

Buying Assistive and Learning Technologies

Use this decision support tool as your one-stop source to become an informed consumer of assistive and learning technologies. Find questions and solutions to move through the decision-making process.



	HELP!	GETTING STARTED	QUESTIONS TO ASK VENDORS
Alignment	<p>We are aligning our entire curriculum to the state standards. How can I determine which technology products will support these efforts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the standards leaders in your state whether they have any guidance on aligning technology products and classroom curriculum. • Consult your curriculum coordinator for guidance on aligning standards to technology products. • Consult with colleagues about how they have aligned standards to particular products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you provide ongoing support in aligning products to curriculum standards? If so, what does this support consist of? • Can you provide me with references to clients who have aligned your product to curriculum standards? • Can you give me a specific list of the topics that your product addresses so that I can create the alignment to specific standards for my agency?
Implementation	<p>With so many technologies on the market, selecting the right products and integrating them into the classroom can be a mystery. Plus, each time our department acquires new technologies, the staff needs to be trained.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact your local education agency (LEA) assistive technology (AT) resource center for guidance. • Contact your LEA curriculum department for a list of technology products that address state and agency standards. • Request training from your LEA AT resource center to help teachers use devices and integrate them into the existing curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of individualized and group training do you offer to help teachers and students use your products? • What types of support do you offer for integrating your products into the classroom? • Do you offer an extended support plan that will provide technical assistance to our school after the products have been purchased?
Scientifically Based Research	<p>Because of NCLB, our district is emphasizing the need for products that are supported by scientifically based research (SBR). How can I ensure that legitimate SBR exists to support the efficacy of products that our district is interested in purchasing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to technology-focused resources for guidance, such as www.TechMatrix.org and journals including Journal of Special Education Technology, Closing the Gap, Special Education Technology Practice, Teaching Exceptional Children, and ATIA Outcomes and Benefits Journal. • Refer to curriculum development resources for guidance, such as ACLD, subject area journals, and literature on differentiated instruction. • Make certain that the research you use to make decisions has been conducted by unbiased investigators. • Consider initiating or participating in studies that test a product's effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you provide SBR that supports the efficacy of your products? • Can you provide research that guides the implementation of your products to maximize student outcomes? • Who conducted the research to test your products? • In what setting was the research conducted? • Which journals have published findings about your products? • What current research activities are you engaged in and for what purpose regarding the technology we are considering?
Funding	<p>Budget cuts and changes in outside financial support have made paying for technologies difficult. What are some alternative sources of funding and technology?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider low- or mid-tech devices that can meet the needs of students with lower purchase and maintenance costs. • Collaborate with other departments and other agencies to reduce unnecessary spending by eliminating duplicate purchasing. • Take advantage of trial periods to ensure that technologies meet the needs of students. • Apply for grants from your local school district, state, and foundations to purchase technologies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are your products being used in our school or district? • Do you have "try before you buy" options so that we can test drive your products before purchasing? • Is your company engaged in research activities that offer opportunities to participate in exchange for free or reduced-cost products? • Does your company offer discounted prices to underfunded schools? • Does your company offer discounted prices for volume purchases? • What is the most cost effective way to purchase what we need for our school/district over time?
Legislative Mandates	<p>How can I address the adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements of NCLB and still ensure that instruction for students with disabilities is individualized so that they can receive specially designed instruction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your instructional technology coordinator to identify technologies with universal design features that address the needs of students who do not have an identified disability but could benefit from the support offered by the devices. • When considering a computer-based curriculum for general education students, inquire about the level of compatibility with adaptive technology so that students who use such devices can also have access to and benefit from the curriculum. • Look for innovative solutions that have been used to enhance student achievement at www.cited.org, the QIAT listserv, and www.google.com/educators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you help our schools determine which products and services best meet our specific needs? • How do we embed your products with our curriculum to help all our students achieve? • What universal design features does your product include? • Which of your products are compatible with adaptive equipment, such as screen-readers and alternative input devices?

CONSUMER GUIDE ED TECH VENDORS

Marketing Assistive and Learning Technologies

Use this decision support tool to navigate the shifting demands of the educational marketplace. Understand the concerns of decision-makers and find solutions to effectively meet the needs of your clients.



	HELP!	GETTING STARTED	QUESTIONS TO ASK CLIENTS
Alignment	<p>I'm hearing from educators that they are under increasing pressure to align curriculum with state standards. How can I address the curricular standards of my clients?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess your products to determine how they help students achieve the state standards/alternate standards in regions in which you do business. Consider explicit alignment with standards or other published core curricula as a database feature. Clearly demonstrate/specify the links between your products and your clients' curriculum standards at all levels of the school/district. Administrators and teachers have very different information needs. Publish information about the efficacy of your products on your company's Web site to demonstrate how particular products have successfully helped students meet standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which standards are most challenging for your students to meet? What strategies have you implemented to help students meet these standards? What is working and what is not? What features/benefits in technology products are you looking for to help your students meet standards? Will you require ongoing support to help your staff understand how technology provides access to achieving the standards for specific students?
Implementation	<p>In follow-up conversations with clients, I'm learning that some clients do not integrate products into the classroom effectively. How can I help clients maximize my company's products?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make your clients' local education agency (LEA) assistive technology (AT) resource center aware that your company's products have been acquired by a school or district. Offer guidance for effective implementation. Ensure that the LEA understands the needs that your products fill and knows how to get the best results with them. Provide clients with case studies and multiple scenarios to demonstrate how your products have been appropriately integrated into the classroom setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of individualized and group training has your staff received in the past? What approaches have been effective, and in which instances have you experienced challenges? What type of support do you feel that you need to integrate our products into the classroom? Does your LEA have designated staff to offer training and disseminate information throughout the district?
Scientifically Based Research	<p>Since the implementation of NCLB, I have noticed an increase in requests for scientifically based research (SBR) to support the efficacy of my company's products. Where can I find examples of SBR and what are some strategies for conducting SBR with our products?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to resources for guidance, such as the www.TechMatrix.com and journals including the Journal of Special Education Technology, Closing the Gap, Special Education Technology Practice, and Teaching Exceptional Children. Partner with reputable researchers to design and execute studies to test the effectiveness of your products. Consider the NCTI Tech in the Works competition for support. Engage potential clients in research activities to test your products' effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is SBR used to inform your purchasing decisions? In what format is SBR best received by you and your colleagues (journal articles, white papers, presentations)? Would your district be willing to partner with our organization to engage in ongoing research activities? Note: It is critical for your organization to have qualified research capacity in place before partnering with schools or districts.
Funding	<p>Potential clients express great enthusiasm about our company's technologies. However, regardless of the benefits, many districts are limited by their budget. How can I market my products to potential clients with limited resources?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote product features that benefit both students with disabilities and students who are struggling learners. Products that meet several needs may be supported by various funding sources within a district. Promote how the products help clients meet the needs that are most critical to them at the moment. Sell value versus product features. Ensure that your marketing and sales staff are up to date on the mandates that are driving purchasing decisions and that they help your clients achieve student progress. Offer discounted prices for volume purchases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many people will be involved in the purchase decision? What are their top priority needs, and what is the urgency of solving those needs? How many students will you need to serve with your budget? What special needs are you attempting to meet? Have you applied for grants offered through your district, your state, or foundations to purchase technologies? What are the sources of funding and who are the decision-makers involved in purchasing technology for general and special education students?
Legislative Mandates	<p>Potential clients appear to be less concerned about meeting the individual needs of students as mandated by IDEA and more concerned about helping all students make adequate yearly progress (AYP). How can I help them find a balance between the two pieces of legislation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When applicable, market products as having the potential to address the needs of students who do not have documented disabilities but could benefit from the support offered through the devices. Make certain that any computer-based curricula targeted toward general education students are compatible with adaptive technology so that students who use such devices can have access to and benefit from the general curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your existing general education technology compatible with adaptive equipment? What type of adaptive equipment do your students with special needs already use? Has your district considered a universal design for learning (UDL) approach to bridge the gap between the needs of your general and special education students? How does the mandate to consider AT in the individualized education program (IEP) process factor into your purchasing decisions?