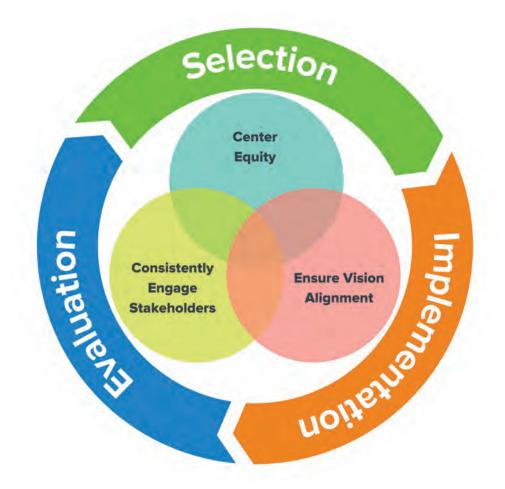# How to find and use the right technology tools

BY JIN-SOO HUH

Educators and students use education technology tools in a variety of ways — for assessments, projects, organization, and more. A recent report found that during the 2022-23 school year, educators and students accessed an average of 42 education technology tools (Learn Platform, n.d.). Schools and districts need processes and systems to ensure they choose, implement, and evaluate tools in ways that best meet the needs of their school community.

The Learning Accelerator, a national nonprofit that accelerates individual, organizational, and sector learning to transform K-12 education, created a free, web-based guide to support schools and districts in developing these processes and systems. At the core of the guide is a focus on equity. The guide, titled *EdTech Systems Guide: Equity-Driven Selection, Implementation, and Evaluation*, was developed in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's

Office of Education Technology.

To work toward educational equity, The Learning Accelerator believes we must be deliberate in how we're designing or redesigning systems in a way that centers the experience and needs of our traditionally underserved students — particularly students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families. The guide provides detailed recommendations, resources, and examples that schools and districts

can incorporate into their own context. While comprehensive, the guide is designed to make it easy to navigate and jump directly to the most relevant or pressing content.

Here, we share three tools from the guide to support teachers in using education technology effectively:

- A tool to help determine criteria for selection;
- A protocol for determining baseline skills needed to implement a tool; and
- A rubric for observations of implementation.

REFERENCE

Learn Platform. (n.d.). *The edtech top 40: A look at K-12 edtech engagement during the 2022-23 school year*. Instructure. www.instructure.com/resources/research-reports/edtech-top-40-look-k-12-edtech-engagement-during-2022-23-school-year

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Jin-Soo Huh (jin-soo.huh@ learningaccelerator.org) is a partner at The Learning Accelerator.

ACCESS GUIDES ONLINE

View *EdTech Systems Guide* and other resources from The Learning Accelerator, including guides on digital equity, data advocacy, and teaching and learning practices, at **practices.learningaccelerator. org/guides**

DEVELOP EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY SELECTION CRITERIA

Selecting the best tools for your school will set up educators to use education technology effectively. Schools and districts should identify important criteria as part of their education technology selection process. Taking a moment to set nonnegotiable criteria and develop a rubric for screening tools will help make the process focused and faster. These criteria can also be used to evaluate tools already in use in schools and districts. Here are sample criteria that can be adjusted for a school or district context.

Name of tool		Reviewer(s):	
Nonnegotiables	**Yes**	**No**	**Notes**
The tool is within our budget.			
The tool meets privacy requirements.			
The tool is accessible for all users.			
The tool aligns to our district's vision.			

Criteria	Does not meet	Partially meets	Meets	Exceeds	Notes
Staff capacity: Our current staffing model can support the tool's implementation.					
Research: The tool is backed by or based on research.					
Single sign-on: Users can log on with our single sign-on.					
Support resources: The vendor provides videos, professional learning sessions, etc.					

Adapted from *EdTech Systems Guide*.

View additional examples and descriptions of criteria to consider for selection and a downloadable selection criteria template at **bit.ly/LF-selection**

EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY SELECTION CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS

The guide has tools to help schools and districts apply the advice in their context. Here are considerations for school and district teams as they develop their education technology selection criteria.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Education technology tools that incorporate linguistic diversity and language differentiation or translation can allow students and their families access points into systems with which they may not otherwise be able to engage. We strongly recommend considering the needs of linguistically diverse students early in the tool selection process to ensure that the selected tools can meet this group's unique needs. Consider making linguistic accessibility a nonnegotiable selection criterion.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Some education technology tools do not offer adequate accessibility functions. Selecting tools that follow Universal Design for Learning principles and provide accessibility functionality (e.g., closed-captioning, color and contrast, speech recognition, predictive text, magnification, keyboard shortcuts) will ensure that all students can engage meaningfully. Accessibility features should be one of your nonnegotiable selection criteria.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EQUITY

When using tools to support student learning, it is important to represent the full spectrum of student diversity in any examples, stories, or characters portrayed so that students can see themselves reflected in an affirming way. When developing your selection criteria, consider the extent to which tools are designed to reflect the identities and experiences of a diverse set of students and what opportunities tools may provide for educators to tailor pre-existing content to better reflect students and their lived experiences.

Equity pauses are incorporated throughout the guide to help schools and districts take a step back and reflect on their project design and decision-making to mitigate biases and ensure equity lives across all parts of the work. Through this pause, teams can make the time and space to reflect and improve in service of their school and district's vision and continuous improvement of their education technology processes.

Adapted from *EdTech Systems Guide*.

DETERMINE BASELINE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

After selecting a tool, schools and districts need to determine an implementation plan and ways to support students, teachers, and other stakeholders to use the tool. Depending on the reasons for selecting the tool and its alignment to their vision for teaching and learning, schools and districts likely have very specific uses for the tool in mind. It is important that schools and districts focus implementation efforts on these specific use cases and that they equip stakeholders with the information needed to use the tool in this way.

1. Articulate the vision for the tool.
Describe the ideal use of the education technology tool in your school or district. What does this look, sound, and feel like?

2. Identify stakeholders and key skills they need. In the vision of the tool above, identify stakeholders who are using the tool and what skills they need to achieve this vision.	
Stakeholder group	**What skills do they need to use the tool in the way described above in the vision?**
Example: Teachers	• *Plan and execute a lesson to introduce the tool to their students (logging in, knowing what to work on).* • *Review data on student usage and mastery.* • *Access professional learning resources provided by the education technology tool's company.*

Adapted from *EdTech Systems Guide.*

Here are common elements of tools that schools and districts may want to explore related to the tool they are implementing.

- **Data collecting and reporting:** How a tool is collecting data and how to make that data actionable.

- **Key functionalities:** Relevant features and functionalities of the tool, including accessibility features and available translation functions.

- **Navigating:** Practical knowledge of how to access the new tool, log in (if applicable), navigate within the tool, and use the tool's functionality.

View guidance on future steps to support the implementation of education technology tools, including identifying available training resources and providing initial training opportunities in the guide, at **bit.ly/LF-implementation**

TOOLS

OBSERVE EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

Observations can be a powerful way to gather information about how an education technology tool is being used by directly seeing how it is implemented. Here are some sample observation rubrics for various types of tools. These rubrics can be added onto classroom observation tools used by schools and districts. Gathering data can help determine if a tool is effective. The data can also be used to inform targeted professional learning support for teachers. Some examples include:

- Teachers can use rubrics to self-evaluate their implementation.
- Instructional coaches can share their rubric data with teachers they coach to identify areas of focus. Coaches can provide resources and feedback on an area of focus and use the rubric to track teachers' growth over time.
- Gathering data can help identify bright spots and school or district focus areas to provide professional learning opportunities.

Engagement				
Content-area practice tool	Very few or no students engaged with the tool.	Some students engaged with the tool.	Most students engaged with the tool.	All students engaged with the tool.
Adoption				
Formative assessment tool	Teacher did not use the tool.	Teacher gave a formative assessment but only to a few students.	Teacher gave one formative assessment to the whole class.	Teacher gave multiple formative assessments to the whole class.
Video creation tool	Students are making videos not aligned to the content (off task) or not making videos.	Students are attempting to make videos but do not understand how to use the tool.	Students are making videos aligned to the content.	Students are making videos aligned to the content and using at least one advanced feature (e.g., animation).
Satisfaction				
Student-facing classroom tool	None of the students you asked said they liked the tool.	A few students you asked said they liked the tool.	Most students you asked said they liked the tool.	All students you asked said they liked the tool.

Adapted from *EdTech Systems Guide*.