SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY— BOTH HARDWARE AND DIGITAL CONTENT—INTO YOUR K-8 SCHOOL PRESENTS AN IMMENSE CHALLENGE THAT IS COMPLICATED BY A LOSS OF AVAILABLE FUNDING. WE HAVE FOUND MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO BE AKIN TO FIRE: IT IS POWERFUL AND CAN BE TERRIBLY Destructive, BUT ALSO CAN BE Harnessed FOR TREMENDOUS PRODUCTIVITY.

The following practical guide—drawn from resources focused on affordability, accessibility, security, training, and educational effectiveness—is a seven-step process that will ensure successful technology integration into your school.

1. Articulate Your Goal

The first step is to articulate your school’s short- and long-term goals. An expensive technology investment that doesn’t meet your goals is a common error. Use an online assessment designed specifically for K-8 principals to help you set goals and cover basic curriculum objectives and budget considerations. A well-designed first assessment, such as the School Technology and Readiness Chart (www.iste.org/starchart), provides an evaluation of your current technology and steps to improve it within a specific time frame. For example, ask yourself the following questions about the technology investment:

- Is the goal to directly engender student learning? If so, is the focus individual or community learning?
- Is the goal to provide teachers with an efficient management tool? For example, they’re probably already recording grades and attendance, but do your teachers want to post readings and assignments or use blogs as interactive journals for students?
- Is the goal to provide yourself with a comprehensive administrative and communications network? Do you want to share forms and guidelines with other administrators or communicate with parents and teachers?

2. Identify the Right Technology Tool for the Job

The second step is to select the proper technology devices, making sure that they function to meet student learning. The Metiri Group’s report, “Technology in Schools: What the Research Says,” is useful in that it helps “educators [to] make informed technology investments, cautioning them to pay attention to conditions essential to effective technology use and to the fidelity of the implementation.” For example, if your investment idea includes one-to-one, computer-to-student use, this report demonstrates what background research shows about this model. If the model doesn’t support your potential learning goal, the report will help you select a different technology type that will. For example, a computer lab might better support your learning goal and fit your budget.

3. Evaluate Content

The range of choices in new education software that promises school success is overwhelming. The ideal and intended outcome of your decision is finding cost-effective software to motivate student learning. A basic component of your software decision is evaluating software lifespan and its compatibility with hardware. Answer these questions to establish criteria for basic compatibility, life span, and ideal content to motivate learning in your school:

- Is the software designed for student use and what is its goal?
- Does the product give students an opportunity to learn content and technology?
- Is the software leveled, responding to student use, and challenging students in levels as learning occurs?
- What is the life span of the software and is it compatible with the intended hardware?

In addition to making quality software decisions, extend opportunities to teachers and IT staff to join online education and technology community forums and blogs. For example, the Consortium of School Networking and Edutopia bring technology leaders together to engage in various discussions about...
software content and compatibility. Participation in such groups will keep your school continually engaged in the educational technology community.

4. Follow the Money

The first three steps formulate a beginning strategy for launching a technology investment. The next step is to fund it. Every principal should know about Edutopia, the International Society for Technology in Education, and Technology Grant News as online resources supporting educational technology grants with listings and expert advice. From these resources, target grants unique to your established goals.

Community foundations and local businesses exist to support you, so look local. Although local grants generally offer less financial support, the competition is less fierce and you can combine the money with other sources.

You should also be aware of virtualization as a budget-friendly option. Virtualization reduces investment costs and increases student access to technology by replicating the hard drive and software from one computer to a network server, allowing multiple computers to operate from the virtualized hard drive and software. Your school or district technology consultant can help you resolve funding conflicts or answer questions about virtualization. If you don’t have a technology consultant, eSchool News has comprehensive listings organized by region.

5. Train Teachers

Implementing, supporting, and encouraging teachers’ technology training and development will contribute to classroom success. As a preliminary measure, it’s an economical and supportive precaution to understand what types of training are included with a device purchase. For example, a SMART interactive whiteboard has a touch-sensitive display, but hands-on training is not included in the purchase. To avoid missing expensive details, help your staff determine technology ability levels before the purchase takes place.

Supporting professional development and technology maintenance on a monthly or biweekly basis sustains a productive learning environment throughout the school year.

With the help of IT staff, develop a quick survey to assess the condition of devices significant to classroom use. Also ensure that maintenance policies exist and that teachers copy you on important requests to IT staff. Established procedures for consistent maintenance, routine follow-up, and technology updates for teachers and IT staff limit the number of technology problems that occur.

6. Online Security

Protect and involve students and teachers using technology in your school with the following security measures and strategies.

Make sure your school has a usage agreement with privacy and security guidelines covering students’ rights and responsibilities. Consider whether it will allow administrators to regulate users while respecting user privacy. The California Technology Assistance Project (www.mycatap.org) educates administrators on technology security issues and provides templates for security guidelines and acceptable use policies for student behavior in cyberspace.

Include basic security lessons and safe Internet use in the curriculum to let students know their part in maintaining security.

Track dysfunctional hardware and software and use this information plan to replace outdated technology. Whether a hard drive is unable to protect itself because of viruses or other security issues, this information is invaluable to keeping up with security and finding more reliable replacements.

Become a member of online technology and educational communities and encourage staff members to do the same. These resources can alert you to problems occurring in other schools and function as radar to prevent problems at your school.

7. Plan for the Next Investment

You can ensure an efficient process for your next set of investment decisions by recording the process you are taking now to implement your current technology purchase. Answer the following questions to chronicle each step, including the goal and other significant decision-making elements:

- What was the time frame, purpose, and goal to increase learning?
- Which devices best and most affordably advanced learning? Where and when were these devices purchased?
- What strategic measures were taken to find funding?
- Where and when was hardware and software purchased? Were the two compatible and did the software content meet classroom expectations?
- What were the terms of training and professional development and was there a service agreement? What strategies and resources continued professional development and were training demands met?
- What security measures were implemented to protect the technology investment?

A detailed history of this process gives you the materials to support teachers and students and improve future technology decisions for the entire school community.

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