Guide: Choose a Technology

Educational technology may help to achieve the goals you've set for your school or district. But, selecting the technology that best fits your needs can be challenging. The RCE Coach is targeted to those who have already selected or implemented a technology. If you are looking for a technology to implement, you can use this guide to help you with that process and return to the Coach once you are ready to plan a pilot of that technology and initiate your evaluation.

FOUR STEPS FOR SELECTING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

1. **Conduct a needs assessment.**
2. **Discover what technology might fit your needs.**
3. **Vet potential technologies.**
4. **Begin initial conversations with technology providers.**

1. CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT.

A needs assessment will help you identify gaps (the needs), set priorities, and determine important criteria for solutions -- the educational technology you choose. This assessment can take many forms. It can be informal conversations or interviews with various teachers, students or administrators, or it could be a more formal survey, focus group, or working group. You will have to decide what kind of needs assessment you would like to engage in based on the time and resources you have available. If you feel as though you already know the needs of your school or district and have a sense for how educational technology can help you meet those needs, you may not need to conduct a needs assessment. But, if you do choose to conduct a needs assessment, we've included some helpful guidelines below:

A. Determine your knowledge objective(s). It's important to clearly outline what you want to learn from the assessment you are conducting. Write out some questions you want to be able to answer at the end of the assessment based on the information you collect. This will help you determine who to talk to and what questions to ask them. For example, if you want to know what features might be most effective in a new technology, you might want to talk to students about the types of virtual tools and games they already use. If you want to know if there are specific subgroups of students that you should target the technology towards, you might want to talk to teachers about which students need the most help. Make sure to write out each of these knowledge objectives and refer back to them throughout the process of designing and conducting your assessment.

B. **Choose who you want to participate in your assessment.** Before you begin conducting your assessment you should determine who you want to hear from. Perhaps your objectives require input from a wide variety of sources, or maybe you only want to focus on teachers, administrators, or students. Determine who you'll need to speak to and invite them to participate in your assessment.

C. Develop your questions. Once you know who will participate, come up with the questions that you will ask them in order to reach your knowledge objectives.

D. Conduct your assessment. Now you can begin your assessment. You'll want to be recording responses in some way. For an informal assessment this may just mean taking notes during or after your conversations. For a more formal survey, this may mean recording responses in a systematic way.

E. Analyze your data and draw conclusions. After you've spoken to everyone you need to, look back at your data (notes or survey responses) for trends and themes. Do you see any comments being made across multiple participants? Are there needs that people already agree on? These are the things you'll want to take into consideration as you start looking for the right educational technology.

2. DISCOVER WHAT TECHNOLOGY MIGHT FIT YOUR NEEDS.

Below are some questions to keep in mind while you look at various education technologies that are out there:

- ☐ *What is the problem you are trying to solve or opportunity you wish to pursue?*
- ☐ *Who should be involved in the selection process?*
- ☐ *What are the technical requirements?*
- ☐ *How much training is required and how will it be delivered?*
- ☐ *What's the intended implementation approach?*
- ☐ *What kind of data/reporting tools do you need?*

There are a number of websites that collect information like this, and more, to help you select the right technology. Another good starting point is the What Works Clearinghouse, which can help you find technologies that have been effective in other settings.

3. VET POTENTIAL TECHNOLOGIES.

In addition to pre-existing requirements and discoveries from the Needs Assessment, below is a checklist of questions to consider when vetting technologies.

- ☐ **Does the implementation model you have in mind match what tool is designed for?**
  - small groups vs. classrooms
  - remediation vs. general practice vs enrichment
  - self-directed vs. system-directed
  - in class vs. independent use
  - adaptable vs. assignable

- ☐ **Product fit;**
  - What is the problem that you wish to solve, and how does the technology help to address this problem?
  - Does the technology address the desired outcomes for learning, productivity, etc?
  - Does the theory of change / learning underlying the technology match your approach?

- For student-focused technologies, is it aligned with the standards you care about?

☐ **Product design**;
- Do intended users find the resource engaging?
- Is it accessible for all target users?
- How easy is the technology to use?

☐ **Implementation issues**;
- How easy is the resource to use?
- Do teachers / students / other intended users have to undertake some preparatory training? Is this provided by the developer?
- Is the technology compatible with your school system's existing technology?
- For technologies that are meant to be used out of school, do intended users have access to the necessary devices and connectivity?

☐ **Cost and time** needed for implementation
- What are the license costs?
- Will the developer provide a free demo period? (this is strongly encouraged!)
- What costs are associated with implementing the product? Are any additional equipment purchases involved?
- What costs are associated with administrative and teacher time for training, reviewing the product, and incorporating it into the curriculum?

☐ **Evidence of effectiveness**
- Is there *strong* evidence of the effectiveness of the technology?
- Is the evidence of effectiveness specifically *for students and settings like yours*?

☐ **System data availability**
- What learning and usage indicators does the technology track?
- Do the indicators tracked by the technology provide the information you need to determine whether it is effective in achieving your goals?

4. BEGIN INITIAL CONVERSATIONS WITH TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS.

Once you've narrowed down the number of potential education technologies, you should begin talking to providers and developers about your needs and specific requirements.