Your District's Guide to Building a Stronger Edtech Ecosystem

**From Organization to Process Development
to Ongoing Evaluation of Your EdTech**

Co-authored by **Kristina Ishmael**,
Deputy Director, Office of Ed Tech, U.S. Department of Education

PROLOGUE

Every school district leverages technology to support teaching and learning today. Building an equitable, efficient and effective technology ecosystem requires intention and precision. The reality is that this work is accelerating and occurring in many school districts with limited technical personnel to manage the systems, processes and procedures that allow for smooth adoption, implementation and sustainability.

New products that have incredible potential to elevate teaching and learning are increasingly entering the market—in fact, there are more quality educational technology ("edtech") tools than ever before, but making connections between district needs and digital learning solutions is growing more difficult. Technology teams juggle budget management, existing tech ecosystems and exploring new solutions, making it challenging to navigate a noisy marketplace to find the best solutions for their educators and students.

The breadth and depth of these issues can be daunting, but they don't have to be. School districts can have a modern, efficient and effective way to integrate new programs and tools with the right evidence, processes, systems and structures in place. This guide is the beginning of a conversation—there is no one way to do this work, as a combination of concepts, models and resources can be implemented to craft a solution that fits your district's needs.

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PHASE ONE:

Getting Started

Coming Together

District leaders have a significant opportunity to bring people together for conversations about program and tool selection, as well as the organization system for those tools. It is critical to have conversations about topics such as interoperability, data privacy, cybersecurity and bandwidth, but these conversations must also include discussion of which programs and tools impact teaching and learning—a real opportunity to build consensus across teams.

WHY IT MATTERS

In many districts, there is a significant gap in daily interaction between those in charge of teaching and learning, and those in charge of technology. This is rarely the intention, but is a common pattern because of how individuals grow into their positions. Teaching and learning personnel often come from the teaching corps while technologists often come to their positions from experience as technicians in school districts or comparable corporate positions. This guide allows these different groups to come together to make powerful decisions for students and teachers.

HOW TO DO IT

Before any new structures are built, it is essential to build a culture of collaboration across departments. To do this, try these four things:

1. Ask teams to present their work streams to one another.

2. Ask teams to share both easy-to-understand concepts and more technical aspects of the work to build background knowledge of one another's work, developing empathy.

3. Identify three or four areas that bridge the work of teams and write them out.

4. Identify areas where consensus can easily be built.

empathy noun

em·pa·thy | \ 'em-pə-thē \

the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Empathy. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

The culture of listening and empathy is foundational to the elements outlined in this document. Continue to look for ways to deepen your understanding about the work that others do. Practice openness and transparency by consistently communicating about the work of technology staff that impacts everyone in the district.

Think Beyond Tools

In education, technology is often only seen as a tool to be crafted and used effectively by students and teachers. While true, the key to excellent craftsmanship s /having the right tools to do the right things at the right moment.

WHY IT MATTERS

A formalized process for the review and selection of programs and tools saves time, money and impacts student outcomes. This is the reason why individuals across departments work collaboratively to set goals and evaluate past, present and future purchases. Districts must validate their edtech program and tool choices to better support daily instruction.

HOW TO DO IT

Consider these steps to get buy-in:

1. Identify current programs and tools used in the district and ensure all interested parties have visibility into their purpose and use. *See Tip*

2. Expand the narrative from "just tools" to "essential components for learning," focusing on the why and what.

3. Gather stories from teachers and students about the impact of edtech tools on learning outcomes. *See Tip*

4. Leverage engagement, cost, and evidence data and analytics to reevaluate past decisions as they relate to current context.

5. Encourage sharing of experiences with newer tools and technologies, and promote opportunities to explore further potential.

6. Make an effort to gather a range of perspectives and do not assume the loudest voices represent the whole.

TIP

When building a district library of edtech resources, consider what information you want to include, how people will access it, how people will know about it and whether you need to tailor what is seen to specific audiences, such as teachers or student families.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

The energy required to thoughtfully approach education technology tools is essential when building consensus across departments and throughout the district. Avoiding a tools-only mindset will help minimize the risk of uninformed choices. Lead with the idea that buy-in is always about growing culture and understanding among all parties.

A searchable, user-friendly edtech library provides easy visibility to available edtech tools.

LearnPlatform makes it easy for districts to organize their edtech tools with a customized and configurable edtech library that acts as the hub of all edtech activity.

CUSTOMIZED LIBRARY

Teachers can search for, research and select the approved and available edtech tools that best meet their needs.

Instructional technology teams can add specific resources to any tool's listing to support their teachers in using the tool.
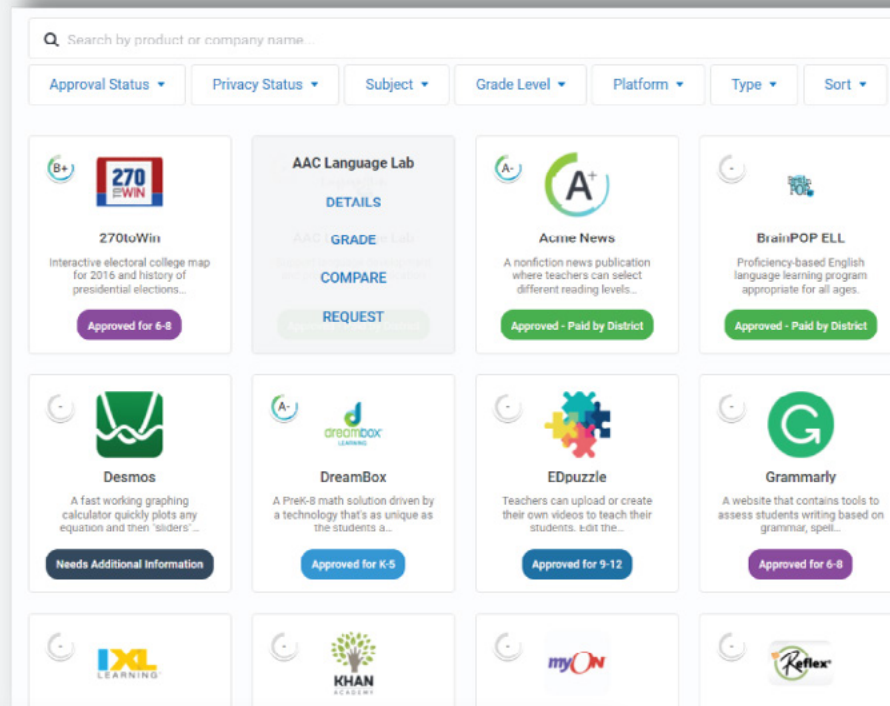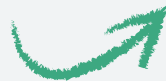
EASY ACCESS

Teachers can access these resources right from the library, along with other information, including privacy insights from trusted third parties.

Focus on Learning

It is critical to approach this next phase with the support for learners and learning top of mind. Underlying this work are questions such as, "Does this program or tool align to instruction and support teaching practices?" and "Is there evidence that use of this tool leads to desired outcomes?"

WHY IT MATTERS

Learning should be your North Star for this work. All interested parties (teachers and students included) engage in the process, discussing the explicit learning goals supported by various programs and tools. Customization is important, as each district's needs and goals are unique.

HOW TO DO IT

Districts need to be hyper-focused in this phase to ensure the right questions are asked and the appropriate learning goals are determined. Consider taking the following actions, in any order, in this phase:

- Identify 3–5 concise and simple goals that speak to the needs of everyone involved without overwhelming the system.

- Consider short-, medium- and long-term goals to work toward and mature over time.

- Encourage goals that support interoperability between programs and tools so access does not become a hurdle for students and families.

- Seek goals around skill development, academic achievement and the social-emotional needs of students as they relate to technology use.

- Ensure student data privacy is included across all goals.

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interoperability noun

in·ter·op·er·a·bil·i·ty | \ ˌin-tər-ˌä-p(ə-)rə-ˈbi-lə-tē

ability of a system to work with or use the parts of equipment of another system

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Interoperability. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interoperability

Project Unicorn defines interoperability for K–12 as "the seamless, secure, and controlled exchange of data between applications." Visit **projectunicorn.org** for more information.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

The learning goals will guide this process moving forward. Establish a procedure to revisit them often as you move through evaluation and selection of programs and tools. Ensure that all interested parties can articulate the identified learning goals and how the selected programs and tools support them.

Examples of District EdTech Goals

Promote a culture of safety and data privacy throughout the district at every level.

Communicate what edtech tools are supported and approved to teachers and staff.

Ensure the edtech tools being used are safe, equitable and effective for all students.

Phase One Takeaways

Working through the three steps outlined in the first phase will lay the foundation for everything that follows. Involve educators in the process by soliciting and incorporating their firsthand knowledge and expertise—this reinforces a common understanding around goals and establishes a strong position as you move into the next phase.

Getting buy-in around this work isn't easy. It is worth noting that buy-in is not about complete agreement, but rather everyone seeing the best intentions and relying on collective wisdom and data.

buy-in noun

\ ˈbī-ˌin \

acceptance of and willingness to actively support and participate in something (such as a proposed new plan or policy)

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Buy-in. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from **https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/buy-in**

Involving the Right People

Taking a Teams, *Not Team*, Approach

This work is unique as it requires rethinking the team approach from a single team to a set of sequential teams that have precise roles. Many districts that attempt to create efficient systems around the review and selection of programs and tools stumble because they task one group of people with all elements over a long period of time. This becomes unwieldy and often causes productivity and collective wisdom to fade over time. Changing your approach from a single team to multiple teams makes it easier for the right people to support the right things at the right time.

WHY IT MATTERS

Most people have experienced the discomfort and inefficiency of being a part of a low-functioning team. Dividing the work into three teams or committees allows those involved to be more nimble and efficient. All teams and committees have natural peaks when their impact and effectiveness wane, but designing for multiple teams means more peaks over a shorter period of time.

HOW TO DO IT

Look for the right people to be a part of each team and include all interested parties over the planning life cycle. This includes students, teachers, curriculum coordinators, building leaders, instructional technology personnel, and any others working with technology and teaching and learning. Seek out the right fits for each of three teams: Ideation, Planning and Implementation.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

Once the district shifts from a single team to a series of teams developing systems and structures, solutions emerge that are better understood, accepted and embraced. Moving to a team approach also allows for a fair, just and equitable way to bring voices into the solution while keeping processes intact.

- **Ideation Team**

  This team has the role of generating ideas, bringing all perspectives to the table and expanding the conversations to make sure this work is comprehensive enough to support the district now and into the future. This team is usually the largest and most diverse as it relates to roles and responsibilities throughout the district. It may have as many as 15–20 people.

- **Planning Team**

  This team typically has 6–8 people, and will synthesize the ideation team's potential solutions and develop a coherent plan. The role of this team is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

- **Implementation Team**

  This is usually the smallest team, consisting of 3-4 people who hold the institutional knowledge of why this work took place. They are on this team for the long term, monitoring, adjusting and improving the plan based on feedback. Periodically (every 2–3 years, or in the face of rapid change), this team may call on the Ideation team to refresh and recalibrate based on the new realities.

Transitioning from *Team* to *Teams*

WHY IT MATTERS

Ideas are easy—the details are where things can be challenging. Many district teams are pros at examining issues, identifying problems and making suggestions, later getting stuck at this stage. A key to this work is moving from the Ideation Team, where every member contributed, felt heard and gave suggestions, to the Planning Team charged with crafting a plan.

TIP
Define a clear beginning and end for the ideation process to keep it from dragging on unproductively.

HOW TO DO IT

The transition from ideation to planning can be the trickiest part of any design process. Solutions have to be crafted with an understanding of organizational limitations. While limitations can change over time, some solutions are ready for the current structural and attitudinal realities of a learning community while some great ideas will get bounced by the barriers of a current system.

Success can come when moving from ideation to planning if the following are considered:

- Recognize the Ideation Team and its work at the end of its process.

- Craft a narrative around the Planning Team that showcases a commitment to the inclusion of diverse ideas and solutions.

- Select the Planning Team based on strengths in convergent thinking while making sure that a spectrum of ideas remains on this team, including one or two divergent thinkers to feed the process.

- Acknowledge that different team members play different roles, with some advising the decision making and others focusing on implementation.

- Commit to including all voices in essential dialogue and final decision making.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

If all teams trust in the process, the transition from the Ideation Team to the Planning Team allows a solution to emerge that promotes transparency and a focus on learning, while decreasing stress and frustration in the selection process. This is also when solutions begin to be critiqued through a variety of lenses, ensuring selections are accessible to all students and promoting conversations around how the selected tools meet district goals on concepts such as Universal Design for Learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insight into how humans learn." Learn more at CAST.org

The (Right) Cooks in the Kitchen

WHY IT MATTERS

There are historic omissions in educational teams that create obstacles to success. Without these voices in the ideation and planning stages, unseen barriers can emerge and be impossible to overcome due to the implementation timeline. Not having the right people on the right teams can manifest a loss of trust and confidence around the emerging solution, derailing the launch and delaying initial impact. How does a district avoid these obstacles? What can allow for the development of a process that is strong from start to finish? Where have districts taken missteps in developing a transparent and navigable process? In short: are the right cooks in the kitchen? Here are the essential players:

HOW TO DO IT

- District Leaders: Keep the superintendent and senior leadership informed of the process to avoid political roadblocks with the school board and community. Remember that keeping them informed is not the same thing as mandating their participation in every meeting.

- Title Program Coordinators: These individuals maintain budgets with significant spending power for technology that caters to specialized student groups. Include them when possible to avoid duplication or faltering on budget.

- Librarians: The modern librarian plays a significant role in championing new technology in buildings and often leads relevant technology training. These professionals may also have insight into key pieces such as accessibility and copyright of a program or tool.

- Teachers: While this may seem obvious, always include the right teachers in this work. This means those teachers who regularly use programs and tools, along with teachers who wield significant influence among their peers. Both groups are important because their endorsement of a solution generally leads to widespread buy-in.

- Trusted Technology Partners: Schools need industry partners. The speed at which the technology industry moves requires that schools have partners who help wade through the marketplace. These partners may participate on internal teams at times to provide their perspective on trends and connect with other districts.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

When teams are composed of the right voices, there are greater chances of success and moving big decisions through the system for long-lasting change. Inclusion does not mean that everyone is involved in every decision—select the right members for teams, not because it will make the process easier but because it will make the process better and positively impact learning.

Phase Two Takeaways

Just as the second phase is dependent on a successful phase one, the remaining phases can only sit on a strong foundation. Knowing the *why* (Phase One) and *who* (Phase Two) makes the rest of the work robust, sustainable and impactful.

Elements to Incorporate

STEP 1:
Audit Your Existing Tools

A district's technology toolbox becomes cluttered over time. While the collection of programs and tools might have made sense at some moment, it requires regular reflection and review. This review is critical to ensure districts spend wisely for the items they truly need and that best serve their current teacher and student population.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many districts are unsure of which programs and tools they have, how they're being used and whether they positively impact learning. Finite budgets and greater accountability around technology require an organized set of programs and tools to ensure effective use. No new processes should precede a thorough audit of what is currently accessible.

HOW TO DO IT

Create a matrix of all free and purchased programs and tools being used across the district. Once everything is identified, collect satisfaction data about each program from students, teachers and other staff. Be as thorough and structured as possible during this first round to develop a comprehensive picture.

Determining what tools teachers are using (or perhaps more importantly, not using) in the classroom setting is essential. Developing a formal process around collecting internal feedback allows teachers to feel heard in the edtech decision making process and centralizes communication.

Once the matrix has all programs and tools listed, ask these questions as they relate to each tool or program:

- Do staff think this program is user friendly?
- Do staff see greater student engagement because of the use of the product?
- Do students find the program interesting and engaging?
- What academic gains come from this program?
- How many students are using the program daily/weekly/ monthly? Consider the difference between use and engagement when asking this question.

TIP

Need help discovering all the edtech tools —free and paid—in use across your district? Claim your free Inventory Dashboard for insight into which, how many and how often edtech tools are accessed by students and teachers in your district.

- Visit: **learnplatform.com/inventory**

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

Evaluating the current reality helps guide the selection of future products and even the future of current products. Many districts have a similar curricular materials process, so seek out these auditing processes and avoid reinventing this tool identification process. Once there is a sense of what is available, used, liked by staff and what is getting results, it is time to consider how all of these tools impact the other aspects of school governance.

Structuring Teacher Feedback

For teacher feedback to be most helpful, it should be easy to gather, synthesize and interpret. Structured feedback, such as what is collected through a survey, is most helpful in this context. Include your must-have questions for evaluating edtech tools, while also leaving room for some open-ended responses.

A sampling of questions and criteria included in LearnPlatform's free, research-based rubric for grading edtech tools is shown below.

The full rubric is built into LearnPlatform and is also available for **download**.

CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS:

- How long have you been using this tool?
- How often do you use this tool?
- What group(s) of students use this tool?
- For what purpose have you used this tool/technology?
- How long did it take you to set up this tool in a classroom?

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

- How do you use the product in your classroom?
- What worked best for you?
- What did not work for you?
- What was your overall impression of using this product?

GRADED CRITERIA:

- Ease of Use & Navigation
- Quality of Features
- Quality of Content
- Technical Merit
- Alignment with Learning Objectives & Standards
- Impact on Student Learning & Engagement
- Impact on Teaching Efficiency & Effectiveness
- Professional Development Required (quality & amount required)

Identify Natural Barriers

WHY IT MATTERS

Once all of the programs and tools have been audited, it is time to identify the natural barriers in the school system. These barriers include technical limitations based on types of devices and operating platforms, as well as budget barriers and the physical infrastructure limitations of your buildings. Without this information, even the best team with the right voices can fall short because they are out of sync with the current system realities.

HOW TO DO IT

Work with a small group to uncover up to ten barriers the Ideation Team should consider as they think about program and tool selection processes that support students and teachers and enhance learning.

In preparation for the process development aspect of this work, ask these questions:

- What natural barriers (i.e., budget, current technology, infrastructure, etc.) does the district have?
- What limits do they create?
- Can the limits of the barrier be reduced? If so, in what ways?
- Would changes to the system be considered if they remain a significant barrier?

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

An honest assessment of district system limits can either highlight challenges or spark creativity. The onus is on the district to craft a culture that sees these barriers as opportunities rather than limitations. This step emerges for all groups making changes, but the best teams know the limits prior to launching a new process.

Phase Three Takeaways

The knowledge of what a district has and the limits that exist are essential elements to this entire process. Too often, this phase is missed or minimized causing additional stress on the system later. In this phase, it is also important to consider whether the technology program or tool works with in-person learning and/or in blended/hybrid learning environments. Product flexibility over time, as well as sustainability of the tool to adapt over time, should be reviewed.

Making it Efficient

STEP 1:
Needs Assessment

This phase outlines a framework for each of the four major processes districts develop to maintain and grow their library of technology programs and tools. Each district should customize these processes to meet their specific needs that have been identified in the first three phases of this work. With processes in place in these four areas, schools can ensure they are getting the most learning from their tools while freeing up budget for future opportunities.

WHY IT MATTERS

This process builds on the programs and tools audit (Phase Three) and asks a district to look for areas that need support from new or different programs and tools in the near future. Having this process in place also helps avoid panic purchases or quickly reacting to new, popular tools.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Review the programs and tools audit with the Design Team.
2. Look for areas that include duplicates or are void of programs and tools.
3. Identify tools that could support these areas.
4. Examine areas with minimal tools supporting learning.
5. Discuss whether the current selection is sufficient or if more are needed.
6. Assess areas with low satisfaction among teachers and students and consider alternatives.
7. Compile findings for the Implementation Team.
8. Schedule a meeting for the Design Team to complete an annual or bi-annual needs assessment.

New Tool Request Process

WHY IT MATTERS

Beyond the annual or bi-annual needs assessment, districts need to have a process and workflow in place that allows teachers to request a review of new programs and tools. This process is different from a curriculum review and is intended for all edtech, such as complementary or supplementary programs and tools. This ensures educators can quickly and easily make requests in a more formal way.

This request process can be facilitated with a form that collects necessary information about the requested edtech tool upfront and creates a trigger to initiate an internal review.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Create an easy-to-find form for educators to complete. Keep it simple but comprehensive. Consider including the following fields and questions:
   - Requestor contact information for follow up.
   - Product company information (company, product name, URL).
   - How does the program or tool support teaching and learning?
   - Does it require setting up accounts so students can log in?
   - What is the cost of a license? Is it per student or per site?
   - Does it conform to district policy for equity, inclusion, privacy, etc.?

2. Set a specific timeline for response.

3. Provide an avenue for educators to follow up on their requests, such as an email or phone number. You could even create an approval tracker that showcases where things are in the process, promoting transparency.

4. Publicize this process through email, video and other media.

4. Identify areas where consensus can easily be built.

> **workflow** noun
>
> work·flow | \ ˈwərk-ˌflō \
>
> the sequence of steps involved in moving from the beginning to the end of a working process
>
> *Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Workflow. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/workflow*

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

This is all about building efficiency into the system. Having one clearly defined process not only reduces the number of people needed to keep track of and respond to incoming requests, but also cuts down on communication that happens when requests are incomplete.

Vetting Process

The selection of new programs and tools to support teaching and learning promotes positive change, but also introduces challenges. A comprehensive vetting process ensures legal, technical, budget and human capital requirements are taken into account.

New edtech programs and tools, for example, must be reviewed for legal compliance with **COPPA** and **FERPA** and technical compatibility with existing systems. On the human capital side, implementation requires support from technology personnel who may have limited bandwidth. Additionally, there are implications on short- and long-term budgets, and the need to support ongoing teacher training on the program or tool. Nevertheless, a well-integrated, highly used tool that makes teaching and learning more robust should always drive this selection process.

There is a wealth of resources that can further help districts begin or refine a vetting process, including:

- **Common Sense Media** maintains a database of privacy evaluations that can provide educators with a baseline understanding of privacy components.
- The **Student Privacy Pledge** from **Student Privacy Compass** allows companies to attest to various privacy standards.
- **Project Unicorn** seeks to partner edtech providers with school districts who pledge to upload data interoperability standards and data privacy measures, and has created a free community portal.
- Affinity groups of colleagues from other districts, as well as industry organizations like **CoSN** and **ISTE**, can also act as a springboard in varying stages of curation.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Acknowledge the request has been received.
2. Decide if standing meetings are needed or if meetings scheduled as requests are received are sufficient.
3. Gather a predetermined group from technology and curriculum departments.
4. Ask these essential questions among the group:
   - Does this tool fill a need?
   - Do we have something that already solves this issue?
   - Does this work together with current resources in this area?
   - Does the request work with available hardware?
   - Are there any concerns with student data privacy or data security?
   - Does this require rostering and automation support?
   - Does this require labor-intensive installation?
   - Does this tool meet district policies regarding equity?
   - Is there a cost associated with this tool?
   - Are there funds available?
5. Test the product in a sandbox environment to verify usability and accessibility.
6. Respond to the request, whether via email or other channel, when a decision has been made.
7. Provide opportunities for follow-up conversations with the requesters to create greater understanding if application was denied.
8. Document the decision about the program or tool.
9. Create and share a repository of all approved/not approved programs and tools to prevent duplicate future requests.
10. Categorize programs and tools in a way that is widely available, easily searchable and accessible across the district.

TIP

Consider automating your workflows to keep things moving and build in notifications of status changes to increase transparency throughout the process. This also reduces duplicate requests and inefficiencies.

Sample Request Workflow

01 | Teacher discovers new edtech tool, verifies that nothing similar is already approved by District.

02 | Teacher submits request using District Request form, providing required information and supporting documentation.

03 | Instructional Technology Team notified of request and assigns appropriate reviewers.

04 | Instructional Technology Review Team reviews request, confirms no existing approved tools offer similar capabilities.

05 | Curriculum Team reviews if edtech tool has a curricular focus.
APPROVAL NEEDED

06 | Legal Team reviews. If student data is captured, privacy review initiated, appropriate agreement obtained from product provider.
APPROVAL NEEDED

07 | Technology Team reviews and confirms compatibility with current devices and systems.
APPROVAL NEEDED

08 | Instructional Technology Team Lead confirms workflow completed, updates status and notifies requestor.
APPROVAL NEEDED

Each department considers its own criteria during the review process, such as:

Curriculum Team
- Is there educational value to the product?
- Is it aligned with our curriculum?

Instructional Technology Team
- Is the value unique to this product?
- Can we support it with existing resources?

Technology
- Does it need to be installed locally or is it web-based?
- Does it work with our existing systems?

Privacy/Legal
- Does it meet state or district privacy requirements?

STEP 4:
Continuous Improvement Process

WHY IT MATTERS

Every process works in the context in which it was developed. Change is a constant, so processes can decay and lose effectiveness over time, which is why it is essential to have a continuous improvement process as part of this work. Adding this process to steps 1–3 of this phase keeps this work relevant, effective and efficient.

HOW TO DO IT

- Schedule regular reviews of all processes.
- Gather feedback from all involved about what is and isn't working.
- Identify ways to streamline the process.
- Look for ways to reduce the workload for all involved.
- Consider bringing different voices into the teams.
- Anticipate challenges that could arise and try to solve these issues.
- Revise documents and workflows based on this review.
- Communicate these changes with all involved, including information about why the changes were made.

WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE

By building improvement into the process itself it, in effect, becomes future-proofed, able to evolve with shifting priorities and changing environments.

Phase Four Takeaways

Processes will create efficiency over time as edtech feedback is streamlined and standardized. Additionally, a culture of trust will develop naturally when processes are specifically designed by district teams for district needs.

Rollout to Ensure Adoption and Success

STEP 1:

Communicate Changes

WHY IT MATTERS

The last thing any district wants is to spend time crafting helpful solutions that are not impactful. Making sure everyone knows about changes and, most importantly, why the changes were made, requires crafting a series of messages for various audiences using multiple forms of media.

HOW TO DO IT

Consider using these strategies to clearly and consistently communicate newly created process changes:

- Identify the various audiences.
- Design a plan for each audience.
- Consider the messages that need to stick.
- Use the power of video to communicate.
- Recognize the need to say things multiple times.
- Limit the number of messages in each communication.
- Ask for feedback.

STEP 2:

Create Learning Options

WHY IT MATTERS

New programs and tools enter a learning ecosystem with great promise and excitement, but the impact can be limited by minimal usage, oftentimes because teachers are unaware or uncomfortable using them. Training and support are essential, and no communication plan will be successful unless it is coupled with high-quality professional learning.

HOW TO DO IT

- Create asynchronous and synchronous learning options for tools.
- Centralize access to professional development resources to drive ongoing training.
- Incorporate training on specific tools in pieces, targeted on instructional practices.
- Design short 5–7 minute videos that show how the tools work and support learning.
- Provide multiple entry points for the trainings so educators can learn on their level.
- Reinforce learning at 3-, 6- and 12-month intervals.
- Plan options for individuals and small groups.
- Create time and space for individuals to ask specific questions.
- Identify teacher ambassadors who can demonstrate the effectiveness in their classroom.

TIP

If adoption of a tool lags or is inconsistent across buildings, consider whether professional learning was a factor. Investing in additional professional development and monitoring engagement over a designated period of time may be more cost-efficient than replacing one edtech tool with another option and starting over.

Phase Five Takeaways

Along with communicating changes and creating space for professional learning, it is also important to measure usage and impact of tools. This new information will create a feedback loop that can be used in your continuous improvement cycle. Districts will also create mechanisms for teachers to provide feedback around new tools to continue the focus on empathy-based design and changes.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Technology continues to play a significant role in learning and is growing at a pace that can quickly outstrip the resources a district has to manage it. Robust processes and structures must be designed by those most impacted, and the vision and mission of a district should be embedded in each technology decision to create a greater sense of transparency.

The goal of this guide is to set districts up for success and make things work better. There is no longer the need to rely on historical decisions or the status quo—the best products will rise to the top when there is genuine feedback and teacher voice embedded in these processes.

About the Authors

KRISTINA ISHMAEL

Kristina Ishmael is an educator, learner, advocate, and agent of change. After her work in the classroom, along with at the state and federal level, she found herself working on education policy around instructional materials in the perfect culmination of her commitment to removing roadblocks for resource access, developing inclusive and representative materials, and providing professional learning for educators.

Ishmael is an educational consultant and senior research fellow for the Teaching, Learning, & Tech team at New America supporting educators, school systems, nonprofits, civil rights organizations, and other entities as they navigate the learning environments of today. Previously, she worked in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Ed Tech, Nebraska Department of Education, and taught emerging bilingual students as an elementary teacher in Omaha, Nebraska.

ROBERT DILLON, ED.D.

Dr. Robert Dillon has focused his educational career on designing optimal systems for learning. This includes instructional design, infusion of technology for learning, and maximizing learning environments to support all learners. Dillon has had the opportunity to support teachers and leaders in optimizing current spaces as well as through the experience of designing new spaces. He sees this work as an opportunity to rethink what is possible as well as bring all systems into sync to maximize the impact of excellent teaching.

Dillon is also an author, speaker, educator, and lifelong learner. He has served kids and families as a teacher, principal, technology director, and innovation leader. He works through an equity lens and looks to bring excellence to every classroom. For this work, he has been honored by Common Sense Media, The Center for Green Schools, the School at Stanford University, the Buck Institute for Education, and Future Ready Schools. Dillon is the co-founder of ConnectED Learning, a Saint Louis non-profit dedicated to affordable, quality professional learning for teachers.

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+ Build and share a centralized district edtech library

+ Manage contracts and license costs

+ Configure approval and privacy statuses to meet local needs

+ Collect and report on teacher feedback on specific edtech tools

+ Communicate key information, resources and guidance on edtech tools to staff and families

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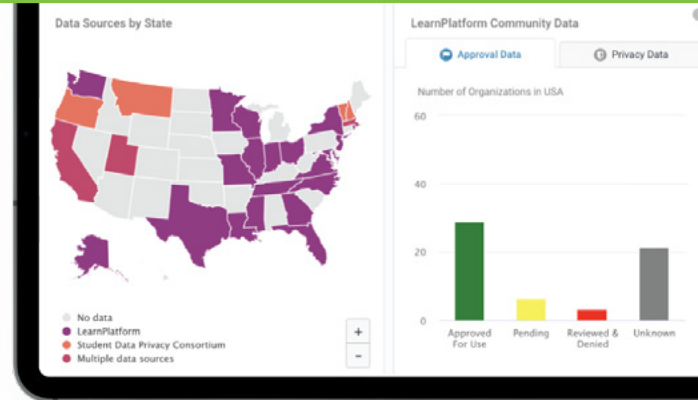
STREAMLINE & COMPLY

+ Gain control over how teachers request new edtech

+ Increase transparency by keeping teachers informed of status changes

+ Standardize and simplify internal processes for edtech vetting and procurement

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+ Identify and address equity gaps by monitoring edtech engagement and effectiveness for different demographic groups

+ Inform ongoing professional development needs related to edtech

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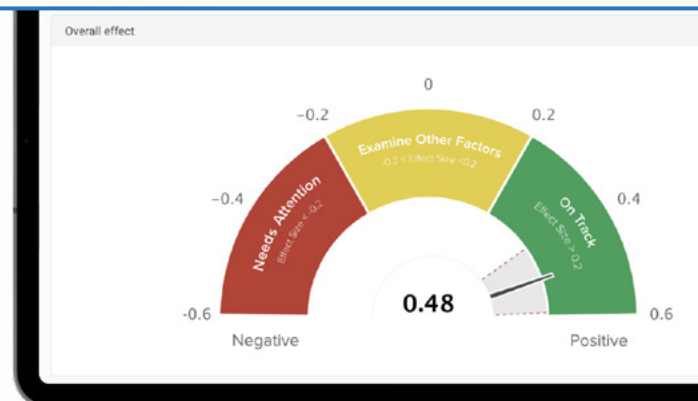
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