



# *Inclusive Technology*

## During the COVID-19 Crisis



## Selecting and purchasing education technology (ed tech) products that are accessible to students with disabilities requires engaging a variety of stakeholders throughout the five-phase process described in our [original guidance on procurement](#) (June 2019).

During the rapid transition to distance learning in response to COVID-19, decisions were made quickly to keep staff and students safe and healthy, educate students remotely, and finish the school year amid the crisis. As planning for the next school year begins, leaders and educators can use this opportunity to make more strategic decisions about ed tech that are inclusive and designed to benefit all learners, including those with disabilities.

### Who is at the table?

State, district, and school leaders are facing immense pressures to create reopening and enhanced distance learning plans for the fall semester. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect all elements of education, it may be challenging to convene the full breadth of stakeholders in ed tech decisions. Engaging the following three categories of stakeholders throughout the process remains critical, though the specific individuals involved may change based on availability.

1. School and district administrators (e.g., superintendents, chief technology officers, special education directors, school business leaders, principals)
2. Community and industry partners (e.g., families and guardians, students, content experts, vendors, student support organizations, school board members)
3. Educators (e.g., classroom teachers, teacher leaders, curriculum developers, library and media specialists)

### Where is our district's starting point?

Prior to the pandemic, the use of ed tech products was largely up to the discretion of districts, schools, and classrooms. Some districts had already devoted time and resources to planning and implementing coordinated ed tech integration strategies. But many districts did not have comprehensive ed tech plans in place when the pandemic necessitated emergency distance learning. Since districts are at different stages of selecting and incorporating ed tech products, each district may need to approach planning for the next school year in its own way.



Early Ed Tech Adopter	Intermediate Ed Tech Adopter	Experienced Ed Tech Adopter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not have a cohesive strategy for selecting, procuring, and implementing ed tech.</li> <li>• Had a piecemeal or decentralized approach to distance learning.</li> <li>• May not have highly prioritized inclusivity or accessibility in making ed tech decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had some cohesive strategies for selecting, procuring, and implementing ed tech prior to the pandemic.</li> <li>• Created a vision to prioritize ed tech accessibility and inclusion, and began to implement tools and practices to work toward that vision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had experience in selecting, procuring, and implementing district-wide inclusive and accessible ed tech prior to the pandemic.</li> <li>• Had a vision in place for the use of ed tech that highly prioritized accessibility and inclusion.</li> <li>• Expanded on existing tools and practices when striving to meet the needs of students with disabilities.</li> </ul>

**No matter the starting point, this summer presents an opportunity for districts to reflect on lessons learned and to develop intentional decision-making processes to improve the implementation of ed tech for students with disabilities this fall. This resource breaks the inclusive procurement process into five phases, with guiding questions your district can use at each phase.**

# Phase 1: *Vision*

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## The vision guides why and how the local entity is deploying technology to support student learning.

Given the rapid changes in learning contexts due to COVID-19, many districts were not able to create a vision for integrating ed tech use before transitioning to distance learning. As distance learning becomes a more permanent part of education, creating a strategic vision for ed tech in your district will become increasingly important.

### Guiding Questions

- What is our goal for ed tech integration during distance learning? What should learning look like for all students in the district, including those with disabilities?
- *Experienced:* If our district already had a vision for ed tech, how has it changed due to the pandemic? What new priorities does our district have for supporting learners, educators, and families?
- What is our instructional challenge and how are we leveraging technology to address that challenge and improve learning?
- What tech capabilities (e.g., devices, digital literacy) and access do families have in our district? How does this impact our plan for inclusivity and equity with distance learning? How do we know the capabilities and access of our district's families? How can we ensure that we understand *all* families' tech access, not just that of the families most closely engaged with the school?
- What lessons did our district learn about the implementation of district-wide remote learning in the spring that can inform our strategy going forward?



**Example of district plan for remote learning guided by a vision:**

<http://www.ipSD.org/Subpage.aspx/RemoteLearningPlan>



# Phase 2: *Design*

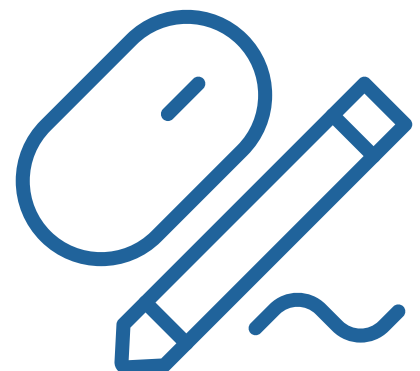
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## **The product developers design, guide, communicate, and collaborate to develop products that meet the educational needs of *all* learners.**

In the rapid shift to distance learning, many districts and product developers didn't have time to work together to address specific needs or capabilities before selecting ed tech products. Even with limited opportunities to influence the design of products, key questions about design should be considered when making decisions about longer-term commitments to ed tech products.

### **Guiding Questions**

- What specific functionalities must ed tech products have to be inclusive for all learners? Are these functionalities included in the tech platforms and products we currently use and the products we are considering using as we move forward? How flexible will these features be if the school year involves a combination of in-person and distance learning?
- How can feedback from students, particularly those with disabilities and their families, be collected and engaged in the design process?
- What resources, if any, are available to support working with product developers to ensure that their products fit with our vision for ed tech that benefits all learners? Is the developer willing to redesign products or elements that were not successful during remote learning in the spring?
- Are products grounded in research about learning, suggesting the developers thoughtfully designed these learning tools to support each learner?
- How do potential product vendors incorporate considerations of [accessibility](#) and learner variability into their design processes?





# Phase 3: *Procurement*

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**The procurement phase answers how local entities address considerations in ed tech purchase contracts that account for the needs of their diverse learners.**

An influx of interest and sudden reliance on ed tech can create added challenges for the selection and procurement processes. Reflecting on how the process went in the spring can inform necessary changes for the new school year.

## Guiding Questions

- How are stakeholders from all communities, including those with disabilities, engaged prior to making purchasing decisions?
- How will our district sustain support for ed tech in light of growing budget constraints?
- How does our district inventory the ed tech tools in use across the district, including tools educators selected and began using this spring?
- Has our state education agency negotiated master contracts with an ed tech provider that could make products or platforms more affordable and accessible?
- *If our district purchased new products in the spring:* What went well, and what was challenging about that process? How effectively did those products serve students with disabilities? How can this inform the procurement process in the future?
- *If our district took advantage of short-term options to use free, time-limited product offers in the spring:* How will that impact our procurement decisions going forward?
- *Experienced:* Can a new product be piloted with a small group of students? How can pilots be evaluated to determine accessibility for all learners?



# Phase 4: *Use*

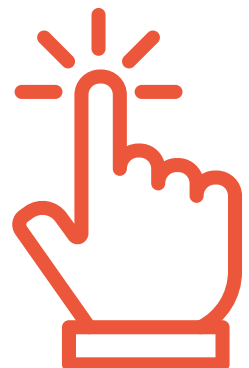
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**The use phase accounts for how local entities align human capital and technical capacity to meet the needs of their diverse learners.**

With immediate and widespread use of ed tech due to the pandemic, the implementation process in the spring came with significant challenges. Planning ahead for the fall is an opportunity to think more strategically about professional development, support, and pedagogy.

## Guiding Questions

- How can pedagogy inform the integration of ed tech products? How might a greater reliance on distance learning inform changes in pedagogy?
- How can principles of [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#)\* be incorporated into the use of digital platforms or products?
- What training or professional development (PD) do educators need to be able to use [ed tech products effectively](#) to engage students of all abilities? How can PD be personalized based on educators' existing skills? What follow-up or ongoing supports will educators need to fully benefit from PD?
- *Experienced:* If our district was already providing PD for ed tech integration, how will we determine how effective it was? How can it be improved or scaled up for the upcoming school year? How can teachers share best practices for ed tech use with one another?
- What capacity do school- and district-level IT staff have to provide technical support to educators, families and caregivers, and students using new ed tech products during distance learning?



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\* Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that is designed to give every student the opportunity to learn. UDL provides flexibility in how information is presented, how students demonstrate what they know, and how students engage with the material.

# Phase 5: *Continuous Improvement*

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**The continuous improvement phase reflects the steps local entities establish to ensure that future purchases and use of technology continuously improve the experiences of their diverse learners.**

Districts that are newer to widespread use of ed tech and distance learning because of the pandemic may not have had much time to evaluate the products they began using in the spring. Building in a plan for data collection, feedback, and evaluation going into the new school year can make the continuous improvement process smoother and more intentional.

## Guiding Questions

- How will effectiveness of products be measured and evaluated, particularly for students with disabilities? How will this data inform usage, support, and changes to products and strategy going forward?
- What worked well in the spring? What did not work well that we can learn from?
- *Experienced:* If our district already had a platform or product in place and continued to use it during school closures, what support was lacking for students with disabilities? What is needed to make improvements?
- How well did implementation align with the expectations of students, families and caregivers, and educators? How can these stakeholders be continually engaged in improvement and decision-making processes?
- Who was not invited to or given an equal platform at the decision-making table? How can we include voices from historically marginalized communities going forward?

