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Selecting the Right EdTech Tools

Researching, evaluating, and purchasing the right educational technologies can be a daunting and exhaustive process for school districts – with curriculum and technology leaders carrying the weight of the burden. Selecting software solutions that drive accountability, student outcomes, and teacher success while ensuring data security, compliance, and integration with current systems consumes valuable and limited resources. Knowing the right questions to ask is imperative for success.

9 Considerations Before Purchasing EdTech

1. Data Security
Does the solution provider have documentation showing that they conform to student data privacy standards—FERPA, COPPA, HIPAA, SOPPA (Illinois state law), or the Student Data Privacy Pledge. To what extent does the software conform? You can sometimes read the vendor's EULA (End User Licensing Agreement) for clues if they do not have obvious documentation on their website.

2. Interoperability
Does this software work with your existing software? Does it fit into your digital ecosystem? IMS Global Thin Common Cartridge, QTI, LTI, etc.? Integrations—does the software have a set of third-party tools that work with it to provide more advanced features? If so, how do you hook them up?

3. Technical Details/Requirements
Does your division have the necessary infrastructure to run this software—hardware, software, networking? In other words, does it run on what you have?

4. Accessibility
Can all of your students, including those with special needs, use this software equally well? (Line Readers, speech-to-text capabilities, e.g.)

5. Usability
How user-friendly is the interface? How much training will be required to implement the software fully? Will your teachers and students still be using the software in a year?

6. Following Academic Standards
Does the content match your division's state and local standards so that the work you do in the software can align with your curriculum maps and pacing guides?

7. Feedback/Communication
Does the software provide the chance for teachers to give feedback to students? Can parents communicate with teachers?

8. Learning modes available
Can students learn asynchronously as well as synchronously with the software tool? Is there an offline version for those students who are having connectivity issues?

9. Customer Support
What type, when, and how much is offered? The better the support, the less of a training load there is on the division.

Develop a process for evaluating EdTech and form a team.

Who should be on the team?
- Curriculum Office representative
- Technology Office representative
- Finance Office representative
- Building admins and select teachers
- Technology Resource Teachers
- Parents?
- Students?

If the process is well documented, then everyone should know:
- Who can suggest new software for adoption?
- To whom should they report their suggestion?
- What background research pertaining to the solution is each evaluation team member responsible for bringing to the table?
- Can a pilot version of the program be arranged so your division can see how it is going to work?
- Which criteria are your division going to use as guidelines for deciding which solution is a better choice?

Most of this is probably being done informally in your division now, but how do you know if all of the necessary points are being considered? What happens if you don't have a formal process in place and a parent or community member challenges your reasoning behind a software purchase?

Learn more about selecting the right EdTech tools with Veracity Verification Solutions at **www.veracityvs.com**.
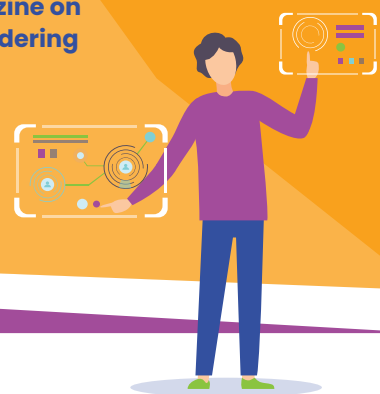
Interesting Links
Click the links below to find out more:

EdTech Evidence Exchange—making a good fit between schools and software

IMS Global—Standards

Project Unicorn—Interoperability

EdTech Magazine on Schools considering Integration

GLOSSARY of RELEVANT TERMS

FERPA
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; gives students and their parents access to educational records and prevents ineligible third parties from accessing non-directory information

HIPPA
Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act; prevents student medical data from being accessed by ineligible third parties

COPPA
Children's Online Privacy Protection Act; places requirements on websites or online services that are used by individuals 13 years old and younger

SOPPA
Student Online Personal Protection Act; Illinois law that protects student data from misuse by EdTech vendors

INTEGRATION
the process of connecting separate pieces of software in order to allow them to pass common data back and forth; a SIS and a Math review product could be integrated so that the class rosters and demographic information from the SIS don't have to be duplicated in the Math review software

INTEROPERABILITY
the concept of software working together due to an accepted common standard; QTI and LTI are examples of those standards

IMS GLOBAL
group formed in 1997 to promote the following of interoperability standards in the EdTech industry and in education

THIN COMMON CARTRIDGE
an efficient method of packaging information into a file that can be read by standards-compliant software to make the transfer of learning content easier

QTI
Question and Test Interoperability standard; created by IMS Global to standardize the transfer of item and test content data between assessment software solutions

LTI
Learning Tools Interoperability standard; created by IMS Global to allow different learning tools to operate within a learning management system

PROJECT UNICORN
is an effort to improve data interoperability within K-12 education by encouraging the use of accepted standards

WCAG
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines; defines how to make the content displayed on web pages more accessible to people with disabilities

VPAT
a document template created by the Information Technology Industry Council (ITIC) and used by various organizations to report the level of compliance of their software products; usually required for federally-funded projects