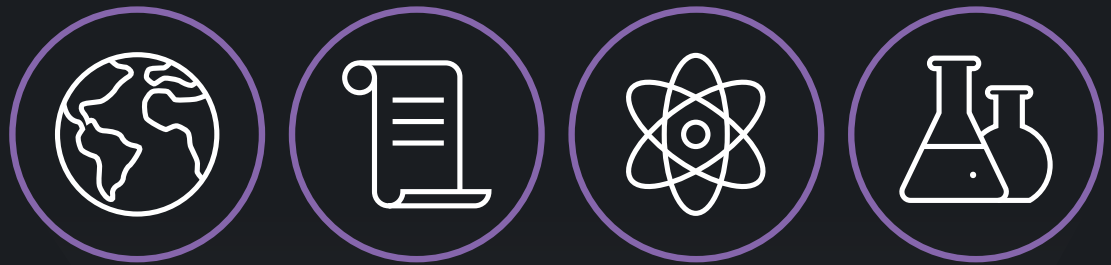


White paper:

How to win funding for your school's remote learning initiative



Education's new normal

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated an accelerated adoption of K-12 education technology — and required creative new approaches to teaching and learning. Districts throughout the U.S. leveraged existing technology to connect with students during initial school shutdowns, but many have faced challenges in delivering effective remote learning. More than 9 million K-12 students lack home internet access for online learning.¹ The shift toward utilizing technology in schools was underway before the pandemic: 96 percent of teachers said their schools were using digital learning technologies to help personalize the education process for students.² But most teachers have not been trained to deliver instruction online.

Many schools still lack the technology necessary to offer remote learning. A 2020 survey shows that 59 percent of districts have a device for every student (known as 1:1 computing).² Many questions remain about what K-12 education will look like over the next few years, and districts are thinking about how they can expand their technology resources to offer students the best possible education — whether they're learning remotely or in the classroom.

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Reassessing your technology plan

When considering new education technology purchases for your district, you may also be concerned about economic uncertainties due to the pandemic. Many school leaders are in a difficult position, in dire need of the technology to support remote learning, yet uneasy about making large purchases in a potentially lean season for K-12 budgets.

Joshua Koen, former executive director for educational technology and computer science at Newark Public Schools, recommends narrowing your needs down to the essentials. "Select a few tools and resources and stick with them," Koen says. "Don't go for everything, but choose what is best in your particular situation." Those foundational tools should support good teaching and learning practices in the online environment. For most districts, a 1:1 device ratio will be essential to keep students engaged. On those devices and your cloud platform, include both synchronous tools that help students connect in real time (videoconferencing and collaborative software, for example) and asynchronous tools such as video on demand, interactive curriculum and applications that teachers can use to easily record and share presentations.

Once you have identified essential devices, software and apps, you'll need to think about potential funding sources, such as the CARES Act. If CARES funding combined with your existing budget leaves you short of your goal, you can look at ways to fill in gaps with grants from state and local governments, as well as private foundations and businesses.

This white paper will act as a guide to making technology purchases for your district in these uncertain times — breaking the process into the steps necessary to plan, purchase and deploy new technology tools. It will also give you ideas for how to find the funds you need to complete the purchase and support the new technologies in the curriculum.



Chapter 1: Timeline and buying cycle

Technology purchases have historically taken a long time to plan and complete. Amid a pandemic, educators don't have time to waste. Instead, they need to quickly but thoroughly assess their needs and proceed through an accelerated version of the usual buying cycle.



STEP 1: Needs assessment

While the current situation demands immediate action, try not to take a short-term view of your district's needs. Instead, focus on creating an in-depth, future-focused plan that considers the emerging role of education technology in your

Questions to help you identify your needs

- What are the essentials of student learning, whether in-person or remote?
- How does your current technology support these learning essentials? What additional devices, software or other tools do you need to reach those goals?
- Does your district have an existing 1:1 device program? If not, are you planning to make that shift?
- Will you need to add to the technology you already have or completely replace it?
- How robust is the bandwidth within school buildings, both for internal networking and internet use?
- How prevalent is a lack of home internet access in your district? What additional technology would be needed to ensure accessibility to remote learning for all students?
- How is enrollment projected to grow over the typical lifespan of educational devices?
- What software resources (electronic textbooks, app subscriptions, etc.) are in place to support remote learning? What software resources are needed?

district over the next five years. The questions listed on this page can help you align your technology and learning needs.

Use the answers to these questions to decide what purchases you need to make, how you can deploy devices and how you'll address remote learning accessibility issues. For instance, think about ways to boost your campus' broadband coverage area so that students who live in the vicinity can connect. For students who live farther from campus, consider purchasing some devices with cellular LTE connectivity to ensure they have equal access to remote learning opportunities.



STEP 2: Planning and budgeting

Once you know what you need, it's time to make a plan. Look at different technology options and assess how much they'll help you achieve your district's goals and meet the needs of students and teachers.

Try coming up with three different solution scenarios to price out for presentation and budgeting purposes. But make sure you're happy with all three, as your leadership and school board may choose any one of them.

Once you've outlined basic scenarios, do some pricing research. You can find guidelines about educational pricing online and use them to build out your cost projections, comparing them with what's available in your budget. If your budget has discretionary spending categories, make the case for why those should be allocated toward this particular technology purchase. Your basic scenario may be fully funded by your budget, while your second and third options may be contingent on getting grants to pay for the extras they offer.

If you're facing a shortfall, research grants can help you fill in those gaps. Gather a list of potential grant sources, noting the amounts they offer, application procedures and deadlines. You may need multiple grants to cover your purchases, so don't skimp on the research.

Set a target date for your district's full rollout of the new remote learning capabilities and then work backward to create a timeline for deployment. This game plan will guide you through the next steps and help you evaluate potential vendors.



STEP 3: Presentation and approval

Present your different options first to your leadership, detailing your plans to pay for each of them. At this point, your leadership may narrow the options down to one to present to the board, or you may agree to present all of them. If you have a basic scenario that can be funded by the budget with add-on scenarios dependent on grant funding, you'll likely want to present all of them so that you have contingent approval if your grants are approved.

Make your presentation as soon as possible so you have time for bidding, grant applications and purchasing for your deployment plan.



STEP 4: Bidding

Once you've acquired board approval, the next step is to reach out to vendors.

Use your early pricing research to narrow it down to vendors who can address your district's needs and provide guidance as you navigate new classroom scenarios that may include remote learning, modified in-person classes or a hybrid solution. Your job will be much easier if you work only with vendors that help your team throughout the purchasing

process and offer ongoing support and software updates as you move toward implementation.

You can use a formal or informal RFP process to ensure that each of your chosen vendors is evaluated on the same criteria. Also allow time for presentations and assessments of the included curriculum materials and professional learning plans from your department heads or assigned teachers.

While you're waiting to get responses from potential vendors, apply for the grants you need to ensure your funding is in place by the time you have to begin purchasing. Finally, decide which vendor can offer you the best value and the best product — and deliver it on your timeline.



STEP 5: Purchasing

Once you've made it through vendor selection and identified funding sources, it's time to schedule the purchase.

Due to the pandemic, your timeline might be tight. You likely don't have time for a pilot project or phased purchasing. Educational technology providers are working with schools to provide additional flexibility around purchases during this time, so find out what your vendor offers.

Even in the current circumstances, you're likely working with multiple yearly budgets and long-term plans. Checking that the budget is accurate early on will help ease the process as you complete the cycle.

Chapter 2: Applying for grants

The information you gathered from your needs assessment and your planning phase will help you apply for grants, as you've likely collected the data you need. The next step is to format this information appropriately for the grants you've decided to apply for.

There are a wide variety of grants available, so you'll likely be applying for a combination of public and private grants. Although procedures and deadlines vary, these general tips will help you write successful grants:

1. Follow the format

Each grant-making organization has a format, and if grants are particularly competitive, failure to follow the format could mean an automatic no. Some organizations require a digital submission from their website and won't consider unsolicited paper requests. Others present periodic requests for grants and only consider them during specific times of the year.

2. Answer the questions provided

Grant applications typically include a series of questions that help the grant-making organization assess whether issuing the grant will be a good use of their funds. Don't be afraid to provide further information in your responses, but make sure you're answering exactly what they're asking.

3. Be specific

In your grant, include information from your research about the needs of your students, the solutions you've chosen and the overall cost of the project. If your students tend to have less access to technology at home, include this in your request and discuss how your grant will help level the playing field for these students by providing better accessibility to remote learning. If your test scores need to improve, share those numbers and illustrate how your proposed technology solution will help your students meet the benchmarks you've set.

Include any relevant information you've used to get approval from your leadership and school board.

4. Get help if you need it

If you're not familiar with grant writing, try to find a staff member who has experience. If there isn't someone on staff, consider hiring a professional grant writer. The cost of a pro can be offset by a higher success rate, and you and your staff can use your time to do what you're good at. You could opt to

hire a grant writer only for a large grant from a foundation and write the smaller grant applications yourself. Make sure the applications you write are proofread by someone else to ensure the copy is thorough and free of errors.

5. Follow up

If you're awarded a grant, follow up with the grant funding organization by sending a thank-you letter.¹ Then provide updates, assessments and a final report as outlined in your grant to help the funder see the effect their grant had on your students.

Important components of a grant application³



Statement of need: Why do you need the funds to meet the educational needs of your student body? If your student population has specific challenges — such as a widespread lack of access to technology and broadband at home — describe them here.



Goals and plan for reaching them: How will the technology help you achieve a successful remote learning program that meets your educational goals?



Budget and timeline: How much is the total cost? How much of that will be funded by this grant? How will grant funds be used? What is the implementation timeline?



Assessment and evaluation: How will you determine if the project has been effective in meeting your goals? Which assessment tools will you use?



Clincher or hook: How will the funds provided by the granting organization improve access to quality education in your district? How will this project help equip teachers with technology tools to navigate the challenges ahead?

Chapter 3: Finding grants

As you find specific grant programs, you can tie each of them into the various components of your technology deployment. For example, a state ed tech grant can be used for a broad range of technology purchases, while a private foundation grant may be tied to a specific area of your curriculum. A grant decision can also be affected by need and student demographics, so if your student body has a high poverty rate, limited home internet access, a high percentage of English language learners or another widely recognized disadvantage, include that in your grant applications. Some federal funds are granted solely based on need, with no application required.

Public grants

Federal and state government grants are one option available to schools.

The CARES Act provides an influx of federal funding designed to flow directly to local K-12 districts. There are also federally funded block grants (such as ESSA and ed tech grants), as well as specific state programs funded by your legislature. The best way to locate these is to go to your state's education

The CARES Act opens the door for K-12 ed tech

Passed in March 2020, the CARES Act allocated \$13.2 billion for K-12 schools, with an additional \$2.9 billion earmarked for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund.² Each state must regrant at least 90 percent of its allocated funds to local education agencies, and the funds may be used for several purposes related to the stress COVID-19 has placed upon districts, teachers and students. Among potential uses, the CARES Act highlights investment in education technology as a way that schools can use this additional funding.

The CARES Act lifts many previous restrictions on justifying technology investments, allowing schools to purchase devices and software to support remote learning. For example, public grants usually limit technology spending to 15 percent when a local education association receives \$30,000 or more, but CARES waives that restriction, allowing them to invest more in technology.

department website, where you can find the guidelines, time frames and links to the application materials.

You can find specifics on federal ed tech grants at the Office of Educational Technology's Funding Digital Learning page. Or check the broader Grants.gov, which has a search engine you can filter to find education-focused grants.



Many local districts are taking advantage of the CARES Act provisions to move toward a model that enables remote learning through digital textbooks, 1:1 device initiatives, virtual learning programs, software apps and ebooks for school libraries. Rural schools will receive additional funding via the U.S. Department of Agriculture to expand access to broadband connectivity and virtual learning. For more information about available CARES Act funding in your area, visit your state's education department website.

Private grants

Private grants can be found from many sources, from large foundations to local businesses to nonprofits.

Large foundations are a reliable source for larger grants that can fund a significant portion of a large technology purchase. But larger foundations also tend to have longer grant applications, longer timelines and specific grant-funding periods, so make sure you're clear on their guidelines and deadlines.

Technology companies often offer grants and programs to help offset the cost of purchasing their equipment, which you can ask about during the bidding process. At that point, grant availability can help sway you toward a specific vendor. Smaller foundations can be a good source of funding, as there may be less competition for them. They may also have more specific funding guidelines that suit your needs, or they may be focused on a particular region.

Information about grants from foundations and corporations can be found online through resources such as Tech & Learning's Best Grants for Education list, We Are Teachers' Big List of K-12 Education Grants and GrantsAlert.

Finally, look at local businesses and organizations. Many of them want to invest in their communities, particularly during this time of national crisis. Some credit unions and community banks offer mini grants for local teachers. Local businesses may also be able to provide larger one-time gifts that can contribute to your technology project. In this case, be prepared to provide recognition for the gift; many of these donations are a marketing function, and these businesses will expect to be thanked publicly. If a business feels they've received a good return value for their donation, they may be willing to make similar donations in the future as part of an ongoing relationship.

Crowdfunding for technology

Many districts require massive technology overhauls to enable remote learning, and such expenses can outpace even the healthiest budgets. To fill the gaps, some schools and teachers continue to utilize crowdfunding.

Through such sites as DonorsChoose, AdoptAClassroom.org, ClassWallet and GoFundMe, schools ask their students, their parents and their families and friends to help make educational technology purchases. This form of funding has recently become more popular, with education contributions on DonorsChoose, GoFundMe and PledgeCents totaling nearly \$200 million in 2017 alone.³

This type of fundraising tends to give teachers more control over what they request for their classrooms. Some district administrators are banning teachers from using crowdfunding platforms, citing a lack of oversight and uncertainty about whether requested materials align with district standards.⁴ But other districts are embracing the fundraising medium. Crowdfunding can be a useful tool when teachers and administrators work together to leverage it.

Crowdfunding projects work best if they are broken into pieces, such as by classroom. This can also be a good option for a specific adaptive technology solution for a student with special needs; you can augment the budget for helping that student engage in remote learning. This works best through

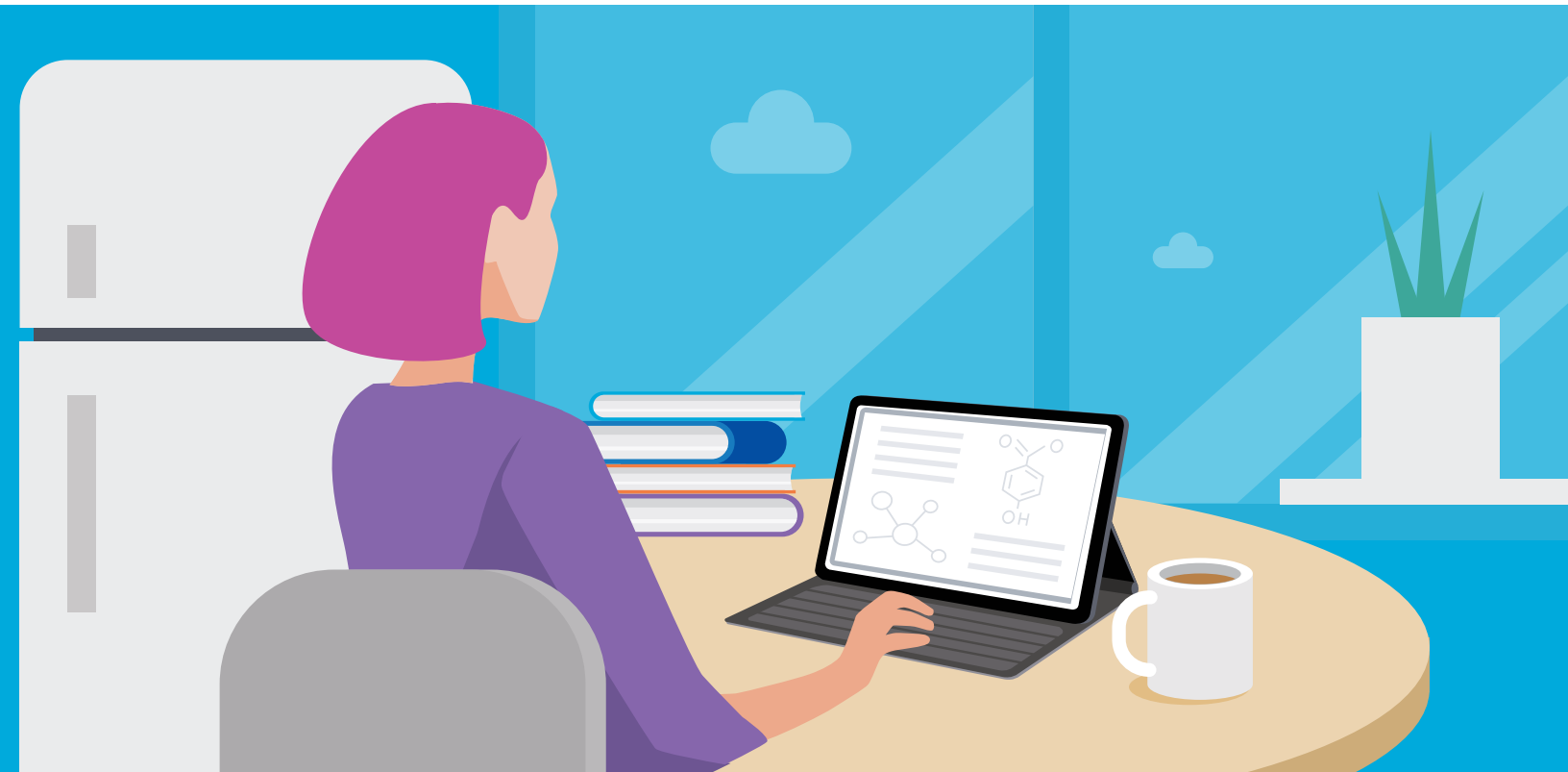
personal connections: Each teacher shares the link with their students' parents, and those parents share it within their personal networks. The PTA/PTO can also help publicize the fundraising links through their social media feeds.






Because many of these sites offer matching funds with special codes or funding boosts for first-time users, it's smart to divide up the applications and have each teacher post their classroom request.

Many of the same guidelines for writing grant applications also apply to crowdfunding. Include a compelling narrative that encourages people to fund your projects. Many of your funders will have students in their families, so they'll have a personal connection. But many more seek out schools and projects to fund, so make sure any site visitor will clearly see the benefits of your project.

You'll also need to provide a budget, so be specific. Most sites list specific equipment and the cost breakdown.

Because you'll be dealing with multiple donors, make sure you visit the site often and thank each donor individually. Provide updates on the project as you go through the funding cycle, and circulate a final report once the project is fully funded and implemented.



Funding Source					
	Budget	Public grants	Private grants	Local grants	Crowdfunding
Best for:	Large-scale purchases, ongoing support, release time for training	Specific projects, such as bandwidth upgrades (E-rate), computer purchases (Ed-Tech) and complete programs (ESSA block grants)	Large-scale purchases, specific projects tied to the grant-funding organizations or funding priorities	Smaller projects, one-time expenses, specific purchases	Smaller projects, one-time expenses, specific purchases
Where to find:	Leadership	Federal and state websites	Grant directories, web searches	Web searches, local business websites	Web searches, recommendations from fellow educators

Conclusion: Clearing the obstacles to remote learning

As you assess the urgent needs of students, teachers and support staff, continue to keep long-term goals in mind. The process of selecting, funding and purchasing educational technology may need to be accelerated to meet your district's remote learning needs. But following the steps and taking the time to evaluate different scenarios and solutions before making a purchasing decision will pay off in the long haul.

Ensure that you're providing teachers with the training and ongoing support they need to be successful while delivering remote instruction. Explore new ways to keep students engaged. Seek feedback from parents on what's working and what's not. When you ensure that the technology you choose is a good fit for your students and staff, you'll be better prepared for the future — no matter what it brings.



Funding resources

tech.ed.gov/funding/grants.gov
grantsalert.com/
techlearning.com/how-to/the-best-grants-for-education-for-2020-and-beyond
weareteachers.com/education-grants/
nea.org/grants/grantsawardsandmore.html
grantselect.com/
digitalwish.com/dw/digitalwish/grants
grantsforteachers.net/cat/Technology/cat_12.aspx



Crowdsourcing

Adoptaclassroom.org
ClassWallet.com
learn.livingtree.com/
donorschoose.org
fundmyclassroom.com/
classwish.org/
getedfunding.com/
oo.com/sa500kids
digitalwish.com/dw/digitalwish/teachers

Footnotes

1. "Show Me the Money: Tips and Resources for Successful Grant Writing," Education World, http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev039.shtml
2. "What Congressional Covid Funding Means for K-12 Schools," FutureEd, <https://www.future-ed.org/what-congressional-covid-funding-means-for-k-12-schools/>
3. "Teachers Raise Millions for Classrooms," U.S. News & World Report, <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2018-10-11/teachers-crowdfund-millions-for-classroom-supplies>
4. "Crowdfunding in K-12: Developing a Vision That Informs Policy," EdSurge Research, <https://go.edsurge.com/rs/590-LFO-179/images/Crowdfunding%20Report%20in%20K-12.pdf>

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