

**Education Week
Story Ideas for EWA
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Sustainability of the Technology Schools Are Purchasing/Leasing

A massive marketplace has opened for devices and digital education. In fact, [Futuresource Consulting](#) predicts that by 2015, half of K-12 students will have access to 1-to-1 computing in school. Things are changing—and fast.

Some districts have tacked the cost of new technology onto bonds, which dramatically increases the cost of a device—and doesn't [build in any financing for replacing the technology](#). Such was the case in L.A. Unified.

If your districts already have computers, how do they plan to pay for them in the future, as teaching and learning will increasingly be supported by the use of devices that have a 4-year life span? If your districts are still buying many computers, check how they'll be financed—this year, and beyond.

What's Going on With Digital Education in Your Schools?

After districts make a technology purchase—whether for computing devices, curriculum, or testing—the public rarely hears about what happens to them.

How are the districts that you cover evaluating the ed tech that they use? How do they decide which to keep and which to jettison? How much does the whole package cost?

In recent years, a number of individual schools leaders and districts, in [Chicago and the Silicon Valley](#) for instance, have sought to monitor the effectiveness of individual products—not only in terms of academic gains, but also how teachers and students respond to them—almost from the time they're introduced. What steps, if any, are districts in your coverage area taking to monitor the effectiveness of ed-tech products?

Startups Knocking on School Doors

Over the past few years, startup ed-tech companies have flooded the K-12 market, all of them convinced that they have the next great product that will improve teaching and learning. But they face long odds. The school market is a notorious tough to crack: it's insular, slow-moving, and cautious.

Critics say the barriers that ed-tech startups face squash innovation in public schools.

[Find and follow an ed-tech startup in your community.](#) How are they trying to break into the school market? What frustrations are they encountering? How are they trying to circumvent those barriers to entry?

How Decisions About Ed-Tech are Made in Your Districts

Decisions about ed-tech purchasing have traditionally been centralized, with district leaders reasoning that it leads to more efficiency and coordination of academic strategies across schools. It also saves money.

But some districts have found that teachers are increasingly doing their own thing.

How much say do individual principals and teachers have over the technology they're expected to use in the districts you cover? Do you find that ceding this power to schools is producing innovation and create more "buy-in" from principal and teachers.

The findings from one recent study found that [principals have more sway than superintendents in purchasing.](#)

Are Your Districts Using Key Performance Indicators to Get Better Results?

Data-based decision making is gaining ground in the financial management of schools. In fact, members of the Council of the Great City Schools have been [using a benchmarking report](#) with key performance indicators to save millions of dollars.

[Managing for Results in America's Great City Schools, 2014](#) is last year's report. Among the items tracked, and for which information is shared among districts:

- Are there any signs that your district has a problem with cash flow?
- How much district funding comes from grants?
- How many miles do you report between preventable bus accidents?
- How many drills does the crisis response team complete in a specific time period?
- What is your retention rate among teachers hired five or fewer years ago?
- How many devices (mixed-use computers and tablets) are available per student?
- What is the bandwidth on your network per 1,000 students?

Outsourcing School Services Enters the “Education Zone”

Philadelphia recently [announced plans to outsource management of its substitute teachers](#), a move that would privatize 1,000 jobs held by unionized workers. An RFP is forthcoming, with details that will be watched by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

Outsourcing is an ongoing trend in the running of schools. With substitutes' jobs on the line, how close is it coming to reaching educators?

Two reports focusing on ancillary services outsourced in education:
In the Public Interest released a study June 2014 looking at this practice
The report was called [Race to the Bottom: How Outsourcing Public Services Rewards Corporations and Punishes the Middle Class. Michigan School Privatization Survey 2013](#) – Reported both outsourcing and insourcing (15 districts went the other way.)