Best Tools for Back-to-School 2019 | Common Sense Education

🖶Print | Save as PDF

Curriculum and Lesson Planning

Common Curriculum

Sleek lesson planner replaces bulky binders, promotes collaboration

Bottom line: Ditch pen-and-paper planning; embrace the flexibility of collaborative lesson planning and calendar design.

Grades: Pre-K–12 Price: Free, Free to try, Paid Free for the Basic plan. $4.89-$6.99 per month for Pro plan. $7.50 per teacher per month (for 20 teachers - price per teacher goes down with more teachers) for Schools plan. $1,500 when purchasing for 3 or more schools for Site License. Free 30-day trial also available.

Goalbook Toolkit

Set tailored targets with pricey but worth-it kit of tools, strategies

Bottom line: You pay for quality with Goalbook Toolkit, including access to clear, well-crafted learning goals and strategies that allow for far easier differentiation.

Grades: Pre-K–12 Price: Free to try, Paid 30-day free trial. There are three paid plans: $995 per year including district/administrator support, $395 per teacher per year with district/administrator support, or $795 per teacher per year with online PD and 1:1 coaching for teachers. The latter two plans require a minimum purchase of 10+ licenses.

OER Commons

Free, easy access to a wealth of resources

Bottom line: Impressive resource opens access to quality materials for all educators.

Planboard

Handy one-stop digital lesson planner saves time in the long run

Bottom line: Although it requires a lot of setup time, this snappy tool centralizes the essential components of lesson planning.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid Free for individual teachers; lesson sharing is available with a Chalk.com Collaborate subscription for $60 per year.

Versal

Slick course creator is full-featured, but lessons remain traditional

Bottom line: A great option for putting your course materials online in a clean, attractive way, but don't rely on it for all your instruction.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid $5 per month or $50 per year for Pro features (progress tracking, private courses), or $7 per student annually for institutional features.

Wizer

Digital worksheet builder lets students show learning in multiple ways

Bottom line: Students will appreciate this 21st-century take on worksheets, and teachers will love all the different options for creation and assessment.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid Wizer Lite is free for up to two classes. The premium version is $69 per year and includes additional features, such as unlimited classrooms, differentiation options, student insights, and Google Classroom integration.

Feedback, Assessment, and Portfolios

Classkick

Easy-to-use, real-time monitoring, feedback, and assessment for 1-to-1

Bottom line: It's a great option for teachers who want to go paperless, provide specific feedback, and encourage collaboration among students in 1-to-1 classrooms.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Free to try, Paid The free version offers unlimited assignments and feedback options. After a free trial, the Pro version is $9.99 per month; users can access grade automation, chatting options, extra editing tools, and more. A school plan is also available via quote.

Seesaw: The Learning Journal

Versatile digital portfolio appeals to teachers, students, and parents

Bottom line: A powerful multimedia learning and communication tool that demonstrates student progress over time.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid Seesaw Plus is $120 per year, and gives teachers more privacy options and other features. Seesaw for Schools, which includes school-wide reporting, is priced per student.

Spiral

Provide instant feedback with collaborative, multimedia assessment tool

Bottom line: Engaging, easy-to-use tool that supports both formative and summative assessment while allowing for student collaboration.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free, Paid Spiral Teacher is free and covers up to five classrooms. The Pro Teacher subscription is $39 per teacher per year and offers unlimited classrooms, student accounts for home use, and progress reports. The Pro School subscription is estimated at $3 per student and offers Pro Teacher features plus additional ones, including full integration with the school's LMS.

FreshGrade

A fresh way to capture, document, and share student learning

Bottom line: Multimedia documentation tools help communicate learning and expand assessment, and the addition of a gradebook sets this tool apart; still, student experience could use some polish.

Grades: 3–9 Price: Free Free for teachers, district pricing is available.

Flipgrid

Pose questions, spark thoughtful video responses with stellar tool

Bottom line: A simple way for students and teachers to create online discussion, as long as your classroom culture is mature enough to use it wisely.

Formative

Superb real-time assessment tool a fit for 1-to-1, BYOD classrooms

Bottom line: Cleverly designed for teachers, Formative offers a flexible and attractive solution for gathering a variety of student response types and offering individualized feedback.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free, Paid Basic features are free and include unlimited assignments and live student responses. Premium features are $12 per month (paid yearly) or a month-to-month price of $15 per month and include enhanced performance tracking, collaboration, advanced question types, and more.

Kahoot!

Game-like student-response tool can spark competitive fun

Bottom line: Effortlessly fun quizzing that can lead to productive formative assessment and student reflection if implemented effectively.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free, Paid While Kahoot! is free, there's a Plus version for teachers priced at $1 per teacher per month, which includes a shared folder for quizzes, co-creation and co-editing of quizzes, and advanced reporting. A $3 per month Pro version adds an image library.

Kaizena

Nifty add-on enables audio and text feedback in Google Docs

Bottom line: If your classroom relies a lot on Google Docs, this might just be the feedback tool you're looking for.

Grades: 6–12 Price: Free Free for teachers.

Organization and Productivity

Google Classroom

Simplify communication, collaboration, and document sharing

Bottom line: Google Classroom is a great way to manage and organize learning, though teachers who need more features may need to look elsewhere.

Turnitin

Encourage original work and give feedback with this valuable tool

Bottom line: Beyond the convenience factor, it's almost a necessity for the teaching of writing in today's digital world.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Paid School-wide subscription pricing starts at $2.50 per student, based on population.

Kami

Versatile annotation tool helps users critically connect with content

Bottom line: Kami is an effective way to promote student interaction with texts, authentic documents, and pictures.

Grades: 4–12 Price: Free, Paid Free version includes basic annotation features and comes with in-app advertising. Teacher Plan is $99 per year, which supports 150 students and includes additional features. School/district pricing is available.

Evernote

Organize digital content with full-featured web clipper and notebook

Bottom line: Students and teachers can learn to better manage their digital lives via this comprehensive organizational tool.

Grades: 6–12 Price: Free, Free to try, Paid Basic, Plus, and Premium plans available. Basic plans are free; additional plans and in-app purchases range from $2.99 to $7.99 per month. Yearly pricing is also available. Plus plans give users up to 1GB of uploads per month and Premium plans add even more features.

Microsoft Teams

Collaborative platform helps manage multiple groups and projects

Bottom line: It offers a ton of options for integrating learning; the lack of some typical LMS features may make it a better fit for small groups or nontraditional group configurations.

Grades: 6–12 Price: Free, Paid Microsoft Teams is included with Office 365 subscriptions, which range from free to $6 per month per student and $8 per month per teacher.

Notability

Flexible note-taking tool empowers learners of all abilities

Bottom line: An excellent tool that lets students make their notes thorough and useful in the way that best suits their learning styles and abilities.

Grades: 6–12 Price: $9.99

Notebook - Take Notes, Sync

Curate and organize all kinds of content into customizable notebooks

Bottom line: From the novice to the super-organized student, Notebook's versatility is a rare free find.
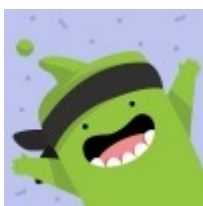

Diigo

Social bookmarking encourages discovery, collaboration, and sharing

Bottom line: With a Diigo educator account, teachers and students have a safe space to organize, customize, and share Web content while learning about a variety of subjects.

Grades: 7–12 Price: Free, Paid Users can mark and highlight 1,000 items a year with a free Diigo subscription; two paid versions, which cost from $20-$40 a year, provide unlimited bookmarking, screen capture, and highlighting capabilities. The educator account, which is also free, lets teachers bookmark and save 20 cached pages a month (users are allowed to save multiple versions of the same page at different times to track changes) and provides unlimited highlighting capabilities

Parent and Student Communication

ClassDojo

Handy management and portfolio tool can promote student growth

Bottom line: With thoughtful implementation, it can help teachers and parents support students' growth through goal-setting, feedback, and celebration.

[Bloomz](#)

Full-featured parent-teacher communication platform

Bottom line: One-stop multi-tool for parents, teachers, and students.

[Remind](#)

Teachers' text reminders keep students -- and parents -- up to speed

Bottom line: Well-designed, highly effective messaging tool has the potential to keep students and families connected with their schools.

Grades: Pre-K–12 Price: Free, Paid Remind is free, but if you use it to fundraise for events, they charge a fee of $0.50 per transaction. School and district plans are also available.

[Skype](#)

Live video communication has potential to open lots of doors

Bottom line: With a bit of work and a measure of patience, Skype can be an excellent classroom tool to expand students' horizons.

[Edmodo](#)

Manage classes, content, and communication with social LMS platform

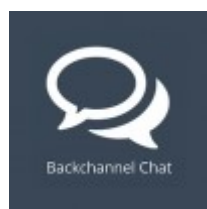**Bottom line**: This free platform allows for teacher-monitored classroom communication but lacks excitement.

Grades: 4–12 Price: Free This website is free to use for all features, but it does contain advertisements on the teacher side.

Google Hangouts

Communication, learning, and fun converge nicely in Google's slick platform

Bottom line: It runs like a dream, works on all devices, and can be used in so many ways to enhance interactive learning.
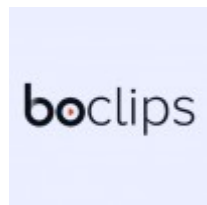
Backchannel Chat

Real-time, moderated online discussions can engage and encourage

Bottom line: Backchannel Chat offers a fun and safe way to hold real-time online discussions that might just increase engagement, interest, and even learning.

Grades: 7–12 Price: Free, Paid The free version supports 30 students and has limited capacity for discussions and no private messages or avatars. The full version costs $15 per year for 50 students or $299 per year for 80 students.

Presentation and Video

Boclips

Safe-for-classroom videos curated by teachers for teachers

Bottom line: It's a pressure-free place to start looking for high-quality videos to

supplement existing lessons in traditional, one-to-one, or flipped classroom models.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free to try, Paid Teachers can get a free trial for up to a year, but the pricing structure after that isn't clear.

Mentimeter

Call on everybody at once with flexible, interactive presentation tool

Bottom line: This flexible tool supports the creation of dynamic presentations and can help teachers strike a balance between information and interaction.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid Mentimeter is free but with limited questions. The Basic version at $4.99 per month allows for unlimited questions, quizzes, more support, and the ability to export results. The Pro version costs $11.99 per month and adds options for customization and branding.

Nearpod

Interactive slideshow tool engages students, promotes collaboration

Bottom line: This effective tool leverages the capabilities of 1-to-1 environments and offers both teacher- and student-paced learning.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Paid The Silver edition is free for up to 30 students, the Gold edition is $120 per teacher per year for up to 50 students, and the Platinum edition is $349 per year for up to 75 students. In-app purchases are available for additional content, and schools and districts can receive volume discounts.

Edpuzzle

Crop, customize, and remix online video content with interactive tool

Bottom line: As a flipped classroom or student creation tool, there are lots of opportunities for use, but teachers will need to be creative if they want students to engage.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free, Paid The basic version is free. The Pro Teacher plan is in development but is slated to cost $6.50 per month. The Pro School plan starts at $55 per month (call for quote).

Explain Everything Whiteboard

Powerhouse tool for creating stellar multimedia presentations

Bottom line: Teachers and students can make dynamic presentations that involve different types of media in this innovative, fun app.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free to try, Paid There's a 30-day free trial. The Education Plan is $4.99 per user, per year (minimum of 5 users). Individual plans are $24.99 per year.

Loom

Create, present, and assess with free, effortless screencasting

Bottom line: This intuitive tool is excellent for recording and responding to screencasts of any length.
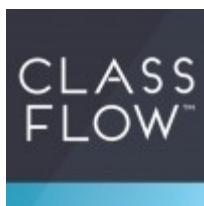
Screencastify

Easy screen-recording tool facilitates outside-the-box instruction

Bottom line: If you have access to Chrome, Screencastify is an easy instructional tool that lets teachers and students communicate in new and creative ways.

Grades: 3–12 Price: Free, Paid Free version offers up to 50 watermarked videos per month and a maximum length of 10 minutes per video; premium version ($24 per year) removes the watermark and unlocks more features, including trimming and exporting capabilities. Bulk pricing is available for groups of teachers and districts.

[ClassFlow](#)

Robust lesson-creation, presentation tool offers built-in assessment

Bottom line: This powerful tool supports connected and blended learning from instruction to assessment, though it's best used to enhance already great instruction.

Professional Growth

[BetterLesson](#)

Exemplary Common Core-aligned lessons from rock star peers at large

Bottom line: Get a head start on the Common Core transition with this professional community for great classroom-ready lessons.

Grades: Pre-K–12 Price: Free The site and its resources are free.

[KQED Teach](#)

Super PD resource for making media in the classroom

Bottom line: Stay on top of the trends and take the fear out of media-making in the classroom.

Grades: Pre-K–12 Price: Free

Teaching Channel

See colleagues in action with digital PD for discussion and reflection

Bottom line: This video library of actual classroom teaching offers opportunities for professional educators to watch, share, and improve their craft.

Grades: K–12 Price: Free, Free to try, Paid Public features on the site are free. Schools and districts interested in the Teams feature have the option for a two-week trial. The developer can be contacted for further information on fees and pricing.

The Current

Engaging space for tech-forward instruction and teacher collaboration

Bottom line: A great resource to share and gather ideas on teaching with technology and media, but there are some bugs that need fixing.

Voxer Walkie Talkie Messenger

Voice- and text-messaging app is a teacher PLN standout

Bottom line: A cool tool for teachers to collaborate with each other (but maybe not with their students).

Grades: 7–12 Price: Free, Paid Optional Pro version is $3.99/month.

[Twitter](https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/best-tools-for-back-t)

Smart classroom tool if used with care; priceless for PLNs

Bottom line: Twitter offers something for everyone: information, resources, and an easy way to connect with just about anyone.