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For Immediate Release

Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community partners with EDDS Institute to launch paid GESS auditing scheme to establish a global standard for EdTech cybersecurity

Washington, DC, May 7, 2026--- The Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community, in partnership with EDDS Institute, today announce the launch of the Global Educational Security Standards (GESS) auditing scheme—an independent, evidence-based audit and certification service for education technology providers.

GESS is not a new cybersecurity framework. Instead, it is a crosswalk of existing cybersecurity frameworks, specifically tailored to the unique risks, data environments, and operational realities the K-12 education sector. Having a single set of security controls to work off benefits EdTech providers, eliminating the need to track jurisdictional requirements. Up to this point, it has been available to providers as a self-assessment form.

This launch marks a shift from voluntary self-assessment to verified, third-party auditing, providing schools, districts, and education departments with a clearer basis for evaluating vendor cybersecurity and data protection practices.

Independent audit and certification

Once available later this year, the GESS auditing scheme will be a paid, independent professional service delivered by EDDS Institute, applying structured audit principles and a standardised, audit-ready methodology tailored to the education sector.

Each audit includes:

- Structured evidence review and verification
- A transparent traffic-light scoring model
- A versioned assessment report
- A 12-month certification, with a defined remediation pathway

Vendor benefits:

- A fast, independent signal of trust—reducing friction in procurement and due diligence
- Scoring based on a single set of controls that align with a variety of jurisdictional requirements
- Clear, structured feedback aligned to recognised practices
- Proportionate, cost-accessible assurance (without enterprise audit overhead)
- Actionable remediation support to close gaps quickly

- A comparable, verifiable benchmark to strengthen procurement readiness

Designed for the education sector — accessible and proportionate

Unlike enterprise-focused certifications such as SOC 2, ISO 27001, or NIST-based audits, GESS is designed specifically for EdTech providers. The model applies a tiered, risk-proportionate approach, and enables participation from start-ups through to established vendors.

This ensures that:

- Smaller providers can access credible, structured assurance
- Larger providers can demonstrate independent verification aligned with recognised practices
- The process remains cost-accessible while maintaining audit integrity

A new market signal for trust and procurement

As expectations on cybersecurity and data governance continue to increase—particularly across jurisdictions such as the United States and Europe—education systems are seeking clearer, comparable signals of vendor trustworthiness.

GESS certification will introduce:

- Independent verification, beyond self-declaration
- A consistent, comparable framework across vendors
- A practical tool to support procurement and due diligence

Call to vendors: early certification opportunity

A4L and EDDS Institute invite EdTech providers to participate in the first wave of audits.

Early participants will:

- Achieve first-mover certification status under GESS
- Demonstrate credible, independently verified assurance
- Receive structured feedback to strengthen cybersecurity practices
- Help shape the development of GESS as a globally recognised standard

Towards a global standard for EdTech assurance

The GESS auditing scheme is designed as the foundation for a global standard tailored to the specific risks and realities of education technology.

GESS aims to provide a trusted, globally applicable benchmark for cybersecurity and data protection in education—balancing rigor, accessibility, and practical implementation, as districts and schools increasingly look for independently verified, GESS-certified solutions.

Vendors interested should contact David Sallay, Director of Data Privacy (dsallay@a4l.org).

A team representative will respond within 48 hours to schedule a short onboarding call.

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About the Access 4 Learning Community

The Access 4 Learning (A4L) Community, and its special interest group the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC), is a unique, non-profit collaboration composed of schools, districts, local authorities, states, US and International Ministries of Education, software vendors and consultants. The Community is “Powered by SIF” as its major technical tool to help manage learning data simply, securely and in a scalable, standard way regardless of platform. The SDPC is designed to address the day-to-day, real-world multi-faceted issues faced when protecting learner information by setting common expectations between market providers and end users. The A4L Community has united these education technology end users and providers in an unprecedented effort to ‘*connect and secure effective learning ecosystems*’ to give teachers more time to do what they do best: teach. For further information, visit <https://A4L.org>.

About EDDS Institute

The EDDS Institute for Education (EDDS) brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars, researchers, educators, engineers and privacy advocates dedicated to protecting the sovereignty of education systems as they become increasingly dependent on Artificial Intelligence (AI): digital, data-intensive and algorithmic systems.

EDDS works with enlightened educators, education authorities and ethical education technology providers to pilot and put in place systems of education technology (edtech) evaluation and certification. For more information, visit: <https://www.edds-education.org/>