1. WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY?
Digital literacy is the ability to successfully use a range of digital technology for a variety of purposes. People who are digitally literate use technology to understand, communicate, manage and locate knowledge and solve problems. In the classroom, digital literacy takes on many forms, an example of which includes teachers and students creating online content to be utilised in and out of the classroom. As such, high school students must learn to critically evaluate online resources for accuracy of information, as well as choose appropriate media to showcase their learning and share it with the world.

“Learners in the internet age don’t need more information. They need to know how to efficiently use the massive amount of information available at their fingertips – to determine what’s credible, what’s relevant, and when it’s useful to reference.”
- Anna Sabramowicz

2. WHAT ISN’T DIGITAL LITERACY?
Digital literacy is not giving each student a laptop and expecting them to type essays. It is the way technology skills are embedded into teacher student relationships, broadening the way teachers present lessons, collect assessment and communicate with students and the community.
Digital literacy is not about just having a computer lab in your school. It’s about social engagement, skills and competencies that promote students’ critical thinking, and the ability to judge information for trustworthiness and relevance.

3. WHY DO SCHOOLS NEED DIGITAL LITERACY?
Educators have been given the task of equipping students with skills to succeed in today’s, and ultimately tomorrow’s, world. The digital revolution is evolving fast, and it is imperative that schools evolve as well. Teaching methods of the 20th century are fast becoming outdated. The increasing use of technology across the school means that it is in teachers’ best interests to embrace 21st century learning and digital literacy, and what it can bring to a higher education setting.
Research indicates that digital literacy will be crucial for all Australians to thrive in tertiary education and in the work place. “As the world of work changes, the degree of digital literacy required for some occupations will shift. Within the next five years this is anticipated to rapidly increase. 90%
of the workforce will require at least basic computer skills, such as using email or company software. Over 50% will need to be able to use, configure and build digital systems in the next 2-3 years.” Foundation for Young Australians, 2017. To read more visit: https://www.fya.org.au/2017/06/29/digital-literacy-important-future-work/

4. WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

The Australian Government recognises digital literacy as an important aspect of preparing young Australians for the workplace, and as a result, funding continues to increase. Part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda is to increase the participation of all students and the wider community in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and to improve their digital literacy.

Technologies is now a component of the Australian Curriculum, with two individual, but connected compulsory subjects: Design and Technologies, where students use critical thinking to create innovative solutions for authentic problems and Digital Technologies, where students use computational thinking and information systems to implement digital solutions. To read more visit: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/technologies/

Along with the government and ACARA, various universities, parent groups and organisations across the education and ICT realm show their support for the promotion of digital literacy skills for both teachers and students.

ACS President, Anthony Wong states “We are committed to seeing the New South Wales Government and all State and Territory Governments build digital literacy in classrooms, both for teachers and students. The development of core digital skills can assist in future-proofing our economy.” Australian Computer Society, 10th July, 2016. To read more visit: https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/media-releases/nsw-schools-report-shines-spotlight-on-ict-education.html

“Young people have an array of informal learning experiences outside of school that can have a big impact on what they bring to the classroom in terms of their technology skills and knowledge but also their attitudes to technology, particularly what technology is for and what it can help with.”

Professor Sue Bennett, University of Wollongong. To read more visit: http://media.uow.edu.au/releases/UOW199613.html

The Australian Parents Council supports the teaching and parental involvement of digital technology, offering training and support for parents and releasing #parentech, a website dedicated to parenting in the digital age. To read more visit: http://parentech.com.au/

5. WHERE CAN TEACHERS BEGIN?

All this direction towards embracing technology can seem daunting for teachers. Here are some suggestions to help you navigate your way to becoming a digitally literate teacher who teaches digitally literate students.

• Start Small. Trying to become an overnight expert in all approaches to technology is unrealistic. Begin with what you know and build on your skills. Work with the technology and devices that are available and reliable.

• Let Students Lead. It’s okay to enlist the support of a class of “digital natives” to create an environment where sharing skills and knowledge is encouraged. Even the most savvy tech users started somewhere, so breaking down the barriers of who teaches who can lead to the improvement of everyone’s skills, including teachers.

• Separate technology and learning. Select technology that enhances your teaching rather than replaces it. Do not assume that using technology automatically increases engagement, in reality technology is a tool that supports quality teaching.

“Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is most important.”

- Bill Gates

• Get Support. Work with and seek out colleagues in your school and community of schools who can share their knowledge. Access a range of online training, websites and articles.