EdTech as a Service

How schools buy technology is as important as what they buy

OneScreen

Contents

Executive Summary

All school leaders face essentially the same problem when it comes to purchasing technology for the classroom:

How do I know that what I buy will make a difference in improving student performance?

Any EdTech implementation that doesn't improve the learning experience and student performance means that the money could have - and should have - been spent on other initiatives. Smarter purchasing could free up these funds.

A new approach to solving this problem is EdTech as a Service with subscription purchasing. EdTech as a Service means thinking holistically about how everything works together in the classroom, whether students are in-person, remote or hybrid.

Subscription purchasing in education makes it possible to bring more EdTech to more classrooms right away as the deployment is not delayed by funding bottlenecks.

School leaders gain ever-current EdTech with an automatic refresh to hardware and software every 3 years, keeping students up-to-date with the best EdTech tools.

This supports better performance overall and prepares students to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Introcduction

Decision makers report that finding funding for essential EdTech in not as big a problem as managing variability in the timing of receiving funding and all the strings attached once it arrives.

While the federal government contributes billions for public and private schools every year, this typically represents only 8% of school budgets, according to the US Department of Education. [1]

Educators report frustration with the restrictions placed on how they can use state and local school funding.

In addition, they often come up against arcane rules for navigating the typical financial controls that govern classroom technology purchasing.

What they discovered is that how they buy EdTech is just as important as what they buy.

Given all this complexity, it can be hard to purchase the most effective EdTech, even when educators know exactly what they want.

As a result, too much of the school budget every year goes to EdTech that cannot reach its full potential due to lack of use or aging out of date too quickly.

For example, an internal audit in Texas concluded that school leaders had misspent $2.7M on unused EdTech. [2]

In New Jersey, Allison Powell, VP of school state services at the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, observed:

"Probably in the last few months I've had quite a few principals and superintendents call and say, 'I bought these 500 iPads or 1,000 laptops because the district next to us just bought them,' and they're like, now what do we do?" [3]

On this topic, EdWeek reported:

31% of educators say they are not able to use technology due to inadequate training.

63% of teachers said that district communication over the educational technology available for classroom use is moderate or non-existent.

67% of educational software product licenses go unused every year.

It all adds up to around **$5.6 billion** that is wasted each year on EdTech teachers and staff just can't use. [4]

A few bad decisions like these can lead to a greater disconnect between buyers and users, perpetuating a cycle of inefficient tech purchasing that does not achieve district goals.

On the bright side, some school district leaders have already found a path to solve these issues and it was hiding in plain sight all along.

What they discovered is that how they buy EdTech is just as important as what they buy. Subscription purchasing delivers more EdTech to the classroom faster and assures ever-current tech for the future.

This whitepaper examines subscription purchasing, presents original research on what teachers say they need most and highlights a case study showing how subscription works in the real world.

Elements of Subscription Purchasing

Subscription has been around for a long time, but the idea of buying technology on a subscription only caught on over the last few years.

Education buyers are accustomed to paying smaller monthly amounts for services like electricity and software, but expect to pay larger up-front costs for equipment like computers. Now those sharp lines have blurred.

Subscription makes it possible to bring more EdTech to more classrooms right away as the deployment is not delayed by funding bottlenecks.

With traditional purchasing, districts might delay EdTech purchases until funding is released. Decisions over which classrooms receive their EdTech first can become a point of conflict.

At the end of 3 years, the district's earliest purchases will be aging out of compatibility with other classroom devices and software.

For the schools that purchased on subscription, lower monthly payments make it possible to put more smart screens in classrooms without delay.

After 3 years, subscribers automatically refresh their EdTech to the latest hardware and software, so students always have the best technology.

Perhaps the most valuable element is the relationship districts develop with an EdTech vendor committed to solving their unique challenges as the needs of the change over time.

With on-demand training, technical support and an advanced replacement warranty provided by the EdTech vendor, district IT specialists gain more time to spend on their essential tasks.

Case Study:
Subscription at the ECI Academy

The Education Center International Academy (ECIA) operates 3 campuses in East Texas, with an academic focus on fundamentals and technology.

As a charter school, the ECI Academy has a lower teacher/student ratio and greater freedom in determining the curriculum, but receives less funding overall from federal, state and local sources.

In purchasing EdTech, the ECI Academy equips all campuses equally. That often led to hard choices over what they can afford given the timing of disbursements.

When the time came for new EdTech, Asst. Superintendent Bob Densmore said, "We weren't happy with our existing classroom tech due to lack of support."

Instead of buying piecemeal replacements, he secured everything he needed at once thanks to a new purchase model.

"Subscription was perfect for us," Densmore said. "OneScreen made it easy and our teachers love it."

Their subscription included an advanced replacement warranty, unlimited training and a tech refresh after 36 months. The big winners here were the students, who now have the tools to outperform their peers for many years to come. *5*

Survey Data:
What Teachers Want - In Their Own Words

In a series of original OneScreen surveys conducted over two years, researchers asked teachers what they needed most to improve performance. [6,7,8]

The top 3 answers were:
1. Better district communication - 26%
2. More community support - 21%
3. Improved EdTech & training - 17%

All of their answers are closely linked as they relate to improved collaboration and communication within the district.

It's important to note that their top two answers would cost nothing at all.

While the third place answer - better tech and additional training - does incur a cost component, subscription purchasing is the most direct way for districts to address the unmet need teachers have for ongoing training now and upgrading tech over time.
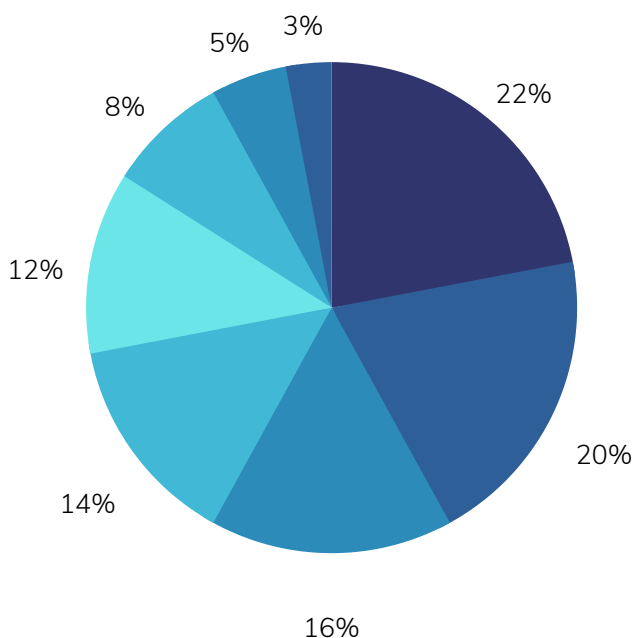
A Sample of Survey Results
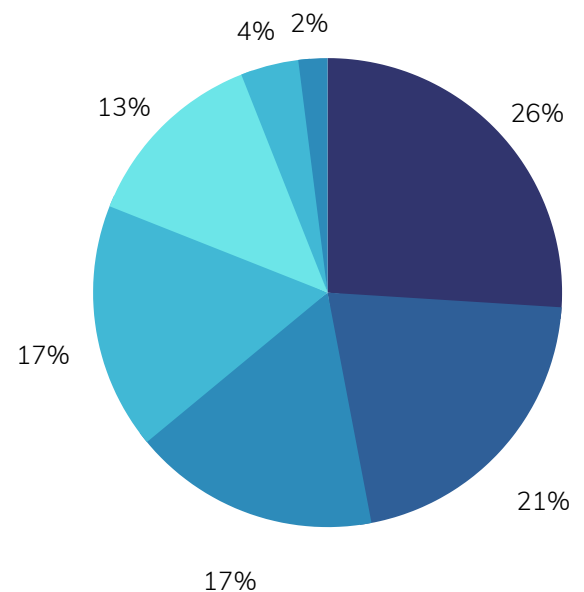
- Better district communications over teacher expectations - 26%
- More support from parents and the community - 21%
- Improved EdTech and training - 17%
- Greater safety measures, both equipment and procedures - 16.8%
- More funding for schools - 13%
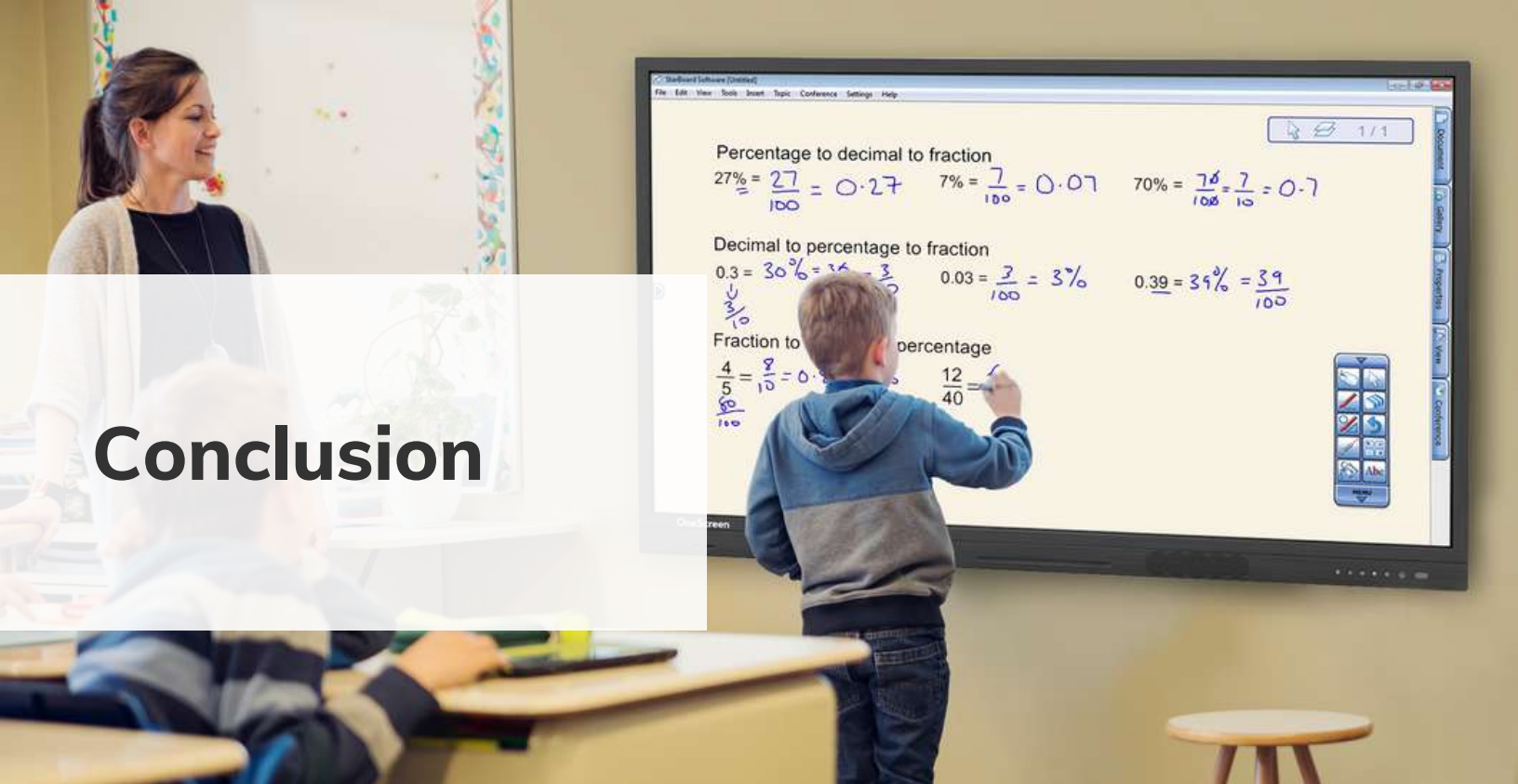- All of the above - 4%
- No problems - 2%

When teachers were asked how to improve the hybrid learning experience, they responded with remarkable enthusiasm and creativity.

This is the question that garnered the most energized responses and the widest variety of answers.

- More involved parents - 22%
- New vision for education - 20%
- Better EdTech and WiFi - 16%
- Remote-only teachers - 14%
- More EdTech training - 12%
- In-person only learning - 8%
- No improvement needed - 5%
- Don't know - 3%

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The top answer dealt with establishing accountability with their biggest partners in education - parents.

This indicates that a new, more expansive definition of the classroom is rapidly emerging.

The second most common response made that new vision more explicit.

Schools must do more to prepare the next generation for a faster, more digital, more interconnected world.

Conclusion

Subscription purchasing is the central element of EdTech as a Service, a school-centric approach to simplify the delivery of classroom technology that puts the needs of the teachers and the students first.

By combining budgetary flexibility with automatic hardware/software refreshes and on-going support, subscription purchasing aligns the goals of everyone involved.

This is how schools everywhere:

a) secure the latest tech right away despite variable funding timetables.

b) afford an equitable distribution of EdTech across classrooms and campuses.

c) assure students of a hardware/software refresh every three years.

d) take advantage of free, unlimited training and support so technology purchases are not wasted.

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