earned.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	DATE:	DOLLARS EARNED:
LESSON 1: Welcome to Workplace Behavior		
LESSON 2: Successful Behavior		
LESSON 3: Problematic Behavior		
LESSON 4: Workplace Behavior Master Badge		

TOTAL DOLLARS EARNED:



# Digitability™ Be Work-Ready!

**Digitability teaches work-ready skills for our technology driven and highly social workplace.**

## Skills Mastered Include:

- ✓ Technological Literacy & Online Safety
- ✓ Time and Task Management
- ✓ Workplace Communication & Socialization
- ✓ Resume, Interviewing and Skill-Based Portfolio Development
- ✓ Problem Solving & Flexible Thinking
- ✓ Financial literacy
- ✓ Self-regulation for Problematic Behaviors
- ✓ Self-advocacy in the Workplace



High school special education students standing outside of independence Hall, Philadelphia

***"As we lead our students into a tech-driven future, Digitability moves students closer to their career and life goals."***

-Jane Cordero, Secondary Special Education Coordinator at Hill-Freedman World Academy.

[Learn more at digitability.com](https://digitability.com)



## Three Solutions in One!

Digitability develops social and emotional capacity while shaping work-ready skills.



**Real-world work simulations  
for generalization**



**Comprehensive Transition  
Curriculum and IEP Goal Bank**



**Differentiates for cognitive  
and behavioral needs**



**Progress monitoring in  
one-click!**



**Capacity building for  
students *and* teachers**



**Social and emotional  
development**



## Digitability™ Service Model

Students have complex learning and behavior needs. The path to preparing students for today's modern workplace involves many moving parts.



- ✓ Digitability's curriculum prepares students with a work-ready portfolio, and the social/emotional capacity to persevere; this is helping people with neurodiverse needs overcome barriers to obtaining employment.
- ✓ Digitability's data and reporting tools measure student efficacy and facilitator fidelity through SMART goals and objectives. We offer real time usage data, data dashboard, weekly emails on efficacy/fidelity, and progress reports.
- ✓ Digitability works hard to make all teachers feel comfortable with technology and evidence based practices. Understanding the needs of teachers and their support staff, Digitability provides personalized support and training to all teachers and support staff.



# Digitability™ Curriculum

When skills are taught in isolation, the transfer doesn't happen. Digitability's one-of-a-kind curriculum teaches skills through real-world simulations, using the best evidence-based practices.







- ✓ Financial Literacy
- ✓ Resume, Portfolio, & Interviewing
- ✓ Technological Literacy & Online Safety
- ✓ Workplace Communication & Socialization
- ✓ Self-regulation for Behavior
- ✓ Self-advocacy in the Workplace
- ✓ Time & Task Management
- ✓ Problem Solving & Flexible Thinking



## 4 Levels of Digitability's Award Winning Work-Ready Training

Today, more than **70%** of people with cognitive disabilities are unemployed. Digitability's award-winning innovative approach is changing this statistic. Nearly **70%** of our first cohort of graduates obtained meaningful employment.

 <p><b>LEVEL 1: INTERNET NAVIGATOR</b></p> <p>Digitability uses technology as a hook to develop expressive and receptive language.</p>	 <p><b>LEVEL 2: THE DIGITAL CITIZEN</b></p> <p>Tech is not an isolated study; it is embedded in all of our independent living and work-ready skills.</p>	 <p><b>LEVEL 3: TECH-SAVVY AMBASSADOR</b></p> <p>Tech is to employment as phonics is to reading.</p>	 <p><b>LEVEL 4: PRIME PROFESSIONAL</b></p> <p>"75% of all jobs require some degree of tech literacy" - DOL</p>
<div>SAFETY/ INTERNET BASICS</div> <div>COLLABORATIONS/ WORKING ON A TEAM</div> <div>SOCIAL MEDIA/ SOCIALIZATION</div> <div>LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT</div> <div>PRIVATE / PUBLIC INFO</div> <div>MY PROJECT</div> <div>PORTFOLIO BUILDING</div>	<div>TIME MANAGEMENT</div> <div>GIVE &amp; RECEIVE FEEDBACK</div> <div>CLOUD DOCS</div> <div>WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION</div> <div>PROFESSIONAL EMAIL</div> <div>MY PROJECT</div> <div>PORTFOLIO BUILDING</div>	<div>PROJECT MANAGEMENT</div> <div>DESIGN</div> <div>TRUBLESHOOTING/ PROBLEM SOLVING</div> <div>SHOWCASING SKILL</div> <div>TEAMWORK</div> <div>MY PROJECT</div> <div>PORTFOLIO BUILDING</div>	<div>INTERVIEW SKILLS</div> <div>RESUME BUILDING</div> <div>CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS</div> <div>SELF-ADVOCACY IN THE WORKPLACE</div> <div>ONLINE RESUME</div> <div>COMPLETED PORTFOLIO</div>
<p>Level 1 is designed to teach students basic tech concepts, while simultaneously developing their social and communication skills. Systematically exploring tech and socialization helps prepare students to navigate the social nuance of sharing online as well as the hidden social norms of a workplace.</p>	<p>Level 2 trains students to use industry-standard workplace technologies such as word processing, email, presentation, spreadsheets. Through work-simulations students deliver presentations, manage budgets, plan travel, problem solve and learn how to give and receive feedback in a workplace, while navigating the most common workplace boundaries.</p>	<p>Level 3 trains students in specific job roles as well as the company cultures that are commonly seen in today's workplaces. Students develop tech routines and collaborate in and out of the cloud, strengthening their project management skills. Simultaneously, students learn how to showcase their skills to develop a sense of empowerment.</p>	<p>In Level 4, students package their online resume and work-ready portfolio to demonstrate the marketable tech and social skills they developed through the Digitability program. Fully prepared for the job-seeking process, students develop their self-advocacy plan for the workplace, equipping with them with the skills to obtain and sustain their employment.</p>

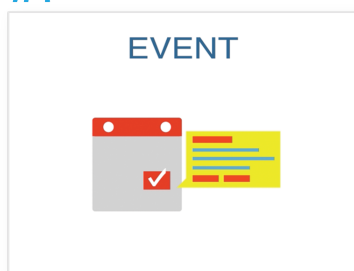




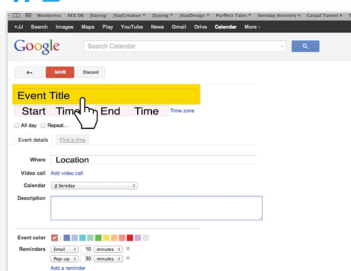
# Digitability™ Video & Lesson Plan Curriculum

The Digitability work-ready training program includes an easy-to-use web based software that provides teachers with a library of hundreds of video lessons. Each video is designed using the best, evidence-based practices such as principles of Applied Behavior Analysis.

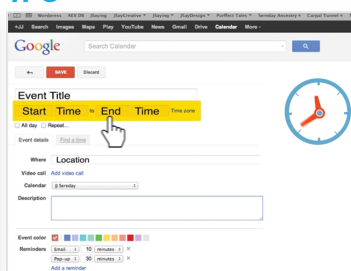
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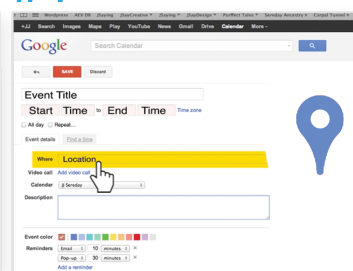
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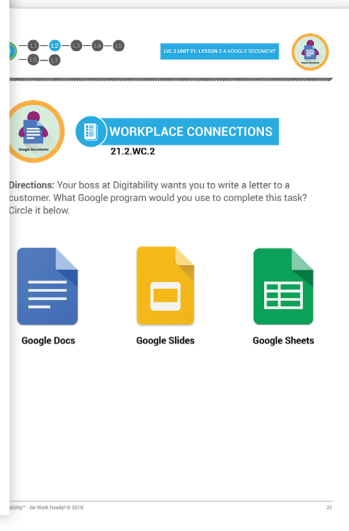
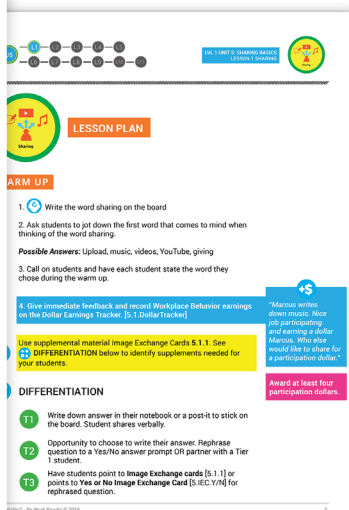
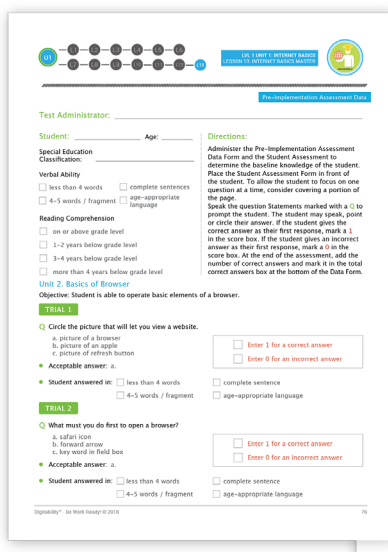
#3



#4



Each online video is facilitated via off-line curriculum resources including lesson plans, social games, differentiated supplements, work-simulations, and resources for IEPs and transition planning.





# Digitability™ Be Work-Ready!



## Josh Bornstein

Director of Special Projects, Union County Educational Services Commission

“The Digitability curriculum is uniquely suited for our programs serving transition-age students. It address prerequisite skills related to employability and independent living -- and all in the context of preparing our students to be responsible and informed digital citizens.”



## Jane Cordero, M. Ed

Secondary Special Education Coordinator at Hill-Freeman World Academy

“As we lead our students into a tech-driven future, Digitability moves students closer to their career and life goals.”



## Amy Wadsworth

NextWork Autism Program Director at Columbus Community Center

“There is such a wide variety of what students know, what they need to learn, and what they need to practice, and Digitability is really differentiated. Some students tended to go through lessons a lot faster than others. I allow them to access their account from home so they have independent practice and apply those work-ready concepts when we meet.”





## How It Works

1



### Whole Group Facilitation

Facilitators engage students with workplace skill training. Facilitators develop the language for technology and understand today's workplace communication

2



### Developing Social Capacity for the Workplace

Through evidence-based practices, students develop their communication skills and financial literacy. Students are empowered to self-advocate in the workplace.

3



### Work-Simulations

*Every student* has a role to play and develops workplace routines using tech. Students problem solve while working together to accomplish tasks.

4



### Independent Practices

Through independent practice using the online system, student comprehension of each measurable objective is assessed.

5



### Review Data and Monitor Progress

Data dashboards and progress monitoring tools identify areas of growth. Data reports can be shared with family, therapists, or other educational team members.

6



### Skill-Based-Portfolio

Students develop a skill-based portfolio, online resume and interviewing skills to showcase their abilities to employers.



# Real-World Work-Simulations

## Industry Standard Software:



Gmail



Google Search



Google Docs



Google Docs



Google Slides



Google Sheets



Google Calendar



Google Forms

## Low/Middle Skill Job Examples



Data Entry



Retail



Personal Care and Service



Social Media



Inventory



Administrative



Clerical Work



Production

Digitability can help you streamline existing programs, like garden projects. Using Digitability, students will develop new skills through stronger work-ready training. Every work-simulation includes differentiated resources that can be used to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles and profiles. Students use their experiences in the work-simulations to build their resume and work-ready portfolio.





# Digitability Classroom Economy for Workplace Behavior

Digitability's Classroom Economy streamlines social and emotional skill development. Digitability prepares students with the important communication skills needed to obtain and sustain employment, as well as to grow professionally in the workplace. Simultaneously, students develop financial literacy, paying bills and maintaining a budget.



Students **earn \$1** to reinforce behaviors that will make them successful in the workplace.



Students **spend \$1** on problematic workplace behaviors and develop self-regulation strategies.

***"Is this real money?"*** - Students Everywhere

While these dollars are not legal U.S. currency, they have real value in the skills they teach students. Students learn to interact within a real economy by paying bills for desk rent, internet use, and gym membership, as well as buy privileges like snacks and preferred activity time.



## Differentiation

***“Digitability has something for every single one of my students.”***

-Dawn Gieger, Special Education teacher  
in Philadelphia, PA.



### ***Everyone has a role to play with Differentiation.***

Individuals who participate in the Digitability program run the gamut; therefore, to create an inclusive environment, all of our resources are extensively differentiated to support a very wide range of learning and behavior profiles from adolescence into adulthood.

## **Behavior and Cognitive Characteristics of Students Served**

- Expressive and Receptive Language Needs
- Impairments Social Reciprocity
- Low Self-Esteem/Confidence
- Limited Verbal Ability
- Intellectual Disability (low IQ)
- Auditory Processing
- Attention, memory, organization Issues
- Sensory Processing Issues
- Difficulty Processing Emotions
- Anxiety and Impulsive Behavior
- English language learning needs
- ★ (Digitability serves individuals with and without special education needs)



# Digitability understands that **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL**

*You're busy. Let us help.*

As a company founded by a teacher, Digitability understands that special educators are tasks with many responsibilities. All resources are differentiated 3 ways to ensure that students can access, comment and develop new skills based on their personal needs. Each resource is created for a specific tier. The indicator for each tier is attached to the title in a green bubble. This bubble tells you quickly what tier this supplemental is for. (Keep in mind some tiers will share supplementals)

## Example



1. Distribute **WB.1.3 Self-Inventory Exit Ticket Worksheets** See **DIFFERENTIATION** for this activity to identify supplements needed for your students.



## DIFFERENTIATION

**T1**

Using **Tier 1 Self-Inventory Exit Ticket**, students will brainstorm their own ideas on personal behavior in the workplace.

**T2**

Using **Tier 2 Self-Inventory Exit Ticket**, students will use a checklist and sentence starters to evaluate their personal behavior.

**T3**

Using **Tier 3 Self-Inventory Exit Ticket**, students will use a checklist and/or modified questions with their Yes/NO Image Exchange Cards. Alternatively, students may use Trace and Learn Exit Ticket.

WB.1.3 SELF-INVENTORY  
EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.1

Directions: Write a paragraph describing the behaviors you have that will make you successful in the workplace.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Write a paragraph describing the behaviors you have that can be problematic in the workplace.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Digitability™ - Be Work Ready! © 2018

WB.1.3 SELF-INVENTORY  
EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.2

Directions: Complete the sentence starter to evaluate behaviors you need work on.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ behaviors that will help me be successful in the workplace.

These behaviors are \_\_\_\_\_ I can use \_\_\_\_\_

these behaviors in the workplace by \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_\_\_ behavior(s) that may be problematic in the workplace. Examples of these behaviors are \_\_\_\_\_ One behavior I will work on is \_\_\_\_\_

Digitability™ - Be Work Ready! © 2018

WB.1.3 TRACE 'N' LEARN  
EXIT TICKET | WB.1.3.3

Successful Workplace Behavior

Sharing, helping, encouraging, following directions, staying on task, greeting a guest

Digitability™ - Be Work Ready! © 2018



## **Digitability™ developed easy-to-use tools to help make progress monitoring and data collection easier.**

Digitability is a company driven by scaling measurable progress for people with neuro-diverse needs. We understand how important data is to informing instruction. That's why Digitability developed easy-to-use data and reporting tools to help make progress monitoring easier.



- ✓ Real time usage data
- ✓ Data dashboard
- ✓ Weekly emails on efficacy and fidelity
- ✓ Progress reports

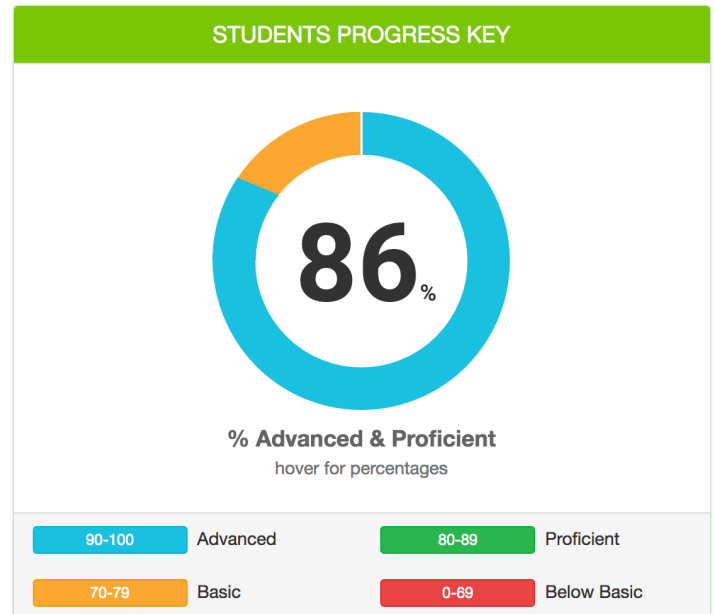




# Complete with Everything you need

Teachers, supervisors and administrators can easily track student progress and performance through our monitoring tool. You can generate a report with the click of a button and Digitability will automatically email reports on student efficacy and fidelity.

Digitability's curriculum is backed by the best, evidence-based practices such as Applied Behavior Analysis. Our specialist work with your educators to support data-driven instruction to increase outcomes throughout your entire organization.



**Mail**

**COMPOSE**

**Inbox (2)**  
Starred  
Important  
Sent Mail

**Digitability**  
to me

**Hi Sam Randall,**

"You're killin' it this month! You are completing 6+ lessons per week with your class or engaging your students 3+ days/week. Your administrator will see that you've earned Level 1 Status...like a boss. :)"

You're currently ranked #1 at Blue Valley North High School. To see how your ranking data compares to your organization wide data, sign in and view your MY PD tab.

Here is a list of your current students and the number of lesson completed this last week:

Student	Lesson completed
Matthew Beedlove	3
Nawal Cheema	2
Bill Chen	23
Kathryn Embry	2
Kris Garrett	0
Jacob Murphy	1
Connor Schaffer	53
Edward Shultz	2
Grace Walline	0

Keep up the great work!

The Digitability Team

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## Digitability™ gives special education teachers and support staff their own personal special education coach.

Digitability fidelity and data features inform the support and coaching teachers need to implement evidence-based practices. This personalized professional development supports student outcomes in special education.



- ✓ On-boarding
- ✓ On-going coaching
- ✓ On-site and live virtual training
- ✓ On-demand access to training
- ✓ Tech support
- ✓ Data analysis
- ✓ Weekly reports
- ✓ On-demand access to training





## Award-winning Work-ready Support Services Include:

At Digitability, we understand that you can not impact student efficacy without teacher fidelity using evidence-based practices. Our model of coaching and professional development is designed to prevent students from regressing or staying at the same level throughout their education.

### Teachers receive:

- ✓ On-boarding training and continued support
- ✓ Implementation Coordination (making it easy to use with existing demands)
- ✓ Technology integration coaching
- ✓ Social and Emotional Development Training
- ✓ Professional Development on Evidence-based Practices
- ✓ Technical support
- ✓ Data review and analysis to support student mastery
- ✓ Progress monitoring tools
- ✓ Weekly reports.
- ✓ Lesson Planning Support for all Domains Taught
- ✓ Custom Work-ready Resource Consulting (to help integrate existing programs)

### Administrators receive:

- ✓ Weekly and monthly reports on efficacy and fidelity
- ✓ Account Management Support
- ✓ Data dashboard
- ✓ Data Reports and Consulting for Admin (managing spec ed made easy)
- ✓ Communication tools
- ✓ Intervention and support summaries
- ✓ Tools for teacher observations and professional development



## For Educators

**Digitability makes managing special education easy.**





## For Administrators

**Digitability makes managing special education easy.**



### 1. IDEA Compliance

Digitability is a comprehensive transition program rooted in Applied Analysis (ABA)



### 2. Data Dashboard

Get data reporting and analytics

#### 3a. Educator Fidelity

Real-time feedback on facilitator usage and progress

#### 3b. Student Mastery

1-click reporting for progress monitoring



### 3. PD and Training

Empower teachers of all ages to use technology and project-based learning

### 4. Ongoing Support

Every teacher and admin had a support specialist ready to answer and assist



#### 3a. Educator Implementation

Digitability comes with on-site training and implementation strategies

#### 3b. Custom Solutions

Data-driven response to intervention tools for admins and supervisors



### 5. Cloud-Based Platform

No IT-support needed to bring Digitability into your organisation



# How tech means jobs ahead for kids with cognitive disabilities

Individuals with intellectual disabilities have it particularly rough when it comes to getting hired. Here's how some are addressing the problem.

Article by: **Marguerite Reardon**

As a special education teacher at a public high school in Philadelphia, Michele McKeone prepared students with autism for life after graduation. But she quickly discovered a glaring hole in the curriculum: a complete lack of digital literacy.

When the US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than half of all jobs require some degree of technology skills, that's a problem. McKeone feared her students were destined for menial, low-wage positions, if they could get any jobs at all.

McKeone saw an opportunity to use technology and project-based learning as a way to teach important technical skills, as well as foster the ability to think critically, solve problems and live independently.

She quit her job last year to focus on her startup, Digitability, developer of an online curriculum that teaches those technical skills. Initially, it was called Autism Expressed, but she changed the name after expanding the program to kids with other cognitive disabilities. Her program, which has won several technology contests, is being used throughout the Philadelphia School District, where she used to work, and in schools in several other states, including in New Jersey and California.

Her program is just one way individuals and companies are working to give people with cognitive disabilities a better shot at succeeding in the workplace with higher-skill jobs. Efforts range from promoting more technology education to companies and employers expanding how they look for talent. They help to dispel the misperception that individuals with intellectual disabilities aren't suited to be in tech.

“

***There are roles that people with intellectual disability can fill in many businesses, if they have the right training and support. I'm trying to raise the bar to make sure everyone is taught these important skills.***

”

These initiatives address a real problem. The unemployment rate for all people with disabilities is nearly twice the rate of people without disabilities, according to the US Labor Department. People with cognitive or developmental differences, such as autism or Down syndrome, are even worse off.

"Most of us want a meaningful job, and people with intellectual disabilities are no different," said Gary Siperstein, director of the Center for Social Development and Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston. "But in spite of tens of millions of dollars spent on programs for better outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities, the needle hasn't moved much."

There's reason to be optimistic. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 requires schools and state vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide transition services to students with disabilities to help them find "meaningful work." Agencies must allocate at least 15 percent of their federal funding toward such transition efforts. This push from the feds could help spur more schools to think about including digital and computer skills in their curriculum and transition plans for students with disabilities.

## Getting tech in their hands

McKeone is both a pioneer and an evangelist when it comes to getting technology in the hands of children with cognitive disabilities. While schools often see the value of providing technology as a way to assist students with disabilities, it's been a harder sell convincing them that people with cognitive impairments should learn skills like web page development and coding.

Even learning how to use the most basic online apps can have a huge impact on people with cognitive differences. For instance, Google Calendar is the mobile equivalent of the wall calendar that many students in special education use to stay on task.

Digital media lets many students showcase their skills in a way that may not be apparent in traditional assessments.

"I just wanted to teach them everything I learned in art school," McKeone said. "We live in this world where everything is digital and they should be able to participate in that."

The program, designed for middle and high school students, includes 250 separate lessons that use





# How tech means jobs ahead for kids with cognitive disabilities

Individuals with intellectual disabilities have it particularly rough when it comes to getting hired. Here's how some are addressing the problem.

Article by: **Marguerite Reardon**

research-based approaches for breaking down concepts and teaching skills in explicit steps. The lessons offer short videos with animation to introduce no more than a couple of concepts at a time. Students are continually asked to demonstrate their knowledge and are rewarded with virtual badges.

The curriculum gives them a foundation to build skills that can be used in the workplace. It's divided into four modules and teaches skills like using Gmail and social media, as well as advanced tasks like coding.

McKeone plans to work with companies to develop certification programs so that Digitability can be tailored for specific workplace skills.

## 'Food, flowers or filth'

Training people with intellectual disabilities to work with technology is the best way to prepare them for jobs outside of "food, flowers or filth," said Jonathan Lazar, a computer science professor at Towson University in Maryland. Lazar is referring to food service jobs, basic landscaping and janitorial work.

But there needs to be a change in how people perceive people with intellectual disabilities such as Down syndrome and autism

"There is this gap in perception, where school boards or rehabilitation service coordinators see providing tech training to people who are blind or deaf as useful, but for people with cognitive impairments they say, Why bother spending the money?" he said.

Lazar has been involved in several research studies looking at how people with Down syndrome use and interact with technology. He found that



they're detail-oriented and often more able than their neurotypical peers to quickly decipher Captchas, the scrambled-letter challenge-response tests used online to determine whether a user is a human or a computer bot.

**“  
We live in this  
world where  
everything is  
digital and they  
should be able to  
participate in that.  
”**

As a result, he said, individuals with Down syndrome are good candidates for many jobs in the IT field, including data entry or web content management.

Companies such as Microsoft and SAP, meanwhile, are beginning to look at the strengths, rather than focusing on the weaknesses, of some individuals on the autism spectrum. The companies have begun tailoring their job applications and hiring practices to recruit people with autism who have

technical skills their companies need, but who may never have made it through the interview process because they have quirky social behaviors.

In 2013, SAP committed to recruiting 700 people, or about 1 percent of its workforce, in this way. Microsoft announced a pilot program in 2015 to hire people with autism at its headquarters in Redmond, Washington. Companies like accounting firm Ernst & Young are following their lead.

While experts such as Lazar are happy that companies are focusing on the strengths of a group of people who are usually overlooked, McKeone is bothered that these companies are focusing only on the abilities of a small subset of people on the autism spectrum who may be considered to have greater intellectual capacity, rather than taking a broader approach that looks for ways to incorporate people of all cognitive abilities into their workforce.

"There are roles that people with intellectual disability can fill in many businesses, if they have the right training and support," she said. "I'm trying to raise the bar to make sure everyone is taught these important skills."

**Read the  
full article:  
[bit.ly/digitability](http://bit.ly/digitability)**

## How a NoLibs startup's partnership with Pa. will help Philadelphia's schools

A Philadelphia startup announced a major partnership with the state on Tuesday that it says will help prepare more than 1,500 city students with cognitive disabilities to enter the workplace.

At an event held with district educators Tuesday, Northern Liberties-based Digitability celebrated the integration of its pre-employment and work-ready programming model into 17 high schools as part of the partnership with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

“When we implement the program in the school district of Philadelphia, with such a large number of students, we’re creating a pipeline of qualified candidates into organizations,” said Michele McKeone, Digitability's founder and CEO.

Aimed at students between 14 and 21 with diverse neurological needs, the program takes a holistic approach to preparing students for jobs through a combination of technology training and behavior modification using streamlined evidence-based practices. Through the state partnership, it comes at no cost to the district.

Digitability's work addresses a pervasive issue of unemployment among adults with cognitive disabilities. According to federal data, about 32 percent of working-age adults with disabilities are employed and McKeone said if they do have jobs, they're often pigeonholed into the three Fs — food, flowers and filth.

She wants to help change that by arming students with social, emotional and technical skills to work in a much wider range of professional positions, from data entry to web design.

Learning the hard skills is important, she said, but often the biggest hurdle can be teaching students with cognitive disabilities how to interact and communicate in an office. Addressing both needs at once can change the numbers, she said, as about 70 percent of Digitabilities graduates in its first cohort are employed.

“In the workplace, you’re also responsible for managing your time, your tasks. You also have to learn about problem-solving, flexibility, all of those other skills beyond what the job role is,” said McKeone, who developed the program after working as a high school special education teacher in the city's school district



COURTESY OF DIGITABILITY

Digitability announced the partnership at a launch event on Tuesday at the Hill Freedman World Academy.

for seven years. When her work building tech skills into the classroom resulted in her students winning third place in the Philadelphia Regional Computer Fair Competition in 2010, she knew she had to expand her reach.

"It's a clear demonstration of leveling the playing field, having people with neurodiverse needs compete with neurotypical peers," she said. After presenting her business plans in competitions in 2011 and 2013, she eventually left teaching in 2015 to start running Digitability full-time. In 2016, McKeone raised a \$500,000 seed round, with half coming from Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

"Leaving the classroom was very hard. I loved teaching, but the impact I really wanted to have was larger than my classroom. I knew there were other teachers who needed these resources," she said.

A notable factor of Digitability's program is its scale. While smaller nonprofits and organizations tackle workforce development among young adults with cognitive disabilities, they're not often at the scale Digitability is reaching through its most recent partnerships and those in the works for the future.

Since the partnership is statewide, they're looking to launch in Pittsburgh next, she said. It already operates in five states. The Philadelphia launch is so far the company's largest.

"We're able to have a very scalable impact across the city, the state and the country," McKeone said.

To develop both sides of the equation, Digitability is also focused on preparing businesses for bringing on employees with neurodiverse needs through helping them form a strategy and then working with them to set up specific tracks, simulations and certifications within the program that match employers' needs.

"We're working to create an ecosystem with partnerships with the state and employees who want to learn about neurodiversity and learning more about neurodiversity strategies at workplaces.

There is a distinct and growing gap between the demand for workers in and around the tech industry and available, prepared employees.

A study released by the Economy League last May stressed the importance of the tech sector when it comes to overall growth but outlined that thousands of jobs in the field remain unfilled.

That growth isn't just demand for high-level coders and engineers. Another report, **this time from the Brookings Institution** and also released last May, estimated that as much as 57 percent of 104,000 well-paying, middle-skill jobs positions in the city's "innovation district" of West Market in Center City and University City are in adjacent support positions that don't require a four-year degree.

**Michelle Caffrey**

Reporter

*Philadelphia Business Journal*







If our expectation is that people with autism or other disabilities will have opportunities available to them to fully participate in communities to be gainfully employed and to have meaningful life experiences, then teaching digital literacy is going to be a big part of that.

–David Mandell, Sc. D. Director, Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research, University of Pennsylvania, Associate Director, Center for Autism Research, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Digitability is impressive and very useful for students with and without disabilities learning to use technology in the classroom.

– Patrick Timony, Adaptive Technology Librarian, DC Public Library

Digitability combines skill enhancement & real world applications that assists students with learning how to understand, interact, and develop the tools to find their voice in this world.

–Alton Strange, Transition Coordinator, School District of Philadelphia

Digitability is a forward-thinking program, facilitating inclusion for people of varied abilities, including those on the autism spectrum, in a way no other program does.

– Dennis Morgan, Executive Director for Educational Services at The Bancroft School



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