

Empowering EdTech Leaders

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO
SURVIVING AND THRIVING AS A
K-12 INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATOR



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Preface

Throughout my career in education—while leading statewide educational organizations and conferences, presenting at National School Boards Association conventions and at local school board meetings—I, as well as my colleagues, have received many inquiries regarding the efficacy of technology used in our schools. We hope that the following discussions of our EdTech leadership practices, successes, and the challenges we faced will help guide you from theory to practice to reality.

—Guy

From Theory . . .

The term *technology* derives from the Greek words *techne*, meaning an art, craft, or skill, and *logos*, meaning discourse. Essentially, technology is *the art of communication*. Its evolution and effective use in diverse teaching and learning environments today remain rooted in cognitive and communicative processes.

. . . To Practice . . .

In essence, as EdTech leaders, we have the privilege of practicing the art of communication to leverage technology for instruction and learning. Throughout our careers in the field of education, each one of us has collaborated with the following stakeholders to use educational technology:

- **students**—to develop ideas, conduct research, evaluate information, think critically, work collaboratively, and communicate knowledge to become successful digital citizens and lifelong learners;

- **teachers**—to innovate, differentiate, and incorporate instructional best practices to address the diverse learning styles and abilities of students;
- **administrators**—to empower educators to effectively integrate instructional technologies and incorporate 21st-century skills to support student achievement;
- **parents/guardians**—to support the home–school connection by establishing a positive learning environment and promoting responsible digital citizenship.

... To Reality

From classroom to boardroom, one of an EdTech leader’s main roles is to cultivate the critical triangle of success between teacher/staff, student, and parent/community to enhance and support the education, development, and well-being of children.

In reality, it is never simple or straightforward. Some stakeholders will not be supportive of the EdTech leader’s efforts to advance technology goals, plans, and budgets. This can be especially challenging when other departments in the EdTech leader’s district have initiatives that compete for the same limited resources.

As experienced EdTech leaders from high-performing school districts on Long Island, we have confronted these challenges; it is our mutual goal, and the impetus of authoring this insider’s guide, to empower you to survive and thrive as a successful EdTech instructional innovator.

Introduction

A leader is one who manifests direction, integrity, hardiness, and courage in a constant pattern of behavior that inspires truth, motivation, and responsibility on the part of the followers who, along the way, become leaders themselves.

—Unknown

So you want to be, or already are, an educational technology (EdTech) leader? We might be inclined to say “Be careful what you wish for,” if you catch us on one of “those” days. But what are some of the things EdTech leaders encounter on one of “those” days that make us question our career choice? The possibilities are endless. A user could give up a password to a phishing email after repeated reminders of how to identify one, or a projector bulb could burn out right before the middle school graduation photo montage, or an Internet connection could go down and the connectivity doesn’t roll over to the secondary circuit like it’s supposed to despite having been tested numerous times.

These are just a few examples of the “normal” headwinds you might face in this type of job. There are also abnormal, unanticipated, epic, blow-your-mind kinds of days. What do those days look like? Imagine finding out a tragic school shooting has taken place across the country and your superintendent wants you to implement a new mass communication system that can notify everyone immediately by phone, text, and email in case of an emergency, and to know if it can be implemented by the end of the week. Or imagine finding out that schools will be closed indefinitely due to a raging pandemic, and everyone (yes, everyone) needs to have a school device, must learn how to videoconference, and must become completely proficient in the learning management system in two days’ time because thousands of students and teachers will be pivoting to remote learning. These are real situations we lived through during our careers that we never could have anticipated.

Why do we open this dialogue with the worst challenges you might face? Well, if you have not yet had a panic attack, we know you have the right temperament for the job and have come to the right place.

All kidding aside, we think being an EdTech leader is the best job in the world. Why do we think that? Because we love every single minute of our careers (okay, not every minute, but you get the idea). Our role is exciting, unique, creative, and impactful. In many ways, an EdTech leader is the primary change agent for innovation in a school district, even more so than a superintendent or a principal (not to take anything away from those critical leadership positions). EdTech leaders interact with key stakeholders throughout the educational community, including students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and Board of Education trustees. EdTech leaders get involved in all aspects of the educational enterprise, such as district policy, teaching methodology, curriculum integration, resource selection, budgeting, purchasing, hiring, security, facilities, and supervision and evaluation. It is a job that you can do year in, year out, always learning something new, never getting bored, and know you are making a difference in the lives of students and staff. It is fulfilling on many distinct levels.

So, what does the job entail and how can you be successful filling such a profound role? That is the question this book endeavors to answer in comprehensive and meaningful detail. We never had such a resource, though we wish we did, and now we have created one written by, and for, educational technology leaders. In the chapters that follow, we offer over a century of combined knowledge and experience. We have compiled many of the most important responsibilities EdTech leaders have to address, and we provide critical information, guidance, and advice about how to effectively navigate those responsibilities. But we do not stop there. We also go beyond the basics and share examples, anecdotes, tips, and insights that will help you on your journey of professional growth and success. You have or soon will have an amazing job. You are the designated Chief Problem Solver and Visionary for your school district! Now what? No pressure! Read on.