

Addressing EdTech Challenges with Evidence:

YOUR DISTRICT'S PLAYBOOK



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SECTION I

Overview: A Playbook Built for K-12 Administrators



Evidence is a word that is said a lot in the world of K-12 education these days.

Over the last few years, the rush to remote/hybrid learning and the explosion of edtech use because of the COVID pandemic has exposed a need for education organizations to update their edtech practices to reflect the current environment. Leaders at the state and local levels have a clear, urgent need to modernize their systems and processes to better support educators and students by **ensuring that the decisions they make about education technology are grounded in evidence, promote safety and equity, and protect the privacy of student data.**

WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS

This playbook is a flexible guide to identifying, analyzing and taking action with edtech evidence in a way that is sustainable for any size district. We share ideas, best practices and concepts for how to make evaluation and informed action a standard part of your edtech environment, informed by some of the key challenges faced by K-12 districts today. This playbook is designed for you to use each section as needed, so you don't need to read it from start to finish to take action.

WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS NOT

This is not a "one-size-fits-all" guide. The evidence you have, the size of your student population, your edtech budget and the number of hats you wear is completely dependent on your situation. This is not a definitive step-by-step for how to create a "perfect" evidence-based edtech ecosystem. This is a guide that helps you take action in ways that make sense for your students, teachers and budgets.

WHO THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOR

This playbook is designed for K-12 education administrators responsible for making decisions about edtech. If you are a building administrator, curriculum director, technology leader, financial officer, or even a superintendent or member of the superintendent's cabinet, this playbook is for you.

With so many edtech tools used by teachers and students, addressing the following questions is critical:

- What evidence is needed to know if those tools are having the intended impact?
- How can usage data be used to better understand implementation effectiveness? What additional data may be needed?
- How can districts and states take evidence and apply it to improve student outcomes and teacher experiences?
- What are the first steps administrators can take to get started?

SECTION II

What is EdTech Evidence? (And Why You Should Care)



To start, let’s ground ourselves in what we really mean by “evidence” or “evidence-based interventions.” In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education issued [guidance](#) saying that “using, generating, and sharing evidence about effective strategies to support students gives stakeholders an important tool to accelerate student learning.” It went on to define evidence-based interventions as practices or programs that are able to show they are effective at producing results and improving outcomes when implemented.

Evidence in edtech combines a variety of information: **what** is being used, **how** it’s being implemented, **who** is using it and in **what contexts**. It is the information, data, stories and experiences that are collected and used to understand how products are impacting student outcomes.

Building an effective edtech ecosystem relies on evidence. It is essential, though, to construct your evidence-based edtech ecosystem in a way that promotes action. District administrators have a lot of information at their fingertips – whether it’s quantitative evidence (aka hard numbers, patterns, trends in data) or qualitative evidence (aka what you think is happening, anecdotes, feedback) – but if it cannot be shared with and

applied by those who need it, when they need it, then it loses its potential. True effectiveness is a mix of evidence and efficiency, offering K-12 district leaders what they need to solve critical challenges.

Today, many use “edtech evidence” and “usage data” interchangeably. While product usage data offers a critical foundation, it is just the starting point of what should be considered when making decisions about edtech. **Higher-quality evidence brings together usage patterns with student outcomes, license costs, implementation information, teacher feedback and more to help leaders better understand what is actually working for students.**



With the many types of edtech evidence out there, there is no one way that is the “right” way to evaluate products. For example, while a holistic edtech audit offers immediate insights on a district’s current edtech landscape, teacher feedback gives teachers a voice in edtech decision making as they are the ones on the ground with students using digital learning tools. Both are valuable, while neither is exhaustive.

QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE EXAMPLES

Assessment data, license cost, usage data, privacy information, effectiveness reports

QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE EXAMPLES

Teacher feedback, peer reviews, product references, stakeholder anecdotes

KEY TAKEAWAY

Evidence is, and should always be, considered in a specific context. Wherever you choose to start, remember that having one piece of information doesn’t mean you have a definitive understanding of effectiveness. As students enter and exit your schools and the world continues to change, their needs and related evidence also shift. To best support teachers and students, gather and use evidence in an ongoing, iterative manner that works for your district.

It’s a collaborative effort from teachers, building administrators, district leaders across curriculum, technology and finance, solution providers and other key stakeholders to find a coherence of different evidence types and use it in a way that works for what a given district needs. Incorporating insights from across these stakeholders engages and equips a community of people dedicated to creating a safe, effective edtech ecosystem.

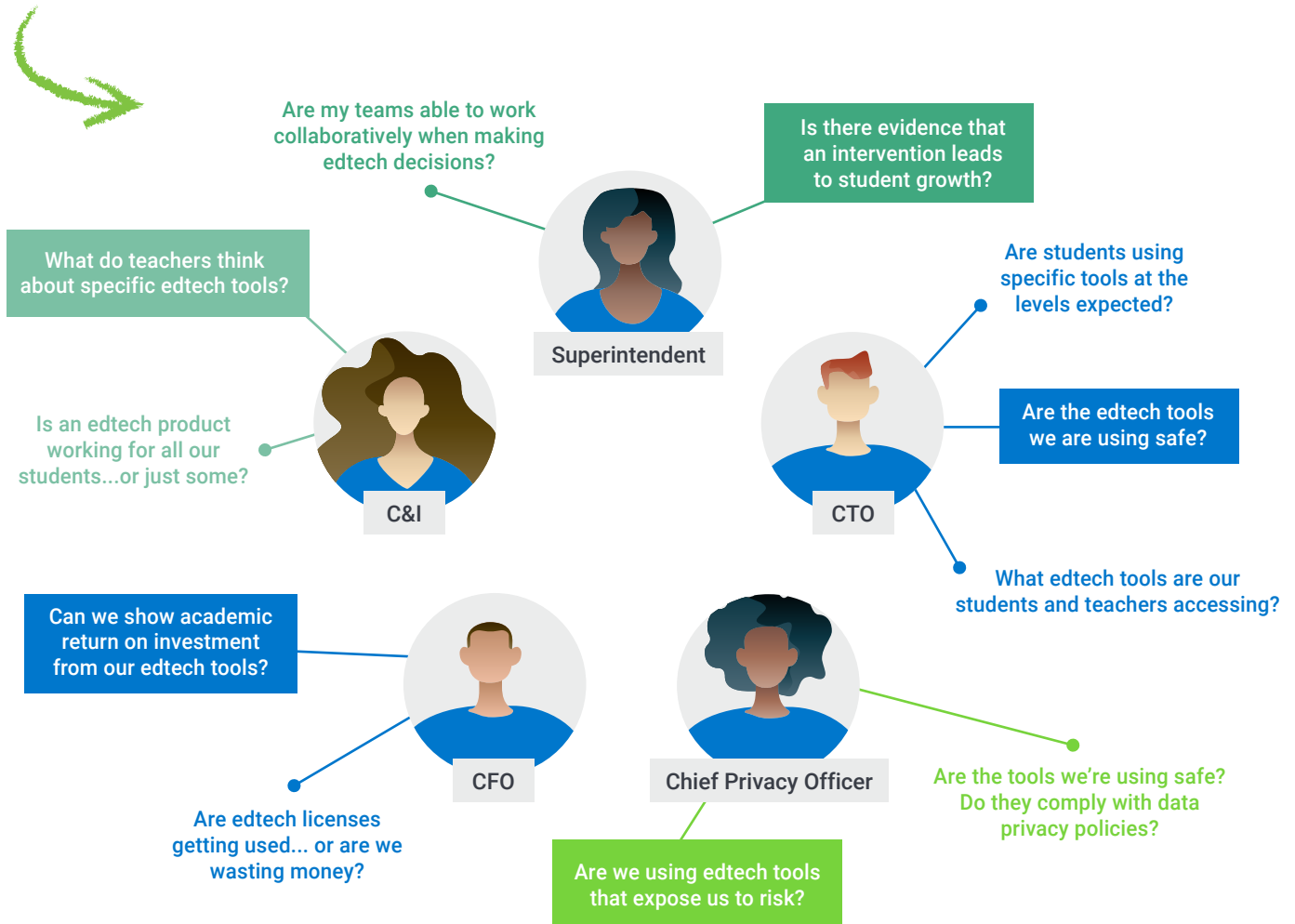
“The curriculum and instruction team, as well as teaching and learning, have to be part of the discussion and part of the team. If they’re not, you’re missing one of the most important voices in evaluating your tools. These are edtech tools, and they tie directly to what our students are doing in classrooms and the outcomes we’re seeing.”

— Lisa Bradshaw, Director of Digital Learning and Strategy at Casa Grande Elementary School District

How to Tell if Your EdTech is Actually Working

 **WATCH**

Start by asking questions and being open to hearing the answers. Here are some ideas:



This playbook is organized by challenges faced by many K-12 districts. The following sections outline how edtech evidence is essential to each, and how you can get started using it in your district. It's important to remember that you do not have to do everything, all at once or in a specific order. Pick your challenge and get started – then pick another one!

<p>SECTION III</p> <p>Getting Started and Organized</p>	<p>SECTION IV</p> <p>Involving Teachers</p>	<p>SECTION V</p> <p>Mitigating Student Data Privacy and Cybersecurity Risk</p>	<p>SECTION VI</p> <p>Informing Decisions that Advance Student Outcomes</p>	<p>SECTION VII</p> <p>Meeting Federal and State Reporting Requirements</p>
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SECTION III

Getting Started and Organized



Edtech evidence becomes valuable when it’s organized in a way that is useful, relevant and actionable.

Start by understanding exactly what is (and isn’t) being used, by whom, at what times and to what extent. This is critical to building and organizing your foundation of evidence. Not only does this support decision making as it relates to outcomes, but it also sets the stage for simplifying management of and communication about edtech resources. Ultimately, it takes out the guesswork for both administrators and teachers when it comes to communicating and sharing approved, safe and effective digital tools.

Here are some tips to get started quickly.

1. First things first: Ask teachers what they’re using.

This may seem simple, but **starting with teachers** helps them know they have a voice in what is being used, and gives you a heads up on the most popular tools among teachers. You could do this using a simple form that populates an associated spreadsheet, ensuring that all responses are in one place.

Sample questions:

- Which edtech tools do you use the most with your students? Why?
- Are there any tools that you’ve tried but don’t really work for your student group? Why?
- Are there any areas you feel there are gaps? Any types of tools you wish you could use?

2. Compare teacher responses to your approved district edtech.

Once you have input from your teachers, compare those answers to the tools your district supports and has approved based on safety, equity, compliance and curriculum goals. This immediately allows you to bring any unapproved or unmanaged edtech to light, and start getting an idea of where gaps may lie in use and implementation of tools. (By the way: if you don’t have a standard way to vet and approve tools quite yet, **check out Section V** for some tips to get started).

WANT TO MAKE THESE FIRST TWO STEPS A BIT EASIER?

1. **Claim your district’s Inventory Dashboard.** The browser extensions take five minutes to deploy, and your dashboard will begin populating and organizing data within 72 hours. You’ll end up with a digital inventory of the edtech tools/apps your teachers and students are accessing (you might be surprised!).
2. **Try out this educator grading rubric** to gather teacher feedback in a structured way.



At this point, there are a few questions you can ask to prompt immediate action:

- Have the edtech tools being used by our teachers and students been vetted for safety, privacy compliance, interoperability and more?
- Are paid edtech licenses getting used at the level we expected, or are we losing budget dollars? If not, do we know why? Could implementation changes help?
- Are there any tools being used that we may want to consider adopting across the district?

“The Inventory Dashboard was a great first step for us. We are able to use the information to ascertain if subscriptions are being used at the level to justify renewal. Lastly, it allows us to gain insight into products being used that are not in our list of approved apps.”

— **Louis McDonald**, Director of Technology at Fauquier County Public Schools in Virginia

3. Take the time to organize your district’s approved digital tools.

Once you know what’s being used and have insight into how teachers feel about the edtech in your district, consider organizing your edtech in a central location that all stakeholders can access.

Organizing your edtech in a **central library** gives your teachers a clear line of sight into what is approved and appropriate for use in your district. Often, teachers may sign up for free tools not knowing that they have access to a paid version of that same tool or another that performs a similar function. With visibility into approved and available tools, they can select what works best for them and their students.

4. Share your new edtech library (and then share it again).

The importance of this step cannot be stressed enough: sharing what is appropriate for use in different situations helps create a community of people involved in informed decision making. Not only does this further support student data privacy efforts (through the sharing of approval statuses), but it also leads to more thoughtful, proactive contributors to your edtech ecosystem.

TIP

When you present your district’s edtech library, attach supporting resources for implementation or best practices. This helps your teachers know that the resource is ok to use, and offers the *why* and the *how*.



App/website link



Approval status



Compliant/non-compliant status



Data elements collected



Intended audience



Resources (implementation, family, lesson plan ideas)



Accessibility information



District-specific instructions

Looking for a better way to organize your edtech?



JOIN OUR NEXT DEMO

SECTION IV

Involving Teachers in Your EdTech Processes



Teachers and administrators all want to make sure that the edtech tools they implement and use in classrooms are actually benefiting students. With free offers and lots of available digital tools to choose from, it is hard for teachers to share feedback on specific tools and for administrators to receive it. Hallway conversations and emails can get lost, but teachers must be part of edtech conversations – everyone benefits when information is shared.

Additionally, teachers and administrators want to implement and use tools that are approved and **compliant**. Teachers understand the importance of this, but need administrators to give them a list of what is or is not approved and, ideally, a way to request new tools that have not yet been reviewed. Multiple spreadsheets that require updates in different places can cause confusion and inconsistencies.

So, what can you do about it?

1. Create a sustainable way to collect (and use) teacher feedback.

Teachers are the ones implementing and using edtech in their classrooms, and are your ears and eyes to how tools actually work for students and teachers (which may be different from what you think is happening). “Oh by the way, how is that new math tool working out for your third graders?” just doesn’t cut it. Teachers need to know that the feedback they provide is being absorbed, discussed and acted on.



A Quickstart Guide to Gathering Teacher Feedback



Choose two core edtech tools, perhaps ones that may be up for renewal or represent a significant budget line item.

Identify specific teachers for feedback, aligned with your district's priorities.

Example groups: specific grade levels, first-year teachers, English language learner instructors

Create questions to dig into your core areas of focus. Here are a few examples:

Is the product positively impacting your students? Why? How?

Is the product aligned with your curriculum goals? How so?

Is the product easy to use? Why or why not?

Have a **rubric** for your teacher feedback – this will help you standardize how you review and take action with what teachers share with you.

Choose a central place to keep track of teacher feedback that all your key internal stakeholders can access.

Set aside time to review and absorb the feedback – as you review, look for patterns in what teachers are saying about a certain product and consider first taking action with items you hear about the most.



Tip: Review your qualitative feedback alongside other evidence like product usage, assessment data and license cost.

Communicate your next steps back to teachers. This is an essential step: closing the loop on this process will demonstrate to teachers that their feedback isn't going unheard, and that they are truly part of the edtech decision making process.

2. Build one, centralized edtech library that teachers and staff can access.

Having a district-specific library of approved edtech tools is critical, and you can read about it in more detail in [Section III](#) of this playbook. This library should be the single source of truth for teachers as they look for approved, compliant digital tools to support learning.

Whatever your method is for creating this library, whether online or in a spreadsheet, make sure that it's:

- Updated consistently.
- Has clearly stated approval statuses.
- Includes supporting resources (such as implementation tips).
- Is publicly accessible by stakeholders in your district.

This library offers your teachers the evidence they need to make informed decisions when choosing tools to implement in their classrooms.

“As a classroom teacher, you aren't expected to be an expert on student data privacy. We just want to make sure that the digital resources [for students] are appropriate. We gave teachers the tools and best practices to do the job – we gave them a path to better do this work.”

— **Kevin Perkins**, Director of Information Technology at Rockingham County Schools

The screenshot displays the LEARN Platform interface for the 'Acme Reading' product. The left sidebar shows navigation options: Products, My Library, Community, Admin, Management, Analysis, Members, Organizations, Educators (Students), Groups, and Settings. The main content area is titled 'Acme Reading' and includes tabs for Overview, Capabilities, Feedback, IMPACT, and Pricing. The Overview tab is active, showing a product card for 'Acme Reading' with a 'Launch' button, 'Approved for Use' and 'Compliant' status indicators, and a description: 'Built for the Common Core, Acme Reading helps keep students on track and diagnoses their progress along the way..'. Below the product card, there are buttons for 'Grade', 'Request', 'Compare', and 'Website'. A 'Details' section below features a 'Download District Manual' link and a 'Student Progress Towards Fidelity' chart. The chart includes a donut chart for 'Overall effect' and a gauge chart for 'Student Progress Towards Fidelity' with a score of 0.48. The gauge chart ranges from -0.8 (Negative) to 1.6 (Positive).

See how teacher feedback can support your decision making.

WATCH

3. Give teachers a process for requesting new edtech tools.

A **standardized request process**, like the one outlined below, empowers teachers to initiate a request of what they need for their students and get status updates along the way. While administrators manage the different steps of the request process, teachers are the ones who initiate it, giving them confidence that their voices will be heard in purchasing decisions.

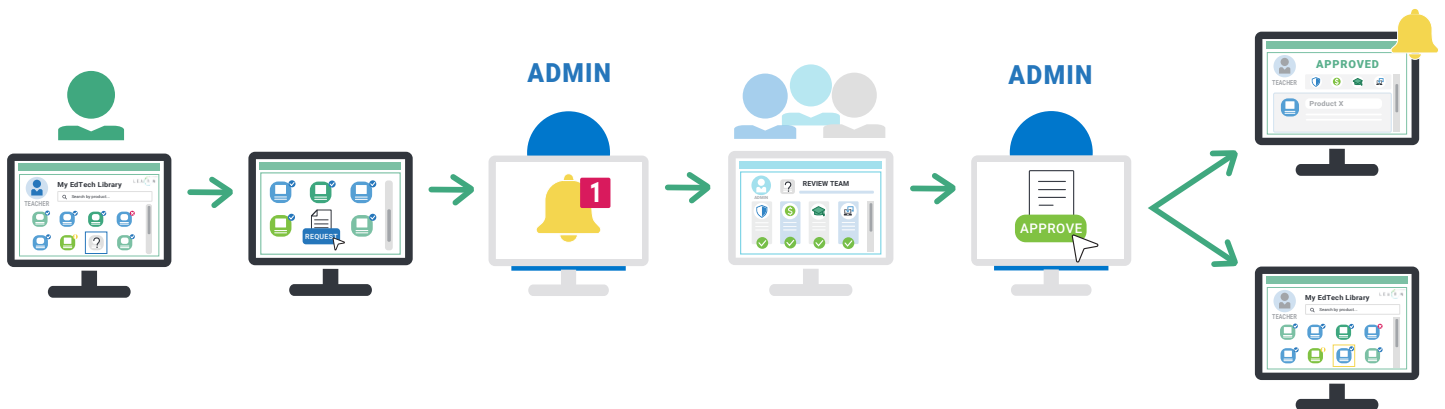
“Staff appreciate a ‘one-stop’ approach – being able to search for a product, see its approval status and submit a request – all from LearnPlatform.”

— Melissa Riggs, Education Technology Specialist - Instruction at District 49 in Colorado

REQUEST PROCESS USE CASE

Challenge: A district is struggling to maintain consistency in how edtech tools are requested, vetted and approved. Its request process for teachers consists of multiple parts, spreadsheets and a manual form on the district’s website. The district needed to get a handle on the massive number of edtech tools in use, as well as in creating consistency among how products were requested, vetted and approved.

Solution: Creating a district-specific edtech library allows the district to have a centralized space for managing product requests, vetting and approvals, and teachers' visibility on what is and is not approved. The system offers a way for teachers to request products directly from the library, saving them time, minimizing frustration and ensuring tools go through the proper vetting processes.



SECTION V

Using Evidence to Support Student Data Privacy and Risk Mitigation Efforts



Remote and hybrid learning has led students and teachers to be online more than ever. In incredible numbers, **1,400+ per month to be precise**, districts are using digital learning tools to support teaching and learning. Along with this rise in technology use came a similar rise in cybersecurity and privacy risk. Ransomware and data breaches have increased alongside the influx of devices and online tools. Virtual classrooms (and the continued use of these technologies) reveal new opportunities for would-be attackers.

There are many layers to developing a cybersecurity strategy – here, we dig into how an empowered workforce (your staff and educators) is an essential component of your efforts. These four recommendations can help you ensure the edtech tools used by your teachers and students aren’t increasing your risk.

1. Discover what teachers and students are using, and uncover any unapproved edtech.

Starting here sets a foundation for using evidence to help mitigate privacy risks. Reflect and take an inventory of what is being used (known and unknown) and by whom. This can help you identify any unapproved (and unvetted) edtech in use that may increase your risk.

HERE’S AN EXAMPLE

Let’s say you identify an unapproved, free tool that has a high level of usage in your district, but it is not compliant with your state’s privacy standards. You do a bit of research, and realize that the tool is designed to meet similar needs as a different, district-supported tool. Since the district-supported tool has lower usage, consider asking teachers these questions:

- How long have you been using this tool?
- What are your goals in using this tool?
- Did you know that the district has approved another tool that serves a similar function?
- Which student groups have you seen it work for?

**Claim your edtech
Inventory Dashboard**



CLAIM NOW

Once you gather this feedback, use it to inform your next actions. First, check that the unapproved tool doesn't present any privacy or cybersecurity concerns (check out these resources to help you out).



Maybe your district-supported tool doesn't actually meet the needs of teachers and students, and you need to find a different, compliant tool.

2. Keep privacy requirements and compliance standards top-of-mind.

Once you've taken stock of what is in use, you can turn your focus to providing a clear view of which tools are compliant with [local, state and federal privacy requirements](#), and are approved and available for your community to use. Consider building the following into your standard practices to further set up your district for success in protecting student data:

- Have a **centralized library of approved edtech** – this takes the guesswork out of edtech selection and usage, and ensures teachers choose compliant tools that don't add to online safety risks.
- **Educate teachers** on why certain tools should/shouldn't be used. We recommend having [some kind of system in place](#) for sharing resources, such as third-party reviews and insights, updates and current approval statuses (outlined in [Section III](#)).
- If you have any teachers who have shown particular interest in student data privacy protection, lean into that. Encourage these educators to step up and **serve as teacher leaders** in their own classrooms and schools, educating others on the importance of risk mitigation through thoughtful tool selection and use.

“Having every district and edtech company separately interpret and act on our state’s student data privacy law is time-intensive, duplicative and inefficient... LearnPlatform simplifies district due diligence for the benefit of operators, teachers, parents and learners.”

— **Doug Casey**, Executive Director for the Connecticut Commission on Educational Technology

Resources to Get You Started

[Common Sense Education Privacy Program](#)

This program offers ratings based on edtech product privacy practices. The program is a coordinated effort to protect child and student privacy, and builds in safety and security from the start.

[Project Unicorn’s Privacy Jump-Start Guide](#)

This guide helps you learn about key data privacy practices and resources from various organizations, and offers best practices when it comes to student data privacy.

[Future of Privacy Forum's Student Privacy Pledge Signatories](#)

The Future of Privacy Forum serves as a catalyst for privacy leadership and scholarship, advancing principled data practices in support of emerging technologies.

[IMS Global Learning Consortium](#)

A nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing technology that can scale and improve education. The [TrustEd Apps](#) certification helps guide and support organizations and product providers in the collection, sharing and securing of student data.

[LearnPlatform’s EdTech Effectiveness System](#)

This platform surfaces privacy insights from a variety of trusted third parties, including Common Sense Education, Project Unicorn and the Student Data Privacy Consortium, in a central location. In addition to viewing data privacy commitments and agreements with other districts, the platform offers tools for managing the processes for purchasing, vetting and managing edtech.

3. Build student data privacy and cybersecurity checks into your edtech vetting and purchasing processes.

Administrators take many steps when it comes to choosing edtech products for their teachers and students. There are a lot of pieces of evidence taken into account when it comes to vetting, including student data privacy commitments, SSO compatibility, systems interoperability, curriculum alignment, equity, accessibility, training requirements, budget and teacher/student feedback.

Let's build on the example outlined in step 1 – you've realized that a tool teachers are using doesn't meet state standards, and you want to give teachers another option. Taking into account the teacher feedback received, you realize your district-supported tool isn't meeting the needs of certain teachers and students, so you need to kick off a vetting process that brings together a lot of different pieces of information to see if a tool will work in your district.

Need a system for evidence-based product vetting? LearnPlatform gives administrators the tools they need to request, vet and organize products – all in one place.



LEARN MORE

EXAMPLE EDTECH VETTING PROCESS

1. Curricular Review
2. Technology Review
3. Security/Privacy Review
4. Financial Review
5. Equity and Diversity Review

3. Security/Privacy Review

- What federal and state data privacy agreements are in place?
- What are the terms and conditions?
- Is any student personally identifiable information (PII) collected and/or stored?
- Is it clearly stated that data is not used, sold or rented for any other purpose?
- What age groups is it appropriate and approved for?
- Does it have advertisements?



4. Create a community of people dedicated to protecting student privacy.

Teachers are at the forefront of implementing tools in classrooms, and should be part of all compliance work. Engaging teachers early in the process will help garner that all-important teacher buy-in, while also preserving authority. [Ask teachers what they are using](#) and what is essential. Start with that list when kicking off your vetting processes.

Transparency and engagement extends beyond school walls – educating student families on what apps are approved for use and sharing data privacy insights also help to mitigate risks. By offering insight into compliance work, families can better support students at home, alongside teachers inside of classrooms. Make sure all stakeholders know about safe practices by sharing resources and where to look to see which software/apps are approved for use. Consider, also, including information about why something is not approved – this is a critical piece of creating a community of people dedicated to proactively protecting student data.

Read how districts in Illinois built continuous communication into compliance work and preserved teacher autonomy.

 [READ NOW](#)



SECTION VI

Making Informed Decisions that Advance Student Outcomes

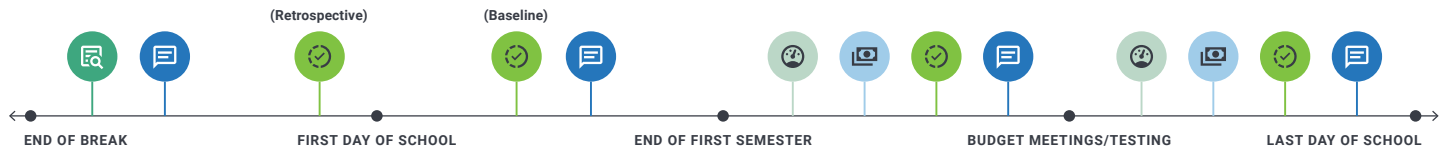


Curriculum and instruction, technology and finance administrators all want to make decisions that benefit students – this is nothing new. No matter the size or resources of a district, leaders can use the evidence they have to improve instructional, operational and financial outcomes **throughout the school year**. This point is key: an ongoing rhythm of conversations and evaluation, rather than one-and-done reviews during renewal season or over the summer, maximizes the benefits that current students and teachers receive.



1. Evaluate your edtech throughout the school year.

Recommended Rapid-cycle Evaluation Schedule



EdTech Audit

Identify opportunities for immediate savings as well as inform school-year initiatives.

**Note: Audits should be run when all stakeholders can participate (i.e., staff with access to contracts and admin tools, enough student count to generate an Inventory Dashboard).*

Example Questions

- + Immediate cost savings opportunities?
- + Priority actions to impact safety, equity and effectiveness?



Teacher Feedback

Improve edtech implementation and support, and see if tools are working for teachers and students.

Example Questions

- + Are tools easy to implement?
- + What do educators think about tools they use?



Usage or Fidelity Analysis

See if students are actually using the approved edtech tools, if they are using them as intended and how student groups compare. Can be run throughout the year to identify patterns and examine use from different periods of time.

Example Questions

- + What supports or needs might improve implementation?
- + Are there any patterns emerging in usage?



Cost Analysis

Uncover edtech ROI at different points in the year, identify cost-related trends and gather data to inform budget conversations. Can be run throughout the year to maximize value for current students, or at the end of the year to determine allocation of funds for the following school year.

Example Questions

- + How much was spent on underused licenses for a certain edtech tool this year?
- + Can we improve team conversations around edtech cost-effectiveness?



Outcomes Analysis

RETROSPECTIVE: Learn from previous year, plan for future edtech implementations and decisions.

BASELINE: Analyze your current edtech ecosystem to set a baseline, examining pre-implementation data.

MIDDLE OF YEAR: Monitor engagement and effectiveness trends, and evaluate impact of program changes over time for various student groups.

END OF YEAR: Review year-long edtech engagement and effectiveness, evaluate impact of changes over time and ensure edtech is working for all students.

Example Questions

- + What can we monitor for budget meetings?
- + Which interventions appear to have positive impacts on mid-year student scores? For which students?

Rapid-cycle evaluations (RCEs)

An ESSA-aligned approach education organizations use to generate practical, relevant evidence and make data-informed decisions about edtech tools.



[VIEW MORE](#)

EXAMPLE MID-YEAR EVALUATION: ACADEMIC RETURN ON INVESTMENT



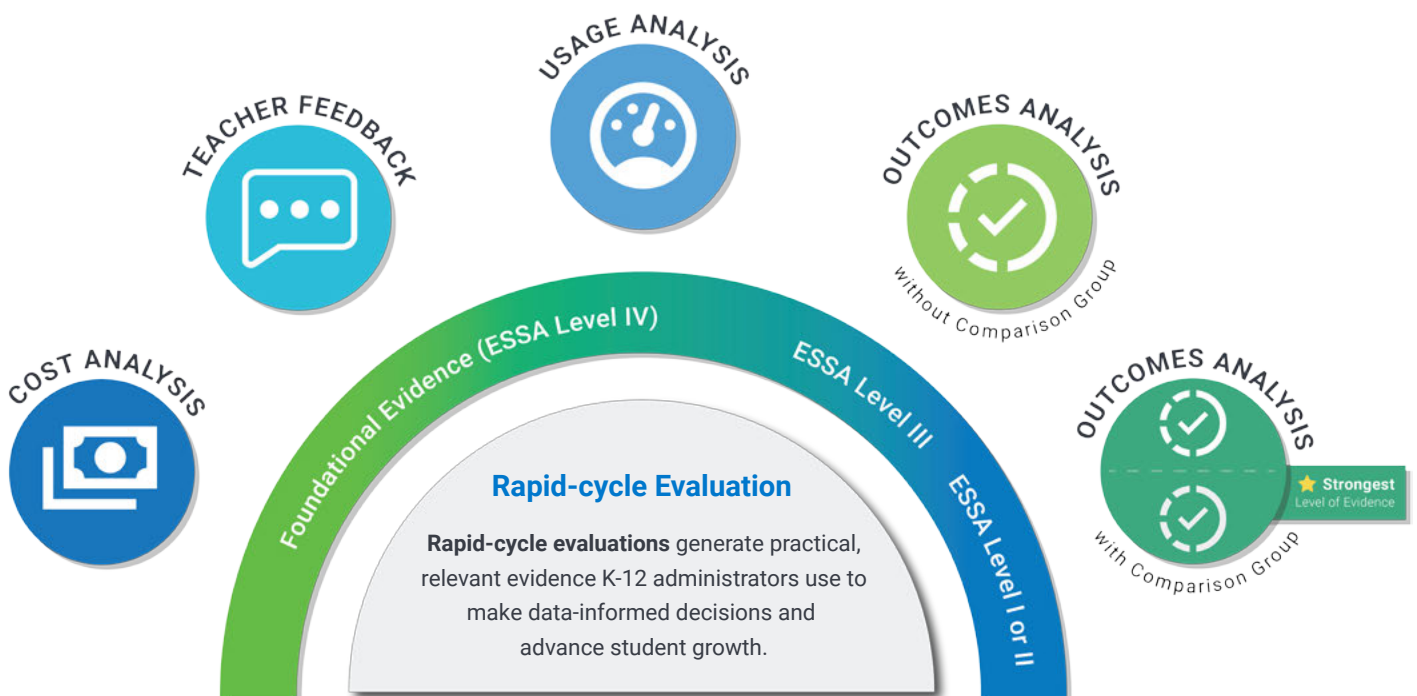
Challenge: A district supports multiple products that perform similar functions. The curriculum and instruction director wants to start gathering evidence to determine if she should continue implementing and supporting all products, despite their similarities.

Solution: The C&I director runs an Outcomes Analysis on three products around the midpoint of the year to determine which product is most effective for students at this time point. SIS, usage and achievement data are used in this analysis, and reveal that one product is more positively impacting student growth than the others.

Taking Action: The district gathers teacher feedback on the three products to review alongside analysis findings, and sees that a different product is more well-received by teachers. The C&I director reviews implementation and PD provided to teachers and finds that the product that was coached the most received more favorable teacher reviews. As a next step, the district decides to provide additional PD for the other two products and plans to run analyses again at the end of the year.

TIP

Incorporate teacher feedback alongside these analyses – their voices are an essential part of your decision making process. [Section IV](#) of this playbook offers recommendations for doing this.



2. Partner with solution providers who have signaled a commitment to ongoing research, protecting student data and comprehensive information sharing.

Learning solution providers and K-12 district leaders are realizing that a modern learning environment requires efficient collaboration and sharing of evidence. Because funding is so often required to be used for evidence-based interventions (**keeping in mind ESSA and ESSER**), every provider should feel compelled to build an evidence base for their solutions.

However, providers cannot do this in a vacuum – to improve products and solutions, they need the necessary real-world evidence for timely, cost-effective product development. In a high-functioning world, solution providers share usage data and districts, in turn, provide contextual feedback and evidence on a solution’s effectiveness.

Partner with solution providers that have made the following commitments:

- Demonstrate an interest in research, and ongoing improvement and innovation.
- Transparent data privacy practices.
- Are willing and able to share usage data with district partners, securely and efficiently.

Learn more about **IMPACT-Ready.**

GET STARTED



“As a solution provider, how do you prove that your product works? You provide evidence that it has impact. Students, teachers and districts must benefit from what is brought to the market.”

— **Sunil Gunderia**, Chief Innovation Officer and Head of Mastery & Adaptive Product at Age of Learning

At the end of the day, it’s all about driving student growth. That requires trust and collaboration between K-12 districts and the solution providers that serve them.

3. Aggregate evidence and make budget decisions that benefit students and teachers.

It's important to remember that it's not just about keeping or cutting a given edtech tool when making budget decisions – as outlined in this playbook, there are a number of context-specific factors to consider. It's about reviewing for fidelity of use, tool duplication or similarity, equity, student impacts and curriculum goals. District leaders should also make sure that all voices are represented and used as evidence for budget decisions.

In your edtech budget review and renewal process, don't just ask: "What is being used?" Consider these deeper questions instead:

1. **Are my district's edtech products being implemented successfully? By whom? How do I know?**
2. **Which products are being used at the levels intended? Are any licenses going unused? If so, by whom and why might that be?**
3. **Is one product leading to more student growth than another product?**
4. **Are we getting a return, financial and academic, on our investment in key district edtech tools?**
5. **What feedback have we received from teachers on the products they use and that their students use? Does it mirror evaluation data, or is it different? Why?**

A Cost Analysis provides insight into financial return on investment (ROI), and offers helpful supporting evidence during budget season. Here's an example:

Build Your District's Capacity for Evidence-based EdTech Decision Making

 [LEARN MORE](#)

EXAMPLE RAPID-CYCLE EVALUATION: COST ANALYSIS

Challenge: A district's budget manager is struggling to manage district edtech products and understand how they're being used following a huge edtech investment. They want to know if licenses are being used for a high-cost product, and by whom.

Solution: Running a Cost Analysis helps determine if the district is getting the full financial value from a specific edtech tool. The data used in this analysis includes pricing and license details, the number of students who use the tool, usage data (how much they use it), demographic data and a recommended usage (dosage) goal. Upon reviewing

the results, the budget manager identifies that some grade levels are using the tool more than others, and that some school buildings have higher levels of usage than others overall.

Taking Action: The district budget manager gathers teacher feedback to try and understand the "why" behind the usage levels, and to see if more product coaching is needed. Next, they decide to revisit the license agreements with the edtech providers. Moving forward, the district will run Outcomes Analyses to relate usage of this high-cost product to student achievement data.



SECTION VII

Meeting Reporting Requirements



Here, we dig into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, and some tips on how to make sure the digital learning tools you use align with federal requirements.

Meeting ESSA Standards

Districts and states want, and are now required to, spend federal stimulus funding on “[evidence-based interventions](#).” It’s not always easy, though, to find research about the efficacy of edtech solutions – many school leaders currently make edtech decisions with almost no information about what is likely to work in their schools” ([Hechinger Report, 2021](#)). Additionally, longer research reports often offer evidence that may not make sense for a given district context.



Foundational Evidence (Demonstrates Rationale: Level IV)

This level of evidence allows district leaders to dig deeper and suggest how an intervention is likely to impact students. By [demonstrating a rationale](#), you are signaling effort to study the effects of a given intervention that, ideally, produces at least promising evidence. Instead of (or in addition to) reviewing existing research, you may choose to do one of the following to start building a foundation of evidence that meets ESSA standards:

- **Try a Pilot:** A product pilot can be used as the first year or term of a contract. Your goal, for example, could be to understand implementation over a period of time with the students who are using it, allowing you to gain insights about usage and effectiveness. This information can inform how you implement or use the product with other student groups moving forward. Depending on the design, a pilot could qualify for Level III evidence under ESSA.
- **Collect and Use Educator Feedback:** Collecting teacher feedback is another way to build evaluation into standard district practices ([see Section IV](#)). Structured feedback, perhaps using a [grading rubric](#), allows administrators to take teacher feedback into account when making edtech decisions, and should be considered alongside more rigorous studies. While feedback doesn’t qualify for Level IV evidence, it does offer foundational information that helps start building.

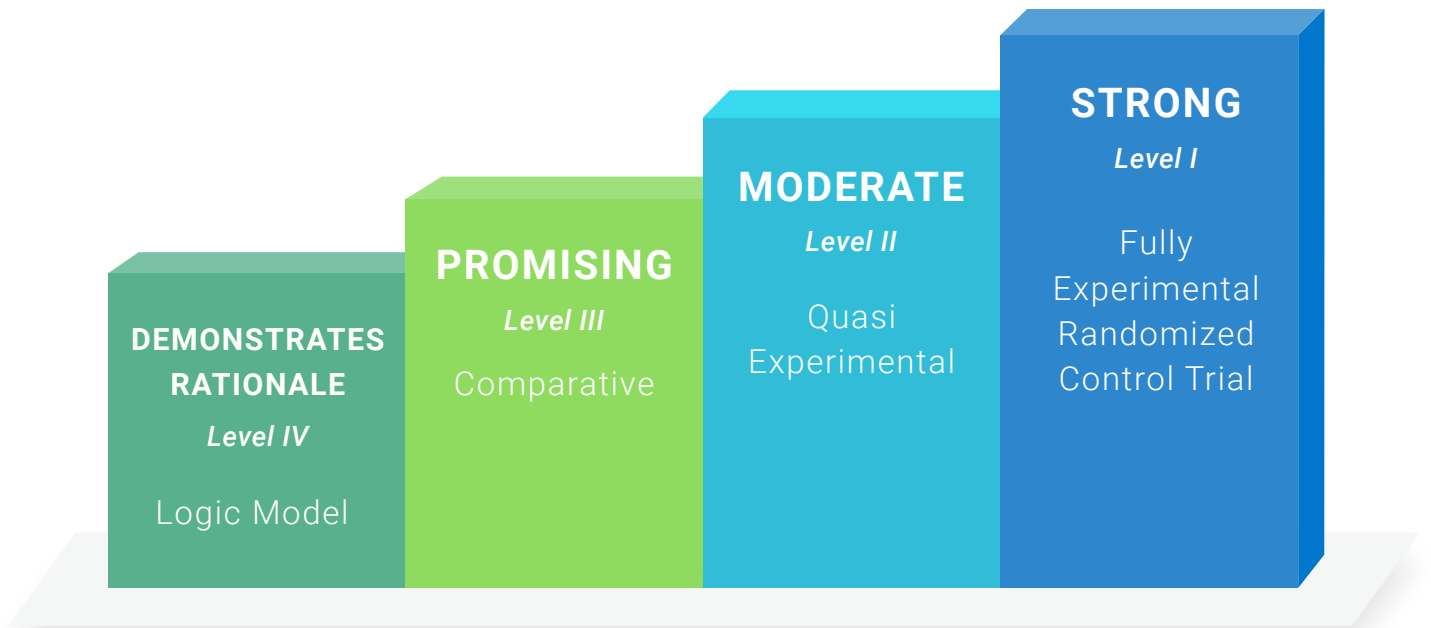
Promising (Level III), Moderate (Level II) or Strong (Level I)

To obtain these levels of evidence within ESSA, you'll need to dig a bit deeper to see how tools used in your district are working for students and teachers. The following are a few options to help you get started.

- **Run Rapid-cycle Evaluations:** [Rapid-cycle evaluations \(RCEs\)](#) generate practical, context-specific evidence about tools used in K-12 classrooms. The RCE process is iterative and formative, making sure that you have actionable (and credible) insights that benefit your own students and teachers. There are a few types of analyses, including cost- and/or usage-focused, but Outcomes Analyses with or without a comparison group will offer the highest levels of ESSA-validated evidence. Refer to [Section VI](#) for more detail and to get started.

Read the Detailed ESSER Guidance

 [LEARN MORE](#)



Meeting ESSER Reporting Requirements

ESSER Guidance:

Activities to address the unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities.

Tip 1: Organize and communicate approved edtech to families – a publicly accessible library of digital tools promotes equitable access to edtech and transparent information sharing ([see Section III](#)).

Tip 2: Identify which tools are being accessed and used by different student groups, and how much they’re using the tools.

Tip 3: Evaluate the impact of edtech over time for specific student groups by running rapid-cycle edtech evaluations ([see Section VI](#)). These evaluations allow you to see if tools are working for students in the ways you intend them to, and prompt action if they are not.

ESSER Guidance:

Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies. Planning for, coordinating and implementing activities during long-term closures.

Tip 1: Consolidate your edtech request, vetting and approval processes into a single process in a specific place – this takes the burden off of teachers and fellow administrators who already have a lot on their plates.

Tip 2: Set up a centralized edtech library that serves as a single source of information. This helps families and teachers know exactly where to go for resources and approved edtech (and ties in privacy and compliance regulations).

ESSER Guidance:

Purchasing educational technology (including hardware, software, and connectivity) for students who are served by the local educational agency that aids in regular and substantive educational interaction between students and their classroom instructors, including low-income students and children with disabilities, which may include assistive technology or adaptive equipment.

Tip 1: Audit your existing edtech landscape. It’s worth it to take a step back, see what’s being used (including products you may not have known about), and identify opportunities for immediate savings and ideas for longer-term initiatives.

Tip 2: Improve student edtech engagement by sharing resources with families and teachers that help support appropriate use. Your edtech library should work with your district’s SSO.

Districts and states need a plan to support and analyze what’s working for certain groups in various contexts as they look to build for sustainability. These categories support use of ESSER stimulus funds by both school districts and state education agencies to advance equity, safety and effectiveness continuously.

SECTION VIII

Building for Sustainability



Incorporating evidence into your standard edtech practices builds a foundation for sustainability. Gathering and taking action with evidence is an ongoing rhythm that ebbs and flows, depending on the [season and situation](#).

These last few years have been a wild ride for education organizations and those who serve them, but one thing has become increasingly clear: doing things the same way as before isn't going to deliver different results.

This playbook offers plenty of tips on how to use evidence to support the challenges you face, but these actions can't be one-off: they must become ingrained in regular practice. Here are five recommendations on how to build for sustainability:

1. **Get (and stay) organized:** [Organizing](#) your education technology resources and related support information (how-to guides, clear guidelines for use, links to access, etc.) equips students, teachers, parents and administrators to know what they have access to, could/should use and self-direct for their own needs.
2. **Be transparent:** Clear [communication](#) seems obvious, but an informed workforce and community is critical, for safety, efficiency and overall performance.
3. **Consolidate processes:** Streamlining and strengthening processes in place helps reduce frustration, negotiate better pricing, increase return on investment and reduce the risks of persistent challenges.
4. **Manage compliance:** Build both cybersecurity and privacy into your edtech vetting processes.
5. **Analyze what's happening, continuously:** [Analyses](#) should be intentional, routine and aligned with your district's strategic initiatives.

With the myriad of edtech tools available today, using evidence efficiently can have a major impact on students and teachers. That is why it is important to constantly review the landscape of your edtech library and continue the cycle – the more evidence you gather and use, the more natural the process and conversations become.



Your Guide to Building a More Effective EdTech Ecosystem

[LEARN MORE](#)

About LearnPlatform

LearnPlatform is a comprehensive edtech effectiveness system used by educators, leaders and their partners to modernize their learning environments and ensure academic and financial return on their investments. The research-driven technology, central office automation, data-rich insights and evidence services equip school districts, states and providers to organize, streamline and analyze their edtech interventions to ensure they are safe, equitable, cost-efficient and effective for all students. For more information, visit LearnPlatform.com.



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Instructure is an education technology company dedicated to helping everyone learn together. We amplify the power of teaching and elevate the learning process, leading to improved student outcomes. Today, Instructure supports more than 30 million educators and learners at more than 6,000 organizations around the world.

The Instructure Learning Platform makes learning more personal and student success more equitable by delivering the solutions you need to support, enrich, and connect every aspect of teaching and learning. The Instructure Learning Platform includes:



Canvas by Instructure: providing a robust foundation for teaching and learning—both in and out of the classroom—for all students, while seamlessly integrating with other learning tools.



Mastery by Instructure: bringing together the assessment tools and quality content educators need to implement a successful assessment program that drives learning forward.



Elevate by Instructure: improving the use of data and technology to help solve district challenges and give educators the information they need to make impactful decisions.



Impact by Instructure: helping teachers and students adopt educational technology to promote deeper engagement with learning.



LearnPlatform by Instructure: enabling education agencies to improve student outcomes by building a safe, equitable, and effective edtech ecosystem based on evidence.

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