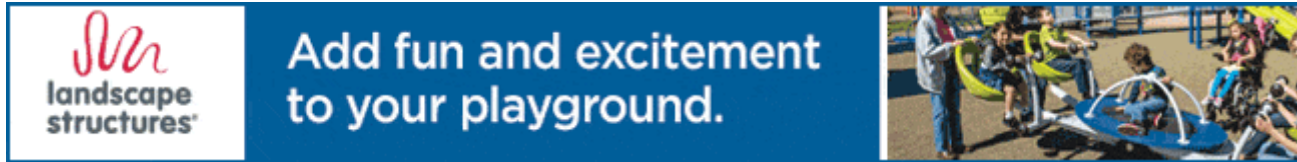


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'Fall' for ed tech with 5 free tech tools to foster engagement

Angela Cleveland

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If the weather is cooling, the leaves are changing colors, and you are wondering, "Where has the time gone and why am I starting another year staying late at work?" you might be a teacher!

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connect students to content. They consider their work-life balance and strive for ways to work smarter, not harder.

What were your goals for the new school year? Less time on paperwork and grading? Collect data and assess student growth more efficiently? Stretch your budget with free resources? It's not too late to make those dreams a reality!

There are several *free* educational technology tools that can help every educator achieve their goals! Many have paid add-on features, but the free versions are sufficient to explore and meet your objectives.

Access free, engaging lessons for every content area and grade level.

[Nearpod](#) is a presentation platform, a student engagement tool, a way to collect data organically, a resource for lessons, and so much more! The best way to learn about Nearpod is to sign up for a free account.

On your homepage, select "Explore Lessons" from the drop-down menu on the right side of the screen. From there you can search for lessons in your content area. To get started, search "Teaching Tolerance" for examples of free lessons for all grade levels that are ideal for social studies/history teachers, literacy teachers, school counselors and others.

Another great resource is "Common Sense Media" for digital citizenship lessons for all grade levels. You can also simply type in the content area you teach and scroll through lessons.

Assess learning and engage students in short, video-based reflections.

[Flipgrid](#) is increasingly popular with educators because the video discussion platform gives each child a voice. It allows every student to participate and share insights and feedback.

Rather than relying upon standard hand-written exit cards (which limits communication to one-directional feedback: from the student to teacher), Flipgrid allows students to share responses in short videos. This is especially helpful to foster continued student engagement and provides a platform for students who struggle with writing to express themselves.

Educators use Flipgrid for icebreakers, reflections on lessons, feedback, conversation, and so much more! Responding in a 90-second video clip to a reflection question means students are focused on content and learning, and it helps students to make meaningful connections to the material and to each other!

Schedule meetings with ease.

Meeting coordination is a time-consuming task for educators. Often, just planning a parent meeting with a group of educators with different prep periods can take more time than the actual meeting!

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available and not available and reasons why. How can one cut through the clutter and schedule meetings easily? Simple! Check out [Doodle!](#)

Select a series of dates/times and share the link. As people respond, it's easy to see when most people are available to schedule a meeting. One of the great things about Doodle is the ease of use.

Respondents do not need to sign up for an account to respond. Doodle isn't limited to meetings; you can use it to vote on the location for the next staff happy hour, book club selection, and more!

Organize your schedule and collaborate with colleagues.

Are you a perpetual "to-do" list maker? Are you a fan of post-it notes for reminders? If so, check out [Google Keep!](#)

It's essentially shareable notes with links and pics in your pocket. You can categorize to-dos by shopping lists, household chores, work tasks and more. Share notes with family or colleagues to make checking off items a collaborative process.

For example, a shared shopping list means anyone in your household can add to it and any family member who hits the local market can review the list and cross off purchased items. Many students use Google Keep to keep track of homework and other tasks.

The reminder feature is helpful to schedule reminders at the start of each class period to nudge forgetful students to write down assignments. Many students share the note with parents who can easily see what the homework is and when their child crosses off each completed assignment at home.

No need to ask, "Did you do your homework?" A parent can simply check Google Keep and see their child's progress.

Educators share Google Keep notes for shared projects. Planning a big event at school like a club project, talent show, graduation, or career fair? No need for check-ins on progress when it's easy to check the to-do list!

Automatically grade assessments and easily collect data.

Use [Google Forms](#) to collect data, grade quizzes, and more! Educators love using [EZ Analyze](#) and other similar add-ons to automatically grade quizzes and track time on tasks.

There are lots of add-ons that allow users to automatically email respondents, students, families, etc. The investment in automation can feel daunting at first, but it saves a considerable amount of time in the end.

Let this school year be the year you take control of your schedule by using educational technology tools that allow you to engage more, be more efficient, and provide you with a platform to take back control of

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The job of educators can be all-consuming. We invest our hearts and souls into what we do. Being more mindful about our tasks can free up time to be more proactive and even take less work home.

Implementing educational technology to streamline tasks is a form of self-care that will yield benefits for your students and for you.

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About the Author



Angela Cleveland is the co-author of "50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective" and "Coding Capers: Luci and the Missing Robot." She has 15 years of experience as a school counselor and received the "2017 New Jersey School Counselor of the Year" award. She is an Executive Board Member and Webmaster for the [New Jersey School Counselor Association \(NJSCA\)](#). Angela Cleveland is the Program Director for [NCWIT Counselors for Computing \(ncwit.org/c4c\)](#), which provides professional school counselors with information and resources they can use to support ALL students as they explore computer science education and careers.



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