

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

How to Help Teachers Make Smart Edtech Choices

Having too many apps and tools to choose from can be stressful, and coaches can play a key role in reducing that stress.

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Educational technology has a multitude of benefits in the classroom, but it can also become overwhelming and challenging for teachers to integrate, and it can contribute to teacher burnout.

Technology facilitators and coaches can play an active role in supporting teacher wellness when it comes to the occupational stress related to technology. As a district technology facilitator, I've seen the impact of the flood of new devices and digital resources on teachers. Some have embraced the multitude of options, but many are exhausted by the learning curves it takes to master them while feeling overwhelmed with all the options.

The causes of occupational stress, according to the *American Psychological Association*

(<https://dictionary.apa.org/occupational-stress>), include workload, level of responsibility, job security, physical environment and safety, the nature and pace of work, relationships with coworkers and supervisors, and more. Teachers deal with these on a daily basis, and having 24/7 access to work email, grade books, lesson plans, and assessments adds another layer of stress, called *technostress* (<https://dictionary.apa.org/technostress>), a type of occupational stress associated with information and communication technologies resulting from the constant flow of new information.

Teachers can't be expected to resolve their stressors on their own. Those of us in supporting roles can contribute by acknowledging and addressing these types of stress through the adoption of strategies to help alleviate them.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH TECHNOLOGY

While the typical edtech coach role is to share how to integrate technology, they are also in a position to encourage healthy relationships with tech. This applies to those who may be more tech-averse *and* those who are more enthusiastic embracers of edtech.

Tech-averse teachers need to have some latitude; it may be that they haven't yet had the training or experience to understand how many tools can help them in the classroom. Starting with assessing their needs and frustrations can lead to understanding what tools might be most beneficial for them.

Learning how to use one tool at a time, whether it's to develop lesson plans, differentiate instruction, assess, or provide feedback, can diminish the aversion and build confidence. Keeping instruction succinct and relevant, while providing no more information than necessary for integration, can also help.

On the other end of the spectrum, enthusiastic embracers of all things edtech should be encouraged to remain enthusiastic but not feel pressure to integrate all the tools available. Suggesting they keep all the tools in their tool belt and select the ones best suited for classroom tasks can mitigate feelings of becoming overwhelmed in the long term.

Teachers, no matter what their attitude with regard to edtech integration, shouldn't feel pressured to adopt all the tech tools all the time. Tools that provide true educational value will be vetted, updated, and around for a while. Finding one tool that fits a desired outcome may be all that is necessary, and it's important to consider the learning objectives before selecting the tools to meet them. Tech tools may come and go, but strong pedagogical skills withstand the test of time.

PROVIDE TEACHER-CENTRIC SUPPORT

Just as classrooms are student-centered, edtech support needs to be teacher-centered, and one of the most valuable things that those in supporting roles can do is be mindful and respectful of time and schedule restraints. Some best practices that do so include the suggestions below:

- Offer both in-person and on-demand support.
- Provide scheduled after-school support hours at least once a week.
- Offer virtual meeting options.
- Use video to create support content and make it accessible and easy to navigate.

OFFER DIFFERENTIATED AND RELEVANT PD

Nobody appreciates professional development (PD) that isn't relevant or is time-consuming. When planning and offering edtech professional development, be sure to consider the following:

- Seek teacher input when planning PD. Educators often have suggestions to help you help them that may not have been considered.
- Model edtech tools when delivering PD. Having teachers experience them can pique interest and encourage greater engagement for learning how to use them.

- Ensure that support resources are as accessible as possible. If it takes a teacher more than three clicks to locate, make it more accessible.
- Streamline instructional materials. Keep them succinct, and if using video, keep it under five minutes.
- Make PD practical, and offer hands-on opportunities to apply the learning to develop content that can be used in the classroom.
- Eliminate icebreakers and unnecessary fillers, and consider delivering content in micro-sessions under 20 minutes.

PROVIDE TEACHERS WITH STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT THEIR OWN WELL-BEING

In Tech for Teacher Wellness: Strategies for a Healthy Life and Sustainable Career

(<https://iste.org/products/a1w8Z000005oLlkQAE/Tech%20for%20Teacher%20Wellness>), I share strategies for teachers to establish healthy boundaries between work and home. Encouraging and modeling healthy boundaries is another way coaches can support teachers.

- If teachers choose to access work email on personal devices, they should be encouraged to not thread their personal and work email together. Their work email should be contained in a separate app, preferably on a separate device, and accessed only when absolutely necessary outside of work hours.
- Many devices and apps now provide options to mute notifications. Understanding when to remain off devices is as valuable as understanding when to use them.

Teachers, now more than ever, need support from all in education to help mitigate stress and burnout. Edtech coaches can play an active role in this while also supporting the meaningful integration of technology to support teaching and learning.

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