



## Choosing Education Technology

### 7 Questions to Ask When Choosing Education Technology for Your School

In the modern education world, the question isn't [whether to equip students with devices](#) but rather *which* devices to purchase. Choosing from the deluge of educational technology options may feel like a nearly impossible task, but it's a crucial process. Picking a device without extensive research could be a costly mistake for your school, staff and students.

As closing your eyes and pointing to a page in the catalogue is a definite no-go, how do you choose the right device for your school or district? Point yourself in the right direction by addressing these 7 questions:

#### 7. How old are your students?

This is a critical factor, because it reveals necessities for the devices like durability and function. For Pre-K and Elementary schools, durability is an important factor to consider; some schools choose iPads and other tablets for this reason. Likewise, tablets are more portable, and the touch screen is easier for young children to use while their hand dexterity is developing. Countless apps allow students nearly unlimited ways to engage with tablets, including apps that aid accessibility for students with disabilities or learning disorders. Keyboards can be added to tablets for more computer-like function when older elementary students need to type assignments. Not all schools with younger children choose tablet style devices, but they are definitely worth considering. Older students typically need more functionality than that offered by a tablet, though schools may supply tablets in addition to laptops or desktops in order to give students better device mobility or access to specific educational applications.

#### 6. How will devices be distributed?

Some schools house all devices in one location - such as the library - and teachers bring their classes to this location to utilize devices for certain lessons. Others keep devices in each classroom, and students use different devices as they rotate through classrooms. Still other schools have 1:1 devices for every student, and the student essentially checks out the device for the school year. This question addresses how mobile devices need to be. If devices are centralized in one location, choosing desktop computers will deter theft. Also, desktop machines tend to be the most powerful - sacrificing mobility for larger processors - so this may be the best choice when mobility isn't required. If students are assigned the device for the year and will presumably be carrying it between classes and between school and home, school administrators would be wise to consider the weight of the device. Distribution of devices will likely drive decisions of weight, size, type of device and more.

## 5. What is your IT infrastructure and involvement?

The setup of various types of devices with different operating systems may or may not require IT expertise, and it's important to verify this during the purchase process so you don't have unexpected IT costs or time burdens. It is wise to consider a device that only requires the setup and maintenance your IT staff has the bandwidth to handle. If IT's time is limited, you can always utilize a service that manages this setup and maintenance process. Troxell offers clients a White Gloves configuration service, which allows for easier out-of-the-box deployment of new devices without burdening your current IT staff.

## 4. Which OS do you want your students to be familiar with?

This is a touchy question. People are usually very loyal to the operating system (OS) with which they are familiar. This is why Apple iOS, Windows OS, and Google OS compete aggressively for new users on the education front. While younger generations' technology fluency enables them to switch between operating systems more readily than older generations, many schools try to avoid making that switch between grades as the transition can take up valuable classroom time. So, if you must choose one OS, which is better?

Well, the answer is, unfortunately, not clearcut. The primary differences between Windows and Apple desktop and laptop devices are in the interface, with the functionality being basically similar. Windows programs like the Microsoft Office Suite can even be purchased for Mac computers, though the interface isn't identical. Most education-related programs are designed for Windows OS and Mac iOS, so your staff should have no problem deploying any gradebook systems or other necessary classroom software on a laptop or desktop PC or Mac. Chromebook has an OS limited to only the Android apps specifically designed for it, however even Chromebook is now offering a version of Microsoft Office and other programs that it was not previously compatible with. Tablets feature a mobile-friendly, app-based version of the full scale OS available on their laptop/desktop counterparts.

Some follow-up questions to ask: What programs do your staff need to be able to deploy and are they compatible? What systems are students primarily using at home, and what did they use in younger grades? What system will your students most likely be using in the rest of their education and in their careers? *Pro Tip:* [Windows owns nearly 90% of the desktop market share](#), so it stands to reason most students who use computers in their future careers will be on a Windows system.

## 3. What other classroom technology do you currently have or plan to have?

Classroom technology such as projectors, printers, and document cameras are installed on computers with drivers. Nearly all drivers have been specifically designed for Windows, Mac and Linux and may not work on all devices, such as Chromebooks, iPads and tablets. Find out which devices will interact smoothly with any educational technology you currently use or plan to invest in so you don't end up with two devices that won't talk or that create a logistical nightmare every time your teachers/students need to use them together.

## 2. Does your school have a specific education pedagogy that requires special programs?

In the digital age, Middle and Secondary school students must demonstrate not just typing proficiency, but efficiency with a variety of input devices and software programs. STEM, STEAM, and STREAM schools that emphasize science and technology usually utilize complex programs such as CAD/CAM, PhotoShop, and complex multimedia applications in the classroom to equip students with skill sets for related careers. Not all devices can run these massive programs or are even compatible with them. Even if devices *can* run the program, it's important to research whether large programs will significantly reduce the device's speed or lifespan. Don't underestimate the processing power required to run heavy duty programs.

## 1. What's my budget?

The reason this is the last question we ask is because there are many factors involved in a school's education technology budget. Some decision makers choose to focus on the lowest possible device price. However, there may be associated costs that actually offset a low initial device price. For example, if you have to hire an IT person to configure and manage the devices or if you have to replace the devices in a few years when your students' software programs outpace them, suddenly the cheapest devices aren't looking like such a small investment anymore. The budget needs to factor in any ancillary costs, including IT personnel, virus protection software, cases and storage, potential repair and replacement, and more. The great news is that all the competition on the educational technology landscape has driven down prices, and devices are more affordable than ever before. For example, Windows now offers four of its coveted devices at sub-\$399 prices: Lenovo N23, HP Stream, Dell 3150, and Acer B117.

[Browse our selection](#) of state-of-the-art classroom and campus devices or [contact](#) one of our education technology experts to discuss your questions and find out how Troxell can help you!