

EdTech Buyer Guide

BETTER BUYING DECISIONS
FOR HYBRID LEARNING

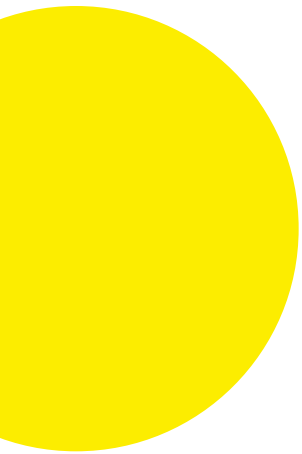
The New World of Education Technology

Education has never relied as much on technology as it does now. It's also become increasingly challenging for buyers to research and acquire the tools their users need. However, there are tools and strategies to make your work easier and to ensure instructors and students succeed.

The current state of education—and the world—requires buyers to not only know about the newest technology, but to understand changes in the buying process and global supply chain.

This guide will help you:

- Overcome obstacles in modern tech buying
- Create equivalent experiences for students, no matter where they are
- Determine what to look for in hybrid and hyflex solutions
- Learn more about funding options for EdTech
- See what kinds of solutions are available



Challenges in EdTech Buying

Although the world is now years into remote learning, not every institution has had the opportunity to build the hybrid—or blended—environment they want. Budget restraints, supply chain issues, declining enrollment numbers, and other issues have hindered creation of the ideal hybrid setup. However, students want to stick with the new ways of learning.

As Joe Way, Director of Learning Environments at the USC, explained, “Isn’t that what the global pandemic taught us? That I can be effective when you give me a way to work that works for me. As long as class starts and ends and the blackboard is up and the LMS is up, what difference does it make where you are? That said, we are noticing our students saying, ‘I want to come to campus, I want the college experience.’ But we are noticing they’re coming to campus, but they’re not necessarily going to class. They still want to attend class virtually.”

Here are some ways to address the most common challenges:

Challenge 1: Making hybrid and hyflex learning permanent

Hybrid learning is a combination of in-person and online learning, and hyflex is when students choose where, when, and how they learn. The challenge now is that because students want these choices, educators must figure out how to give remote students the same learning experience. This means providing the same attention, participation opportunities, and access to learning materials. Hybrid or hyflex learning isn’t just about studying from home on a sick day—it’s about changing the higher ed experience.



Many tech managers are implementing solutions in stages. Here are some other options when implementing your long-term hybrid strategy:

- **Have a plan.** Even though your plan may hit some snags, it's important to outline your EdTech goals and ways to achieve them.
- **Be flexible about your plan.** Your plan may face supply chain delays, facility remodels, or institutional restructuring.
- **Consult with PSNI's Certified Solution Providers and manufacturer partners.** They can keep you in the loop about technology availability, and they may offer suggestions for alternatives.
- **Get started but have patience.** Do what you can, but understand that you may have to implement your plan in phases.

Challenge 2: Creating equitable experiences

One of the biggest challenges in hybrid learning is how you can create equivalent experiences for remote and in-person students.

According to an EDUCAUSE QuickPoll, [94% of students said internet or device issues had caused them stress](#) during the school year, and 61% said at least one experience with unreliable technology impacted their coursework. Your classroom technology won't create equitable experiences unless students all have access to the internet, suitable devices, and even tech support.

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- Beth Peterson, Product Marketing Manager, Vaddio

Once students have access to adequate technology, it's important to ensure the classroom technology can recreate the on-campus experience. “The great thing we have as professional AV integrators is the ability to address those shortcomings with proven solutions,” said Beth Peterson, Product Marketing Manager at Vaddio. “For example, we know that having PTZ cameras and multiple cameras is an effective way to recreate the classroom atmosphere. We also know that making sure students are heard—not just the instructor—is essential to good learning.”

Challenge 3: Supply chain issues

Chip shortages, pandemic shutdowns, international relations, and other problems have made it hard for technology pros to obtain many AV products. As students and educators adopt hybrid learning as the norm, technology managers have to make do with existing tools and budgets. Here's what else you can do:

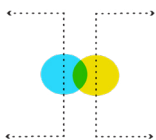
- **Expect longer processes.** Be flexible and know everyone else is dealing with the same issues.
- **Place orders in advance.** By ordering early, you may not have to wait as long when you need new technology.
- **Choose the right partners.** Certified Solution Providers and manufacturers can keep you informed, offer strategy recommendations, and give technology alternatives.
- **Extend your warranties.** Choosing longer agreements will ensure your current equipment keeps working while you're waiting to replace technologies.

Types of EdTech Solutions

Education has come a long way from the days a “high-tech” classroom meant it had a projector. Now there's much more to consider. Here are the kinds of solutions that can help EdTech managers create better, more equitable hybrid and hyflex learning experiences, no matter where the student chooses to learn.

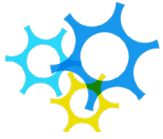
Video conferencing

Schools should provide distance learning with both high-quality video and audio so students joining remotely don't miss any information.



USB bridges

A USB bridge converts your professional AV sources (cameras, microphones, AV switchers, etc.) to USB for a connection to a computer. This helps users easily connect with conferencing platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Cisco's Webex, and GoToMeeting.



Cameras

Quality cameras—and the right quantity of them—are essential to recreating the classroom experience. PTZ (pan/tilt/zoom) can follow a presenter via remote control or using auto motion tracking.

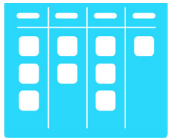
Display

Display technology is essential for seeing instructors, others students, in-room activities. Room and remote activities will determine which types you need.



Interactive displays

Both instructors and students can use interactive displays or whiteboards to cast and annotate. This allows students to engage in ways they can't with traditional displays. Look for solutions that allow remote attendees to use the solution virtually in the same ways in-class students can use them.



Projectors

Projectors are a good option for large classrooms or lecture halls. Laser projectors eliminate the need for changing lamps. You can also provide portable projectors for students to show their creativity in different spaces.



Digital displays

Digital displays are good for maximizing visibility in a large space. You can use these to mirror content from a primary display.

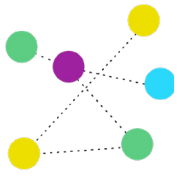


Lecture capture

Lecture capture solutions should accommodate live and on-demand recording. They often include room hardware—like mics, cameras, and audio mixers—and software to edit, manage, and integrate content with your school's LMS (learning management system).

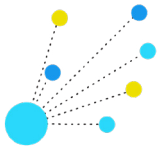
Audio

Audio equipment may not get the attention that video conferencing platforms have, but audio is especially important in education. Robin Hamerlinck, Senior Vice President of IT & CIO at Shure, explained, "Voice clarity and intelligibility have a direct impact on engagement, productivity levels, and overall learning experience. High-quality audio technology is vital. Students need to be able to pick up every nuance of a lecture, whether it's being delivered from a classroom or a professor's office to students at home, or in a space where attending students are socially distanced. Everyone needs to be part of the conversation."



Classroom audio

Microphones should enhance the audio for students in the room as well as those attending virtually. They should allow students to hear each other, wherever they are. Beth Peterson added, “Instead of just one microphone for the instructor, we’re now seeing full DSP [digital signal processing] solutions with combinations of multiple ceiling, table, or wireless microphones, which allow the instructor to move around the classroom.”



Auditorium and lecture hall audio

Professors will still need lectern, lavalier, or hand mics, but it’s important there be room mics, amplifiers, and loudspeakers to capture and project sounds from and for students in the back and on online. For the wireless mics, you’ll also need a wireless microphone receiver.

For these large learning spaces, Robin Hamerlinck recommends a voice lift system—an amplifier for voices. “Such a system offers the ability to amplify the voice in a natural, effective manner from students sat socially distanced in a large classroom,” she said. “It can help to keep discussions seamless between on-site and remote students, creating a much more balanced, comfortable learning experience.”

What to look for in EdTech Solutions

In education, technology often has to meet different needs for various sets of users. Here are some key questions to ask when evaluating a solution:

- **Does it meet students’ needs?** In hybrid learning, collaboration technology should help replicate the classroom experience.
- **Does it meet professors’ needs?** It should be easy to use and not require more work for instructors to teach both remote and in-class students.
- **Does it have the capabilities you need?** Different spaces may be for different types of learning. Consider all the types of spaces and courses being taught. Theatre will differ from a science lab.
- **What are the costs and expected returns?** Cost alone won’t tell you what you need to know. How long will it last? Is there a warranty? Is there manufacturer maintenance? Will it allow the school to support more students?
- **Can you get ongoing support and maintenance?** Maximize the life of new equipment while also ensuring it doesn’t tie up too much of your time.
- **Is it mobile-friendly?** While most college students said they use a laptop as their primary device, 56% said their smartphones are their secondary device for schoolwork.

Tips for funding EdTech

Budgets are always top of mind in higher education, but falling enrollment numbers combined with the need for more hyflex technologies make cost even more of a concern. Here are some options for gaining more funding for EdTech:

- **Grants.** Deadlines and requirements are always changing, but it's worth taking a look at government websites like the [Office of Educational Technology](#).
- **Certified Solution Partners.** Some integration companies employ higher education specialists who can let you know about grants and funding opportunities from public and private organizations.
- **Donations.** Your school may already have initiatives to collect donations from alumni, community members, and private businesses.
- **Discounts.** Ask about discounts for large purchases or longer contracts.

Developing a purchasing strategy can also help you create savings over time. Robin Hamerlinck explained: "It's important to look at long-term solutions over a short-term 'fix,' and to invest in audio technology that can continue to meet the faculty's needs even as they evolve."



Featured Tech for Hybrid Learning

Samsung Interactive Displays



[Samsung's interactive classroom displays](#) let both instructors and students annotate, solve problems, edit photos, email documents, share videos, cast multiple devices, and more.

Shure Audio Solutions



Shure's [hybrid learning solutions](#) like their Microflex® Ecosystem products cover all areas of a classroom or lecture hall and minimize room noise to capture multiple talkers.

Vaddio Lecture Capture Solutions



Create a better lecture capture experience with solutions like the [Vaddio IntelliSHOT ePTZ Camera](#) from Legrand AV that lets users control auto-framing and configure auto-tracking.

Build a Technology Strategy that Supports Flexible Learning

PSNI Certified Solutions Providers (CSPs) can help you develop a long-term strategy that addresses today's most common higher education challenges. Our CSPs also help identify and implement EdTech solutions to support today's hybrid and flexible learning models. Ready to get started? [Find your nearest PSNI Certified Solution Provider today.](#)

Find a PSNI Certified Service Provider



About PSNI

PSNI Global Alliance is the world's oldest, largest, and most recognized network of AV and UCC solution providers, with a presence in 240+ major cities around the globe. We select and qualify the top providers globally, and provide the infrastructure where they can work as one. We bring industry-leading solutions to organizations and institutions everywhere, so they can transform the ways we learn, work, and live. www.psniglobalalliance.org.

