PowerSchool

THE ROI OF Unified K-12 Edtech



HOW UNIFIED SOFTWARE SYSTEMS
can bring K-12 schools and districts real benefits—from cutting costs and improving efficiency to tightening data security and leading student success

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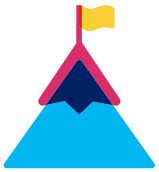
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INTRODUCTION

Moving Forward Together



Henry Ford said, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

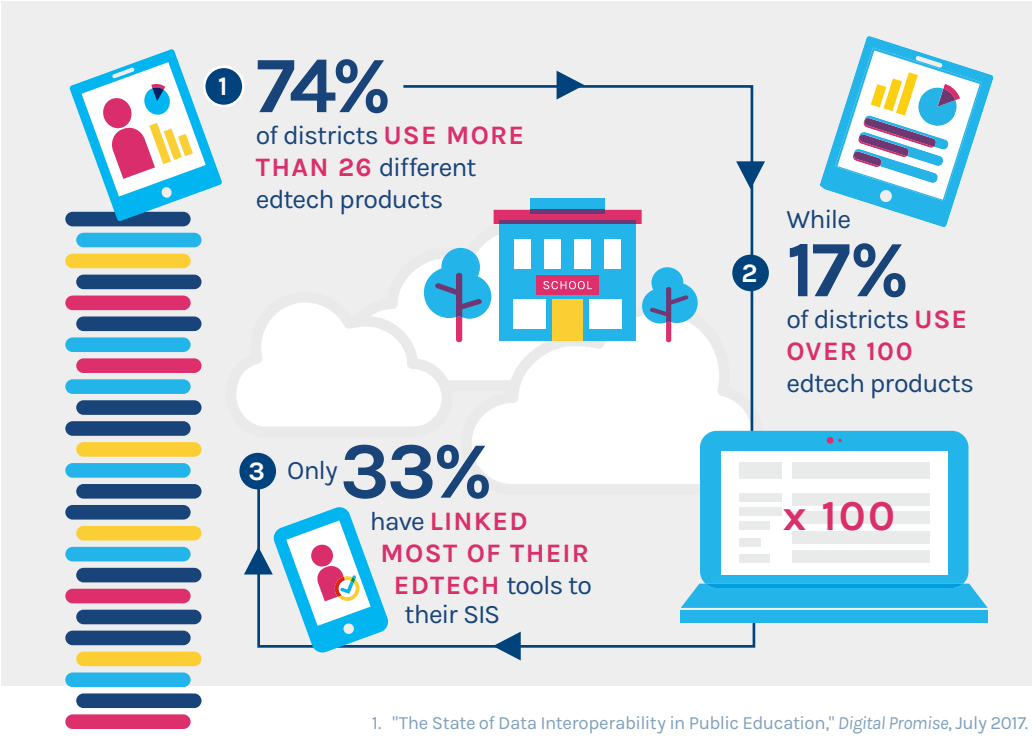
By moving forward together, teamwork is at the heart of any instance of organizational success. When your school staff comes together, communicates and works cohesively, they're destined to succeed—to move forward. When everyone's on the same page, you can maximize production, efficiency, and the quality of your work. When teachers work with parents and K-12 support staff, a student's education is more focused, collaborative, and prosperous.



And when K-12 education technology works together

and communicates, school districts succeed. **With unified edtech products, teachers can have access to 360-degree views of student performance with data flowing from multiple sources.** Tech directors can sleep better at night with improved data security from a single, protected source of student information. Superintendents, HR directors, and administrators can collaborate together better by looking at the same data from different tech applications, compared to before when this wasn't possible.

Unfortunately, many school districts find themselves with old, fragmented edtech products and systems. **A *Digital Promise* survey found that 74 percent of districts use more than 26 different education technology products, and 17 percent of districts use over 100.** Just 33 percent of districts report that they have linked more than half of their teaching and learning tools to their student information system.[1]



1. "The State of Data Interoperability in Public Education," *Digital Promise*, July 2017.

THE IMPORTANCE OF

Return on Value (ROV)

In education, we need to redefine the traditional business concept of ROI to recognize communitywide district benefits. **Stakeholders should see ROI as ROV, redefining the return on investment into the return on value.**

The value of student achievement, teacher development, and school effectiveness—and not only of a financial bottom line—can better define the success that is crucial to an improved outcome for all. Specifically, districts should consider expanding the definition of a positive ROI so that it includes measurements beyond traditional fiscal calculations to things like operational efficiency and student academic development.

Measurable student achievement replaces financial gain. And the increased operational efficiency of a classroom or a school or a district becomes the equivalent of a return on a capital outlay. This is the type of return on investment that school districts should be measuring, along with funding, when deciding whether to spend money on any data-management tool, service, or resource.

For districts to measure ROI, the question isn't just whether or not a tech purchase boosts your financial bottom line, but also how it brings student and district success.



"We have a hodgepodge of products and systems because of the unusual technology era we are in, not because we desire it," says Kecia Ray, Ed.D., member of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and past president of the ISTE Board of Directors.

"I don't think anyone desires a fragmented selection of disparate products that demands maintenance from many individuals," adds Jeff Felix, Ed.D., a former California superintendent. "Staff costs are high enough, communication between departments is already strained, and tight budgets always necessitate that something be cut."

In this guide, we'll look at how moving forward together with unified K-12 edtech can impact a district's Return on Investment (ROI), which also includes Return on Value (ROV). See the sidebar on the previous page for more information on ROV. **We will consider:**

1. The costs of fragmented edtech tools
2. How unified edtech can deliver ROI
3. The steps you can take to start building your district's cohesive system to gain a positive return

PART ONE

The Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) Factor



What challenges do K-12 tech directors face with fragmented edtech investments?

Many K-12 schools and districts get by with multiples: multiple products, multiple logins, and multiple sets of data. That adds up to multiple challenges at both the classroom and district levels, along with a host of hidden costs and challenges of having too many disconnected software products.



K-12 technology leaders are well aware that licensing fees and other up-front costs don't tell the whole story when it comes to measuring edtech expenses. To get a true picture of the total cost of ownership (TCO) of technology, K-12 leaders have to factor in costs associated with training, upkeep, support, and other hidden expenses that can add up over time.

Using a patchwork of different technology systems from multiple software vendors to accomplish core responsibilities is a significant source of these hidden expenses. When school districts use separate software systems for student information, assessment, learning management, finance, HR, and other key functions, hidden costs can add up quickly.

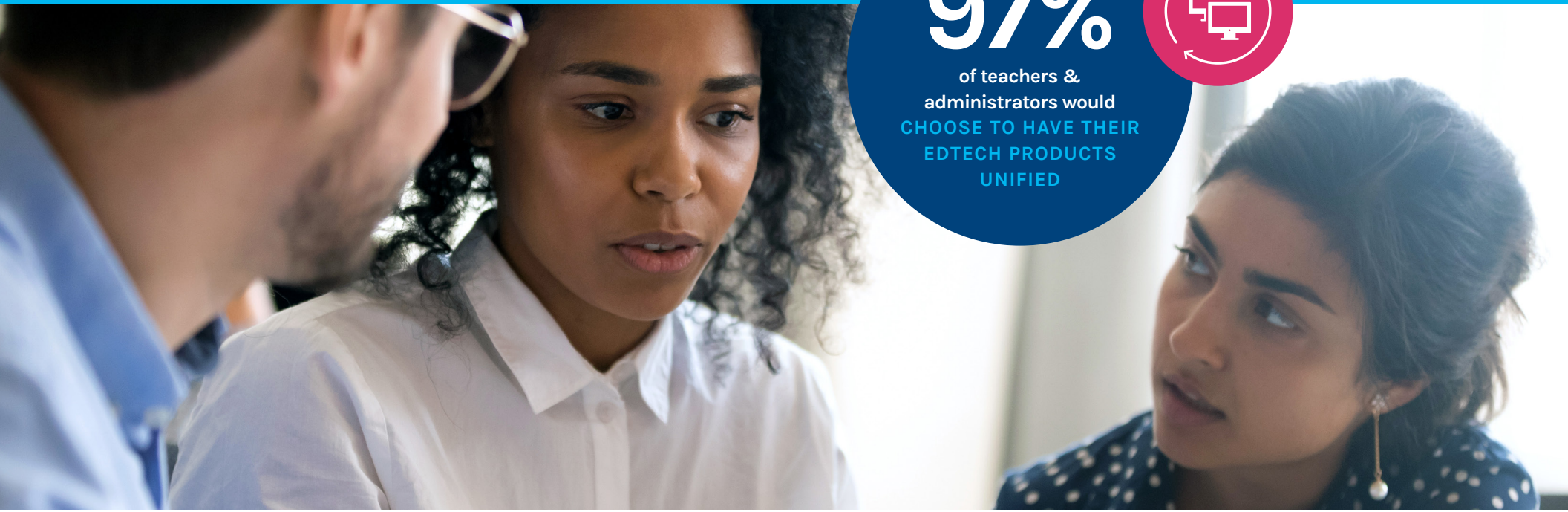
> **When schools make decisions based purely on initial cost, they often neglect to factor in future repair costs and residual value, which can end up costing the school district more in the long run. At the same time, inferior equipment results in lost instructional time and a poor educational experience for students.**
>
> **CHARLES DUARTE**
> *Five Trends for Successful EdTech Deployments in 2018*

TEN FACTORS That Cost Districts Actual Expenses

1. Inefficient processes
2. Hiring outside experts to integrate multiple systems
3. Maintenance
4. Developing in-house expertise to support multiple systems
5. Paying for unused software
6. Repetitive/duplicated data entry
7. Time spent training on multiple systems
8. Lack of real-time visibility into student data & performance
9. Poor student and parent engagement
10. Security risks

THE FOLLOWING SECTION HIGHLIGHTS TEN FACTORS

that cost districts actual expenses, or "opportunity costs" where K-12 educators and administrators are wasting valuable time on unnecessary tasks.



97%

of teachers & administrators would CHOOSE TO HAVE THEIR EDTECH PRODUCTS UNIFIED

#1 Inefficient Processes

When applications are on multiple systems, teachers often have to duplicate data entry, which wastes valuable teaching and planning time. In research conducted by Finn Partners, **97 percent of teachers and administrators agreed that having all of their classroom applications unified in one place would allow them to spend less time on administrative activities** and more time with students.[2]

2. "PowerSchool National Teacher Study: National Online Survey of 800 Teachers and Administrators," Conducted by Finn Partners and sponsored by PowerSchool, May 2016.

#2 Hiring Outside Experts to Integrate Multiple Systems

When you have multiple software platforms from different vendors, integration can be a challenge. If you're adding new software to a multi-platform ecosystem, there's a good chance you'll have to hire an outside consultant or systems integrator to make sure all your various systems can communicate with each other seamlessly. Even if you can handle this with your own IT team, you can expect a longer implementation timeline, which can add to your edtech costs.

#3 Maintenance

A disjointed IT environment complicates new implementations, requiring additional resources for deployment and training. More IT resources are also needed to maintain and support applications. At the same time, it takes longer to actually benefit from the investment when end-user adoption lags due to the complexity of integrating applications.

#4 Developing In-House Expertise to Support Multiple Systems

A complicated mix of applications makes it harder to support your IT environment. Supporting your student information system (SIS) might require different skills or knowledge than your learning management system (LMS) or your front-office enterprise system. **Hiring or developing IT staff with the skills needed to support all of these systems ends up requiring more time and money.** What's more, developing workarounds to make your data flow correctly increases the complexity even further and could make it challenging to replace an experienced IT staff member. **The learning curve for new IT employees is always steeper—and there is more potential for costly errors.**





#5 Paying for Unused Software

Using a wide range of software platforms from multiple providers adds complexity to the end-user experience. Think of it this way: If multiple systems each require their own login, and each has a different user interface and workflow, what's the experience like? Not very good, and people will avoid using them or only use them periodically to satisfy an administrative requirement. If a certain piece of software doesn't mesh well with the rest of your IT environment, it might fail to deliver on its intended benefits. In either case, the software might end up becoming "shelfware"—owned and maintained, yet seldom used.

#6 Repetitive or Duplicated Data Entry

Do you have systems that fail to automatically exchange information? As a result, do educators or administrators end up spending valuable time on repetitive, manual data entry? If so, this is a big opportunity cost that affects staff productivity and your ROI.

"The fact is that many systems we must use in education are not readily designed to be interoperable and the degree of interoperability can vary greatly," says Ray. "When systems aren't in sync, there is a duplication of effort that decreases ROI on all products. Not only is there a decreased ROI, but there is also a lack of trust in data quality because the data doesn't transfer seamlessly and there is always speculation that something went missing."

#7 Time Spent Training on Multiple Systems

Teachers and administrators have a limited number of hours set aside for professional development each month. If they have to learn entire new processes and interfaces for every new piece of software, it eats into the time they could be spending on more powerful learning—such as discovering strategies for using the technology to transform instruction.

#8 Lack of Real-Time Visibility Into Student Data and Performance

When different data streams aren't integrated into a single snapshot view or dashboard, getting predictive analytics and gaining actionable insights can be challenging. Teachers, parents, and students may lack real-time visibility into student performance, limiting their ability to act on that information.





40%

of parents didn't know their children's REPORT CARDS EXISTED

#9 Poor Student and Parent Engagement

Successful education depends on both students and parents being involved and engaged in the process. Yet teachers and school administrative staff struggle to find the time and information it takes to communicate effectively, and in an individualized manner, with each student and their parent(s). Without access to the tools they need to see individualized data and to communicate effectively, they are left to rely on outdated processes which often result in poor parent engagement. In addition, students can be apathetic when they don't receive the information they need or want to engage in their academic progress.

For example, without automation in the parent communication process, the right data isn't getting to parents in many schools. Teachers don't have time to communicate about each student's performance individually, so parents are stuck relying on report cards to see their student's progress. Or worse, according to a Data Quality Campaign report, **40 percent of parents didn't even know their children's report cards existed**[3]. At that point, it's often too late for parents to step in and help their children. But **with a more complete view from data continually available to parents through unified tools—such as a mobile app or parent portal—they can stay on top of their child's education.**

3. "Time to Act 2018," Data Quality Campaign, December 2018.

#10 Security Risks

Cybersecurity and broadband/network capacity are the top two priorities for K-12 IT leaders, according to the 2018 COSN K-12 IT Leadership Survey Report.[4] When you consider that a recent study indicates "education is the most vulnerable vertical" across business sectors (with more than 422 incidents over the past few years)[5], it's no surprise that keeping data safe is top of mind.

One challenge K-12 districts continue to battle is the security risk that comes from disconnected software systems. New edtech tools hit the market on a regular basis, and many K-12 districts keep adding programs to meet changing needs (remember that 74 percent use more than 26 different edtech or software tools/products). But **when districts use programs that don't communicate with each other and require separate accounts and logins, sensitive information may be exposed.**

74%

of districts use MORE THAN 26 different edtech products



4. COSN 2018 K-12 IT Leadership Survey Report.

5. The K-12 Cyber Incident Map, 2019. The K-12 Cybersecurity Resource Center.

Not All Integrations Are Equal

The right types of integrations are important for serving your needs. In addition to improved efficiency and productivity, the right integrations between edtech products should help you reach your mission and goals. An example is having data flow into a student profile so you can see a more holistic view to guide student learning.

What does it mean to have integrated edtech applications? There are software integration types of all kinds. Flat files, single sign-on, data uploads, and even information transferred from one system to another by a disk are all considered integrations. But which is most helpful to you?

Instead of classifying integrations as isolated types, a better way to look at them is on a continuum, or scale progression relating to the best possible user experience.



A fully unified experience is where PowerSchool is heading, allowing customers to move seamlessly between applications.

You log in, have a seamless experience between applications, and data is updated in real time. What we are interested in moving toward is a common, unified data experience—everything looks alike, workflows are improved, and shared data helps improve outcomes.”

MARCY DANIEL
Chief Product Officer, PowerSchool



Integrations Continuum

Single sign-on (1) allows users to use one set of login credentials to access multiple applications. While you can seamlessly move between edtech products, by itself there's no shared data flow.

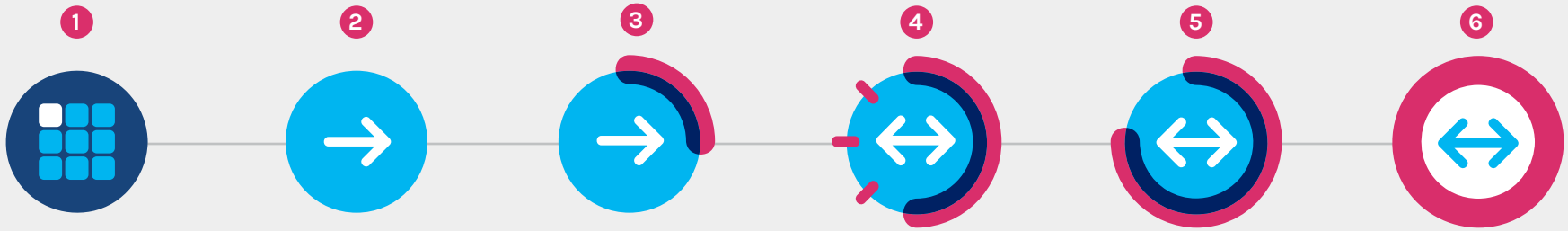
With **file-based, one-way data flow (2)**, the user can expect data that is located in one application to be available in another application typically on a nightly basis. Many of the first-generation standard integration entities on education technology started with this approach (OneRoster 1.0 and EdFi 1.0). File-based, one-way data flow is the most widely used integration approach by education technology vendors and meets many common data integration needs.

Next is **periodic, one-way (3)** and **two-way data flow (4)**—using APIs to update data on a continuous basis periodically (one to many times during the day). This integration approach often provides a "near realtime" experience for users who need to ensure a data change in the morning is reflected for their work in the afternoon.

Real-time, two-way data flow (5) is the ideal for many users who need data to be synchronous immediately and as near real-time as possible in their roles of the school district. This integration exchanges data between products instantly. This type of integration is necessary for data that's required for decisions throughout the day that will change actions. An example is student attendance information.

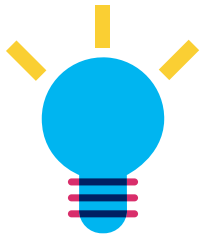
A **common user interface, real-time, two-way data flow (6)** for a single solution offers users the most seamless, efficient, and productive integrated experience. An example is PowerSchool Unified Classroom™, giving a complete, fully unified classroom technology experience between the SIS and gradebook, assessment, and LMS tools.

AS YOU MOVE ACROSS THE CONTINUUM (LEFT TO RIGHT), THE USER EXPERIENCE IMPROVES.



PART TWO

ROI Possibilities with Unified K-12 Edtech



What returns—both in terms of financial and educational success—can you expect with technology that communicates?



K-12 superintendents, chief technology and finance officers, finance directors, and other leaders may find it hard to justify the upfront cost of investing in education technology. But well-built systems can actually save districts money—and provide substantial relief to overworked educators and administrators.

Delivering genuine ROI for technology purchases is something that's hard to quantify but essential in justifying budgets and future visionary actions. Districts need to focus on products that are not only strategic in terms of improving efficiencies and student performance but also deliver a quick and compelling return—both financially and in educational impact.

K-12 SUCCESS

By switching to a unified edtech system, Michigan's Oxford Community Schools has experienced big benefits districtwide.

> **"Systems are now integrated and data is flowing freely, which means a bigger return on investment that we see. Whether it's not spending hard dollars on support costs, an increased return on efficiency by teaching staff, or an increase in student growth and learning, having a unified system is helping Oxford Community Schools operate more efficiently and effectively."**

TIM THRONE
Superintendent,
Oxford Community Schools, Michigan





Ten Ways That Switching to Unified K-12 Products Can Benefit Your District

1. Save time and improve productivity
2. Increase capabilities with continued use
3. Cut costs from better resource allocation
4. Reap long-term financial rewards from less turnover, more effective educators
5. Support parent engagement
6. Make learning more active and engaging: Drive student success part 1
7. Transparency into performance: Drive student success part 2
8. Improve state reporting
9. Ensure future readiness
10. Strengthen data security



#1 Save Time & Improve Productivity

For teachers, students, and parents, a unified solution streamlines access to applications and provides greater visibility into student performance. Data from assessments, gradebooks, and class rosters can sit on one platform shared by all applications, making it convenient to access to make your time more productive.

"If it doesn't make your life simpler and more efficient, technology is just a waste of time," says Felix. "**Interoperability defines the main reason we budget for technology because it saves districts money and creates an environment of efficiency among all employees.** In the early days of edtech, we could never justify spending money on computers until one or both of these criteria were met."

K-12 SUCCESS

> **"We've been able to use the same information that is entered into the system for multiple purposes which saves us time and money from reduced printing and mailing that we previously had to do to communicate with parents."**

MICHAEL PIATKO
Director of Information Technology,
Orchard Park Central School District, New York

#2 Increase Capabilities with Continued Use

Practice makes perfect. The more you use unified products and gain a broader comprehension of how the applications can work together, the more productive you and your teams can become. A common user experience also reduces training time. Once familiar with the navigation and language of the solution, teachers, parents, and students don't need retraining when new functionalities are added.



K-12 SUCCESS | DUMONT PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Our system does things in 10-15 minutes that once took hours or days. Many of the things our new system accomplishes right away would take a week in our old system. We saved time and resources because the scheduling engine was fast and allowed us to build our schedule and run it as many times as we needed before we had to commit the schedule."

EMANUELE TRIGGIANO
Superintendent of Schools, Dumont Public School District, New Jersey



#3 Cut Costs from Better Resource Allocation

Outdated and disconnected systems often make it extremely difficult for IT to manage systems and data security effectively. But a unified system makes it simple—with a centralized architecture, flexibility, and customization. IT leaders can **manage data security and access by role or profile**. One example is making only student-specific or districtwide aggregated information available to individual users. Plus, **more efficient data capture enables better accuracy and completion of data input**. With these productivity savings, IT can redirect time to higher-level, proactive activities.

"When considering systems containing student academic data, the ability to support a student just in time is priceless! When considering operational systems, the increased efficiency certainly decreases overall costs. For example, when I was district administrator for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, we saved over $1 million by implementing a learning management system that worked with our SIS and communication systems," says Kecia Ray, Ed.D.

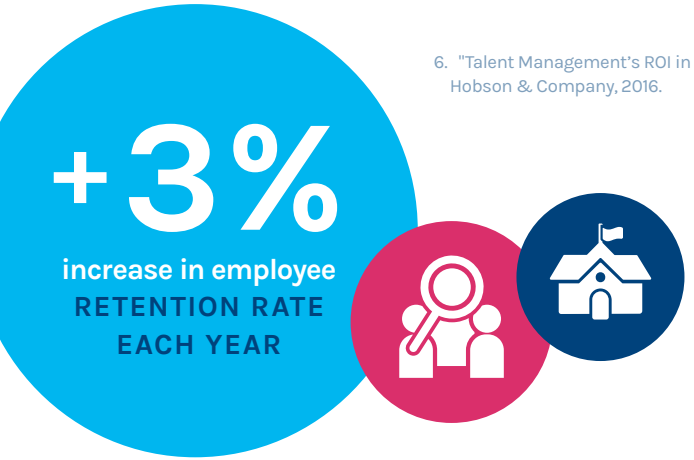
A unified system can also help reduce printing and mailing costs by sharing data digitally between products and between teachers and parents. When every dollar counts, schools often spend an extraordinary amount of money on paper printing and mailing of materials related to student registration and education.

#4 Reap Long-Term Financial Rewards from Less Turnover, More Effective Educators

New employee retention rates improve by about 3 percent each year when schools and districts manage the talent lifecycle using PowerSchool Unified Talent™, a leading K-12 talent management solution.[6] This begins with a research-based assessment and tracking solution that helps schools identify and quickly hire the best teacher candidates.

Schools then use tools designed to help drive individual employee development and, finally, use performance management and evaluation tools that tailor specifically to individuals' roles. Customers say these tools contribute to teachers' job satisfaction.

"I am a firm believer that PowerSchool Unified Talent Candidate Assessment (formerly EPI) gives us the ability to make better matches, and that the end result is higher retention," said one teacher recruitment retention specialist.



6. "Talent Management's ROI in K-12 Education," Hobson & Company, 2016.

Unified Talent Management That Pays Off

A typical K-12 school district can see annual cost savings and productivity benefits totaling about $1 million by using PowerSchool's unified K-12 talent management solutions, according to research by Hobson & Co.[7]

Here's a look at how a unified K-12 talent management solution can deliver ROI in a variety of ways. HR managers face challenges daily with teacher shortages, recruiting competition, clunky onboarding processes, and more. But with an integrated talent management solution, you can solve the tough issues, and realize a wide range of benefits, including:

- Faster, more accurate reporting
- Improved efficiency by eliminating the paper trail
- Recruitment, applicant tracking, and job board interaction efficiencies
- Faster candidate screening and time-to-fill
- Improved substitute identification and placement processes
- Better, more efficient onboarding
- Simplified employee life cycle management
- Streamlined processes for contracts, renewals, and intent forms
- Faster, more effective teacher evaluations
- More effective professional development

7. Ibid.

#5 Support Parent Engagement

Parent involvement helps keep students on track—from better attendance and fewer missed assignments to improved test scores and increased grade point averages. "The evidence that parent involvement can make a significant difference in student achievement is beyond question," says John H. Wherry, Ed.D., President of The Parent Institute®.

When parents are involved, students take more responsibility for their learning, and communication improves when children reach out for help. Engagement can strengthen the parent-student relationship: knowing your student's grades and assignments is an easy starting point to open dialogue for discussing progress, offering advice, working on projects together, or, hopefully, celebrating wins.

Students with parents who are involved in their school have fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance, and are more likely to complete high school than students whose parents are not involved in their school.[8]

Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted, pass their classes, earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.[9]

8. "A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement," Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education. A.T. Henderson and N. Berla, 1994.

9. "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. Annual Synthesis," National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, 2002.



K-12 SUCCESS | Western Foothills Regional School Unit #10

"I really like having a one-stop location for students and parents to check grades, access lessons and assignments, and communicate upcoming events. It is really nice to not have to have students (and parents) remember multiple websites, logins and passwords."

CHANDELE GRAY
High School Science Teacher,
Western Foothills Regional School District (RSU #10), Maine

A unified K-12 educational technology system helps teachers and administrators keep parents informed and engaged in their children's learning. Parents often lead busy lives juggling work responsibilities and family obligations. But with today's digital classroom with unified learning tools, parents can get instant updates about their child's grades, attendance, school projects, special events, and much more with mobile apps tied directly to a student information system (SIS) or learning management system (LMS).

Parents can receive emails, text messages, and automatic notifications from their child's teachers, and they can access an online parent portal that is updated in real time and available at their convenience. Parents can also easily ask teachers questions about their child's education and get personalized feedback.

K-12 SUCCESS



> **"(Before a unified system), parents didn't know how their students were doing in the classroom and they didn't know what the classroom content was."**

REINETTE CHENARD
Data Manager, Western Foothills Regional School District (RSU #10), Maine



#6 Make Learning More Active & Engaging

Part 1 Driving Student Success

Unified K-12 educational technology allows students to take an active, hands-on role in their education, rather than sit passively and take in new information. Equipped with a digital device, internet access, and connected edtech applications, students can search for information, create and compose original works, collaborate with their peers, and participate in project-based learning.

Here's an example with a unified classroom solution. When an LMS is integrated with a digital gradebook, the teacher can go directly from a quiz grade to pull in a recommended extra credit activity without having to stop and switch systems or go back and forth to duplicate information. By making it easier to pull from multiple products, teachers have the ability to make learning more personalized, engaging, and successful.

1	2	3
LMS integrated with digital gradebook	Teacher enters grades + recommends extra credit in one system	Learning is more personalized & engaging

A student who is actively participating in their own learning is going to be more involved and retain more than if they were simply taking notes from a lecture. It also **helps foster essential workplace skills, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.**





#7 Performance Visibility

Part 2 Driving Student Success

When Western Foothills Regional School District (RSU #10) made the switch to a unified solution, the district overcame the barriers felt by fragmented classroom technology. The result? More effective teaching and improved student growth. The solution allows stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and district leaders—to access user-friendly, consolidated dashboards that provide at-a-glance insight into student performance.

"I love the standards-based grading graph on the dashboard page," says Reinette Chenard, Data Manager. "I think this is the piece that our teachers use the most in order to see where the students are either failing or progressing and where they have to go back and reteach or have students move ahead."

Unified K-12 educational technology makes it easier for teachers to assess their students' skills and knowledge without taking time away from instruction. The technology allows teachers to check for students' understanding more frequently by building quick, formative assessment into lessons. Using an item bank aligned to state standards, for instance, teachers can quickly create and administer assessments that home in on students' abilities. They can then see, at a glance, which students are meeting grade-level objectives, and which need additional support.

"There are several ways to show ROI benefits for edtech that maintains interoperability standards," Felix says. "I like to focus on the primary reason we create schools: if it improves student success, we have chosen the product wisely. Seeing the full picture of student progress through a complete data reporting set that is easy to use and read is a primary reason for edtech interoperability and translates to a major financial and academic success."

Sophisticated analytics tools can help teachers make sense of this information visually. Teachers can see trends over time and get up-to-the-minute information for the entire class or for individual students, allowing them to make smarter instructional decisions that lead to better outcomes.

"Many systems require patches of code to sync them up and almost always have some form of malfunction that you don't find immediately," says Ray. "When you do have systems that smoothly share data consistently, then you have the opportunity to offer immediate feedback to teachers and administrators. **This immediate access to data can be the difference in providing immediate interventions for students or interventions delayed by days or even weeks."**

#8 Improve State Reporting

With disconnected and inefficient systems, often reliant on human-error-prone manual data entry, data quality and access represent significant challenges. This is especially apparent with state reporting submissions—and with additional reporting requirements that come with ESSA guidelines. Accuracy is essential to secure timely government funding. **For many districts, compiling information from a variety of sources might just be the most difficult part of the state reporting cycle.**

"When you add the complexity of having to pull this information from multiple data sources, it becomes a really difficult process," says Travis Willard, former Chief Technology Officer for the Georgia Department of Education. "Districts have to perform a lot of gymnastics from a technology perspective to get the data from multiple sources and put it into the required file format."

But systems that focus on interoperability are typically certified and compliant, especially with state reporting standards. The process is simplified with a single data repository for all student records, including grades, medical data, and other required information.

#9 Ensure Future Readiness

Future-proofing a district with the right education technology can ensure excellent ROI, user buy-in, and long-term student and staff satisfaction and success. To do this, school districts need to make sure they are partnering with forward-thinking companies dedicated to growth and innovation with robust development teams and leadership. These companies also need to clearly communicate that vision to customers.

School districts prepare students for the rest of their lives—their own sustainability—so it makes sense that they should use **sustainable products that are easy to use, easy to integrate, and require minimal training and support**.

When evaluating your future-readiness, ask yourself how your current system is preparing your school or district to support:



Growing needs for customized assessment and analytics to support personalized learning



Fully integrated LMS and behavior data to drive more actionable insights and interventions



Growth in blended learning, integrating digital tools with traditional classroom instruction



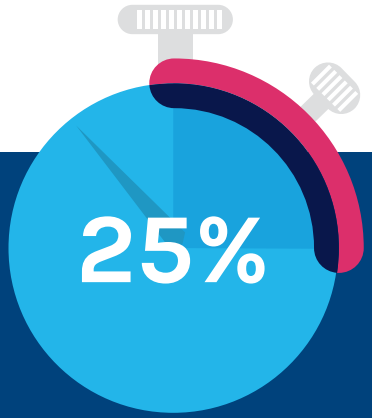
Increasing teacher and student collaboration



Greater transparency through enhanced communication between districts, schools, and families

#10 Strengthen Data Security

Managing the exchange of data between different vendors and platforms increases vulnerabilities, but a unified solution offers IT administrators greater security; data isn't jumping from one system to another. It also provides IT with a single source of accountability. When issues arise, there is one clear point of contact.



A FULLY INTEROPERABLE SOLUTION

provides a 25% reduction in IT time spent on system and data security management [10]

10. Hobson & Company Research: The Case for a Unified Technology Platform, PowerSchool, https://www.powerschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/PS-wp-002-042217-download.pdf

Five Ways Unified Technology Can Improve K-12 District Data Security

A MORE CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT

With unified technology, user permissions can be adjusted for various roles to ensure access across programs is limited to those who need it. Plus, with one account and login, it's much easier for department heads and senior personnel to drill down into transactions to verify they are appropriate. This reduces the likelihood that a rogue employee can cause damage by accessing a database or program they shouldn't.

LESS TO REMEMBER

Many unified technology solutions are built with single sign-on (SSO) technology. Instead of using different usernames and passwords for each program, single sign-on gives users access to all software with just one login. This goes a long way toward preventing passwords from getting into the wrong hands.

ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT CONSISTENCY

It's easier to apply comprehensive security best practices around user account management with unified, integrated technology than disconnected software programs. With single sign-on, your district can plug in a top-tier password management solution and use it across all participating applications. But with fragmented software, you can apply only the account management solution that's compatible with each individual program.

SINGLE LOGOUT

This refers to technology that automatically signs you out of every program in a unified solution when you log out of just one. This can come in handy for K-12 administrators who step away from their computers to, say, take a quick phone call. With single logout, you don't have to worry if someone forgets to sign out of all programs when they leave their desk.

HEALTH & SAFETY

With unified technology solutions, attendance information can flow in real time to the parent portal, which ensures families are in the loop if there is an unexpected absence. Similarly, connected programs improve the accuracy and speed with which a student's important medical and emergency contact information can be updated.

PART THREE

How to Measure & Evaluate Edtech ROI



Steps to Improve ROI with Unified Edtech



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When Choosing Unified Edtech



QUESTIONS TO ASK

to Ensure Edtech Purchases Are Built for Future Success

#1 Is it based on modern technologies?

A unified system should include cloud hosting options to give you more capabilities to expand and enable products to grow easily with your changing needs. It also frees you from having to maintain the software and install upgrades, ensuring that you're always using the most recent version. A unified system should also provide mobile apps so that students, staff, and parents can view and interact with the data from a smartphone or other mobile device.

#2 Is it easy to use?

A modern, unified system has to be simple to use, getting things done quickly and easily. The format and interface should be designed in a way that helps shape decision-making and communication. Processes shouldn't require complicated training; they should be easy to learn. Teachers shouldn't have to log into multiple systems to access or enter information; instead, they should have a single sign-on. Teachers and administrators who need interactive, easy-to-understand reports from the system's data shouldn't have to turn to their IT department or the vendor for this information.

#3 Is it compatible with your other software systems?

If your products don't communicate with other systems in real time, teachers and administrators have to enter information in multiple places. This takes up valuable time better spent on core functions—such as lesson planning or one-on-one instruction—and increases the chances of mistakes. To ensure compatibility, your system should be up to date with the latest standards. It should include an extensive set of Application Programming Interface (API) technologies so your systems can "talk" to each other fluently. True interoperability requires going beyond plug-and-play solutions or simple API integration. A solution should at least meet global standards such as Learning Tools Interoperability® (LTI®) and Common Cartridge® v1.1 and 1.2 import and 1.3 export.





#4 Does it keep your data secure?

Cybersecurity is now the top concern of school district chief information officers, according to the Consortium for School Networking's (CoSN) 2018 K-12 IT Leadership Survey.[11] Your vendor should keep only the minimum amount of personal data needed to provide value to schools, teachers, parents, and students. It should give you the ability to control users' access to the system, allowing them to see only the data they need for their specific role. Your provider should fully comply with FERPA, HIPAA, COPPA, and other laws, and have multiple defenses in place, such as intrusion detection systems, multifactor authentication, and data backup and disaster recovery plans. And it should perform an independent security audit on a regular basis, using an established standard such as ISO 27001.

#5 Is it flexible and customizable to your needs?

Your school or district should not be constrained by a one-size-fits-all solution that lacks the flexibility to support your unique needs. Instead, your unified system should allow you to easily create student schedules and grading systems that work for your teams and your workflow, including standards-based grading if that's how you do things. You should be able to customize the user interface, create or consolidate different page views, and adapt to changing requirements for state reporting on the fly.

#6 Does it provide key insights to help you improve instruction?

Above all, your unified system needs to provide useful, actionable insights to help you improve teaching and learning. Data should be presented in organized, user-friendly ways, helping stakeholders recognize trends and identify key challenges and areas for improvement. Users should be able to quickly and easily draw informed conclusions about the individual student, class, grade, school, and district.

11. COSN 2018 K-12 IT Leadership Survey Report.

AN OVERLOOKED KEY TO SUCCESS:
Support and Training

> "If you don't invest up front in adequate training, you'll pay more down the road."
>
> **FRED SCOTT,**
> Edtech Trainer

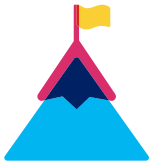
Make sure your staff receives proper training from the beginning—and continuously—**to make sure the tools are used in a way that maximizes value.** Putting a priority on training staff and providing additional support along the way can make all the difference in speeding up implementation and reducing staff requirements.

"We do a lot to invest in hardware and software, but **we also need to invest in 'humanware.'** That's the opportunity to enhance the professional practices of people at school. If you don't invest up front in adequate training, you'll pay more down the road," says Fred Scott, a 33-year K-12 veteran and edtech trainer. **"My greatest joy has been watching people learn and seeing how that learning ended up in practice: learning that improves the entire environment. You just can't buy that."**

Felix adds: "Proper training for employees must be a part of the purchase for any technology product. There are no savings to a district when a product is purchased without professional development. There is a significant cost to the leader who economizes on professional training as a way to lessen the purchase price. The leader who wisely chooses the proper amount of edtech training needed instantly makes using the product more efficient. And it also **creates a positive culture change when the employees are more likely to accept the change of new products, and they also trust their administration more."**

CONCLUSION

The Next Generation of Products



As K-12 districts are forced to do more with less—with shrinking budgets and other resource challenges—Henry Ford's message of moving forward together resonates louder than ever.

"It's time to discover the next generation of products and services that have combined the best attributes of many applications into one," says Felix. "This unification of apps makes it easier to maintain a product, simpler to train staff, and, most importantly, creates a service for students and teachers to work together more efficiently and successfully."





The long list of multiple, siloed software applications most districts are saddled with holds them back, keeps teams fragmented, and shackles productivity.

But with unified K-12 edtech, districts can break loose and thrive with streamlined processes, improved efficiencies, and increased productivity—from the front office to the classroom to the home.

At Oxford Community Schools, moving forward together could be the district's guiding anthem—educators from all departments have unified to improve processes and realize ROI in a variety of ways.

"A unified system allows educators to easily jump between applications on the education side," says Debbie Fox, Oxford Community Schools Senior Technology Consultant. "On the management side, counselors, administrators, secretaries, and all of the behind-the-scenes staff that are managing data have a single source of data entry so we are ensuring clean, quality data."

Adds Superintendent Throne:

> **"With unified technology, every day we are increasing our ROI. And it keeps getting better."**

TIM THRONE
Superintendent, Oxford Community Schools, Michigan



Unifying the Education Ecosystem

See how K-12 unified solutions can power the entire education ecosystem.

In this interactive experience, you'll visit each step of the educational ecosystem—from teacher recruitment and onboarding, student registration, and family engagement to classroom learning, analytics, and finance and HR.

▶ TAKE AN INTERACTIVE TOUR



PowerSchool

Powering Brighter Futures

At PowerSchool, we believe in the simple truth that every student deserves the best opportunities in life.

That's why our mission is to power the education ecosystem with unified technology that helps educators and students realize their potential, in their way. From the back office to the classroom to the home, PowerSchool helps schools and districts efficiently manage instruction, learning, grading, attendance, assessment, analytics, state reporting, special education, student registration, talent, finance, and HR. Today, we're proud to be the leading provider of K-12 education application technology supporting over 45 million students in over 70 countries.

www.PowerSchool.com