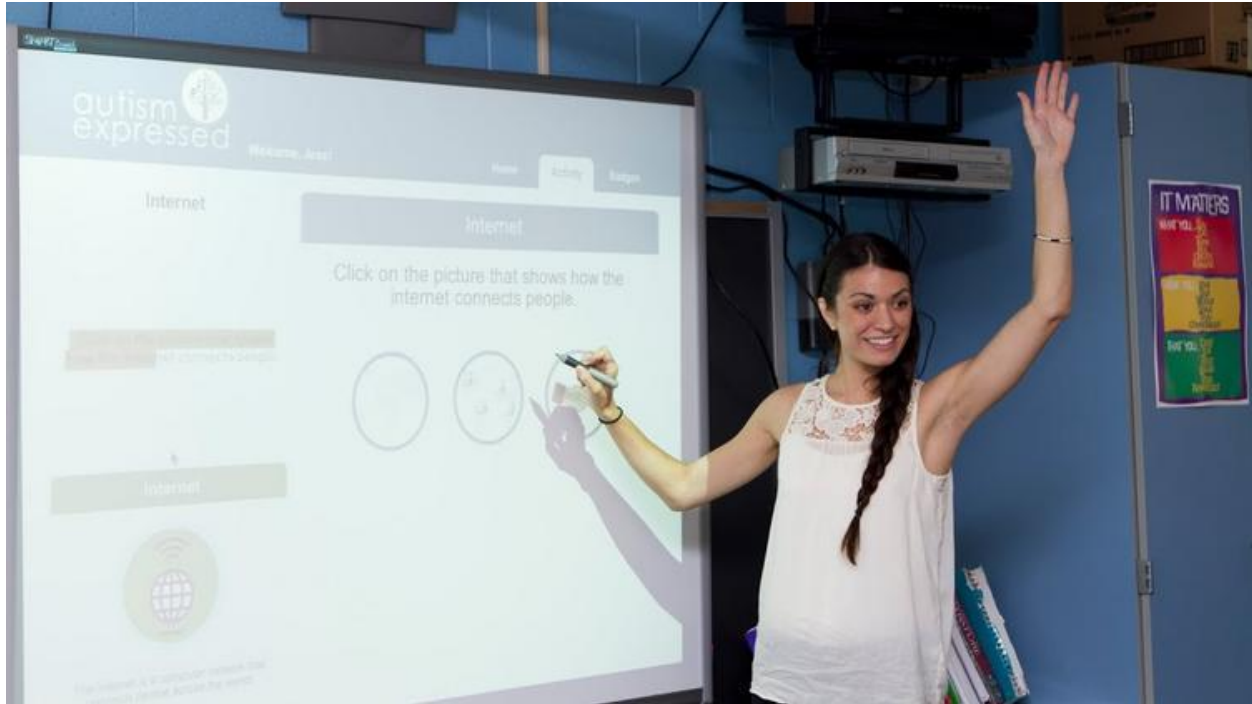


Philadelphia edtech company Digitability launches new training tool as demand surges



[Enlarge](#)

Michele McKeone said her edtech company Digitability has seen a surge of interest as the Covid-19 pandemic pushed school districts to find virtual training options for neurodiverse and cognitively disabled students.

COMPANIES IN THIS ARTICLE



By [Michelle Caffrey](#) – Reporter, Philadelphia Business Journal
2 hours ago

[Michele McKeone](#) watched through Instagram as her friends learned new recipes and picked up quarantine hobbies when the Covid-19 pandemic brought the world to a halt in March. At the same time, her Philadelphia edtech company Digitability was suddenly moving at a breakneck speed.

“We’ve been busier than ever,” she said.

School districts are federally required to offer transitional work training to certain students with special education needs starting at age 14, McKeone said, but when Covid-19 hit, schools' usual go-to options – hospitals or retail stores – were no longer an option.

So they turned to Digitability, which had already designed a workforce and digital literacy platform for neurodiverse students or those with cognitive disabilities that could be used virtually, in-person or in a hybrid mode. Now, as the company has doubled the number of states in which it operates to 25, it’s also rolling out a new financial literacy feature called Bankability that McKeone called “a game changer.”

Bankability builds off of Digitability’s existing “social economy” that teachers can customize for students, where they earn virtual currency for exhibiting work-ready behaviors and can spend it to earn rewards.

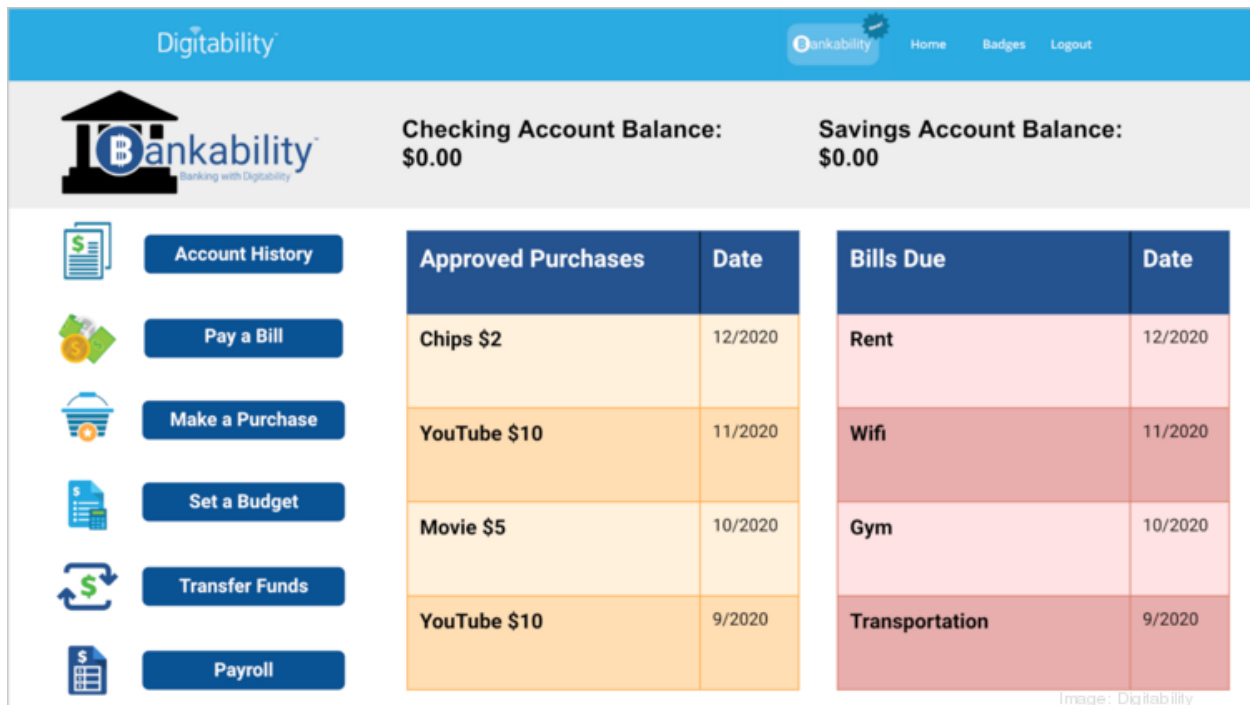
McKeone said they realized they could take the experience a step further by creating an online banking system for the currency the students earn. In Bankability, students are assigned bills like rent, Wi-Fi and transportation; have purchase options like seeing a movie or buying snacks; and are given both checking and savings accounts to manage.

In the classroom, rewards would typically equate to actual snacks and other perks, but teachers have been working with students’ families to tie the program to at-home benefits like extra time to play video games while schools remain in a virtual mode.

Right now, Bankability's beta version is offered to all of Digitability’s existing customers, but McKeone sees it as a potential standalone product in the future. While they exclusively work with school districts at the moment, it’s possible it could also turn into a consumer-facing option in the future.

So far, when she mentions the new Bankability feature to potential customers, they stop her there.

“They say, 'Well you should’ve just led with that,'” she said.



[Enlarge](#)

An example of the Bankability dashboard, part of Digitability's digital literacy training program.

DIGITABILITY

Bankability was built with the help of a \$5,000 grant from Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Southeastern Pennsylvania, which backed Digitability in its \$500,000 seed round in 2016.

The new grant came as part of BFTP's \$2 million Save Our Startups initiative, which focused on providing local startups with funding to improve health outcomes and create social impact during the Covid-19 crisis.

Digitability was a good fit for the funding since BFTP approaches health investing through a big-picture approach, said [Jennifer Hartt](#), director of investments for health and digital health at BFTP.

“We look at health very broadly, including what it is to thrive. With developmental disabilities or just neurodiversity itself, that can end up meaning that it's beneficial to have other supportive things, whether it's accommodations in school, or transitional training to being out of school that really looks at the whole person and looks at their lives in a very whole way,” Hartt said.

Digitability ties that all together, she said, and McKeone is especially well-suited to run the company since she's a former special education teacher with a master's degree in

education who understands what it's like to work with these students one-on-one in the classroom.

Right now, the Digitability team is a mix of a little less than 10 full-time employees and contractors from all over the country. While the company had an office at 1100 Front St., McKeone said she decided not to renew their lease and moved to an all-remote format this fall.

So far, the rise in demand also hasn't necessitated a hiring push since the company was built with scalable tech processes. It does, however, use a high-touch onboarding process in order to reduce the training overload and then abandonment that usually happens with edtech software.

"We only introduce a teacher to what they need to know to get started tomorrow, the first lesson," she said, adding every teacher is assigned a dedicated point person to guide them as they move through the program.

Since the 2016 seed round, the company has grown organically through revenue alone, McKeone said, and they're in no rush to seek out additional funding. She fielded an acquisition offer two years ago, but she felt it wasn't the right time since Digitability was just starting to scale.

So what's next? McKeone said in addition to growing Bankability, the company is also in the midst of working on a new partnership that would better connect Digitability's students with future employers.