

Maximizing Impact of Your Technology Investments

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Five ways district leaders can get the most out of technology investments

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to quickly pivot and change how they delivered learning — relying heavily on online learning. This new normal has put an even brighter spotlight on school technology investments and how to successfully plan for the future.

As district leaders, we often make investments and begin technology adoptions for all the right reasons and with the best of intentions. We might have identified a problem to be solved with technology. Or, maybe, an instructional goal has been named in your district's strategic plan and the instructional technology committee has been tasked with helping achieve that goal.

Whatever the case, day one of an adoption or initiative is easy. There's clarity, interest, and hopefully some excitement in what's happening. Following through and finishing are the hard parts.

To truly maximize the impact of our technology investments, we need to take a 30,000-foot view. From initial vision to final evaluation and everything in between, by changing the way you think about the life span of technology investments, you'll be better able to fully maximize the impact of your technology investments and ensure your vision and goals are achieved.

Incorporate these five steps to help ensure success

1. Know your “why”

Before a dollar is invested or a minute is spent planning, it's critical for stakeholders to know, understand, and be able to communicate the “why” behind the investment.

A few key questions:

- Why do we believe this investment is the right thing to do?
- Why do we believe replacing our existing system with a new system is the right thing to do and is worth the time and money to do so?
- Why do we believe putting a computing device in the hands of every student is worth the investment?

Knowing the “why” of any technology investment is key to maximizing its impact. Your “why” becomes the driving force behind the initiative or investment and is part of every planning meeting, every communication, and every conversation.

Gaining support and engagement in a project is much easier and more likely to happen when stakeholders clearly understand the “why.” And when stakeholders engage in and support an investment, success is more likely to be achieved and the impact maximized.

2. Clearly identify goals or desired outcomes

Once your “why” has been identified, the next step is to identify the goals or desired outcomes of the project or investment.

- What is it you hope to achieve by investing in this project or initiative?
- What does success look like?

Clearly identified goals are critical to any investment or project. As project input changes or evolves, project goals should remain a constant focus. Project goals are your destination, regardless of where you might start.

Project goals should be clear, concise, easily communicated, and measurable. They should be meaningful to stakeholders and align with the “why” of the project. Goals need to be established, communicated to stakeholders, and used as the target of the project no matter if they originate from an individual or even a legislative mandate.

3. Build a plan

Those who have been through initiatives before, know there’s only one guarantee in the world of ed tech, and that is **change**. To quote Dwight D. Eisenhower: “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”

Details, people, input, and maybe even goals or desired outcomes are almost certain to change through the life of an initiative. The goal of planning is to consider the many aspects (people, process, and technology) of a project and the many ways projects can evolve, and to identify ways to accommodate the inevitable change we know will come, all while keeping our focus on the “why” and the goals/desired outcomes of the project.

Once you know your “why” and have identified goals or desired outcomes of the project or investment, it’s time to build a plan.

Essential pieces of your plan:

- Why
- Goals/desired outcomes
- Actions required to achieve goals/desired outcomes
- List of action items and confirmation of their alignment with the “why” and goals
- Defined process for ongoing review of the project

4. Manage the change

Change is at the core of the investments we make and the initiatives we undertake, and change affects people. In order to maximize the impact of our investments and initiatives, we need to proactively manage change and guide people through the change process.

In change management, there are three distinct phases: preparing for change, managing change, and reinforcing change.

In preparing for change, a few basic questions should be answered:

- What is the change?
- Who will be affected by the change?

- How will they be affected by the change?
- What are the barriers to successfully making the change?

The answers to these questions form the foundation of the second and third phases of the process.

In managing change, plans are developed that identify the steps required to support individuals (people) impacted by the change/project/initiative.

Here are types of plans to meet people where they are and help them successfully navigate the change:

- Communications plan
- Sponsor roadmap
- Coaching plan
- Training plan
- Resistance management plan

5. Measure and communicate impact

One of the most commonly overlooked, but critical, steps in any project or initiative is measuring and communicating progress, success, and overall impact.

Measuring progress, success, impact, and communication are critical, because to the outside world (anyone outside of the project team), the investment will eventually receive a pass/fail evaluation. To ensure stakeholders and the outside world are evaluating on fact and accurate details, identify the project metrics to be measured and tracked in the project.

- Track progress based on the timeline established in the project plan
- Evaluate overall impact of the investment, based on the established project goals and vision (the “why”)
- Communicate progress, impact, and success to stakeholders
- Celebrate progress and success publicly

Again, instead of thinking about our technology investments and initiatives as sprints, think of them as marathons. Thinking of technology investments holistically, and incorporating these five steps into your process, will put you in a position to more fully maximize the impact of your technology investments and ensure your vision and goals are achieved.

Best of luck!

Corey Tramm has dedicated his career to helping school leaders maximize their investment in technology. Pairing 15 years' experience in IT leadership spanning local district-level, regional, and statewide education organizations with his knowledge of instructional technology and training as an educator, Tramm specializes in helping schools utilize technology as a tool to accelerate learning and streamline operations.

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