Microsoft

10 steps for choosing the right ed tech solution

Microsoft Education

Inside

Setting out

Bringing new devices and software to your school is imperative. But getting there can seem daunting. This guide will walk you through the important steps from defining your need to making a purchase. As it turns out, the most critical elements in introducing technology to your school have little to do with the features of a laptop. Laying the groundwork with stakeholders and enlisting their support will significantly affect adoption of new ideas.

Let's walk through this.

Support for your journey

✦ Technology enables better learning outcomes, and makes it easier to bring personalized learning to every student.[1]

✦ Technology can help teachers reallocate up to **30 percent** of their time so they can focus more on student-centric activities.[2]

1, 2. Microsoft Class of 2030 Report
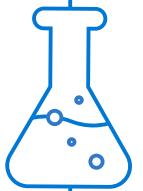
1. Define the need

What are the problems that technology can solve? What are the expected benefits of new devices? How will this technology help teachers ensure better learning outcomes? It's not enough to want a tablet for every student. It's not enough to ask teachers to integrate technology into the classroom. You must be clear about the problems the technology will solve.

Carefully consider the various cohorts that the technology will touch, and thoroughly define the benefit to your staff and students. By creating a needs statement that's shared by leaders and other stakeholders, you can create the momentum for long-term impact.

Write this down. You'll need to refer to it later.
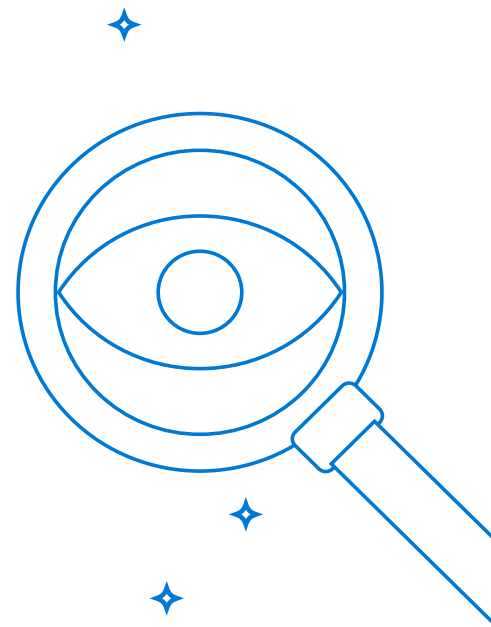
Examples of well-considered needs statements

To support 1:1 learning, we will put a tablet in every student's hands. This will help our students think more deeply. Technology allows them to ask bigger questions, and to explore concepts more thoroughly.

Security and student privacy are a priority for our school. We will invest in technology (devices, software, and apps) to address this priority. A more secure, private learning environment protects our students and staff from risk.

Build your needs statement
The examples above were created using this structure.

? Need _____

_____

⚙ Solution _____

_____

✓ Result for students or educators _____

_____

2. Clarify goals and success metrics

To do this right, you'll need to be clear about the initiative goals, and how you're going to know when you've been successful. Earlier when you defined the needs, it was about vision and aspiration. Now the goals and measurement of success must be qualified by facts and data. Imagine providing your local media outlet with a write-up of the technology initiative. What benefits to students, teachers, and the entire school would you cite to ensure a strong story?

The simplest method for measuring success is to envision what that headline would be in a newspaper. Then when it's time to look back on the success of the program, see how you measure up to that headline.

For more quantifiable measurement, use benchmark test scores that are relevant to your technology initiative. To get really serious, use business intelligence software to connect systems, such as records of attendance and performance, so you can accurately monitor and report on progress.

Examples of a sound goal and measure of success

A district-wide device refresh will enable personalized learning for every student, which will improve outcomes. We will measure this by the improvement in grade-level reading and math skills year over year, per standardized testing.

Setting up a STEM classroom will meet the interests of our student body. We will measure success by determining whether our STEM classes and after-school STEM clubs have high enrollment.

Write your goal and measurement statement
The examples above were created using this structure.

We will ————————————————————————

————————————————————————

We will measure success by ————————————————

————————————————————————

————————————————————————

3. Create a budget and timeline

How much and when? These will be the frequently asked questions of your technology initiative. A lot of factors influence budget and timeline. The considerations below can help you get sharp on these details.

BUDGET

✦ Evaluate whether the expense fits into the existing annual budget

✦ Evaluate whether ongoing maintenance is considered in future annual budgets

✦ Assess whether outside funding is needed

TIMELINE

✦ Enlisting support can take weeks; be sure to factor this into the timeline

✦ Identify any specific and significant launch dates to target

✦ Give stakeholders ample time to review and discuss the plans

✦ Confirm with your technology services provider how much time the full deployment will take

✦ Work with your instructional technologist and educators to make sure the training date fits into the timeline

4. Recognize the obstacles

Hurdles in your journey can take many forms. Some are mindset hurdles—do your educators share your vision? Some are financial hurdles. And some are hurdles you might not even know you need to leap:

Shortsightedness
Implementing a technology initiative to solve a short-term problem may prevent the program from growing and adapting to future requirements.
TIP: Having a clear needs statement will help keep you on track.

Teacher support
Involving teachers early is important. Disrupting their plans and having no training program for them will surely derail your initiative.
TIP: Tap tech-savvy educators as subject-matter experts on different technologies to help train fellow teachers.

Digitization, not transformation
Simply moving traditional content to a computer or tablet is digitization. True technology transformation is a new way of teaching, engaging, and collaborating.
TIP: Study your goal statement to be sure you're aiming for the right thing.

5. Identify stakeholders

The good news is that you don't need to undertake this initiative on your own. Identify the people who can help you, and ask for their support.

Core stakeholders are likely to be:

- Tech-savvy educators

- Technology decision-makers

- School leaders

Other stakeholders who may be involved:

- Parent-teacher association

- School board members

- Teachers' union

Put your stakeholders to work

Educators should have a clear sense of the reasons for change, what the change is, and how to proceed. Once they're empowered with this, their job is to report on their firsthand experiences with any existing technology, detail a wish list, and share frequent updates on the initiative with fellow staffers.

School leadership is responsible for getting critical statewide or district-wide buy-in, which will help the new technology program find success. In small and large meetings, school leadership is tasked with being the voice for your initiative, providing clear answers to questions and generating support for the project.

Technology leaders are charged with the most important elements of your program: evaluating the new technology, driving the device and software deployment, and putting together a training plan for educators.

6. Develop criteria for the purchase

**Starting with guidelines will help narrow the options.**
Some questions to consider:

NEED	CRITERIA
Does the technology support rich assessment and feedback?	Giving individual evaluation and feedback is simple with tools like Teams and OneNote Class Notebook.
Does your technology plan support accessibility so that every student can achieve improved learning outcomes?	Accessibility built into the device and software means supporting every student with ease.
Does the technology need to go beyond the classroom, to support teacher collaboration across the school?	In addition to classroom collaboration, software like Teams and OneNote provides new opportunities for teachers and staff to work together.
Are you looking to empower students to learn in the way that's most engaging for them?	Look for technology that supports different interfaces—touch, type, digital pen, and voice.
Will you need a solution that supports media, gaming, advanced coding, or peripherals like cameras and microscopes?	Look for devices built for high performance, with high processing speeds and plenty of memory.
Will you need to deploy and manage this solution across multiple classrooms or an entire school?	Choose a cloud management system like Intune for Education to save time during setup for users, devices, apps, as well as updates throughout the school year.
Will this technology prepare students for the future with the skills most in demand by employers?	Of the top 20 essential employment skills, only two technical proficiencies are specifically requested: Microsoft Office and Microsoft PowerPoint.[1]
Are you meeting the highest levels of privacy and security requirements to ensure your students' safety?	Make sure any solution you choose meets FERPA and GDPR standards.
Do you have a plan for adoption for educators at your school?	Make it easier by choosing software that teachers already use and prefer.

➔ To learn what a transformed classroom looks like, explore our **interactive experience.**

1. Anderson, Cushing, and John F. Gantz. "Keys to the Future: Worldwide Readiness Skills to Ensure Student Success—International," IDC, sponsored by Microsoft, June 2016.

7. Dig into research

Modern technology lets you deliver curricula and assessments that are more engaging, equitable, and personalized than ever before. There is a dizzying array of choices in educational technology, from educational software, apps, simulations, videos, computer games, podcasts, webisodes, robotic kits, and augmented reality, to devices. How do you know what's best? Here are some tips to keep you on track as you begin your research.
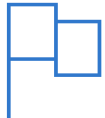
Reference your needs statement and your goals
It's important to remember the problem you're solving

Keep your criteria close
This will provide the best framework for ensuring you're making the right choices

Talk to peers who have undertaken a similar initiative
They'll alert you to red flags and best practices

Share your top three choices for review
This is another opportunity to involve your stakeholders

Looking for the right device and feeling overwhelmed?
Get answers with our device finder quiz.

8. Gather support for the final decision

It might seem that engaging stakeholders and your school community early was enough. They were enthusiastic, and support for the initiative remains strong. Now follow through with engagement on the final decision. Keeping your stakeholders involved right through to the purchase decision keeps the plan active and in their minds, which drives anticipation and enthusiasm.

Tying your needs statement to your technology recommendations can give your plan justification and momentum.

9. Make the purchase

The hard work is behind you. Now you can move forward with confidence and set up the technology that will help transform your school.

Get in touch. We'd like to hear from you. ⊙

10. Wrap it up

One last thing. You're in a great position to fill in all the parts of your journey with devices, software, apps, lesson plans, and training tools for teachers. Maybe your journey was about devices—we can help with your deployment and maintenance plan. Maybe your journey was about setting up a STEM program—we can help with lesson plans or a STEM cart.

Reach out. We're here to help. ⊙→

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