

Key Considerations for Educational Leaders

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology (OET) hosted a series of conversations with educators and learners with disabilities as well as group design sessions at an [accessible educational technology \(edtech\) event](#) in partnership with [New America](#). This document summarizes several lessons learned.

5 Things Learners with Disabilities Want You To Know

"When edtech is accessible, I can thrive in the classroom. I am a diligent learner, always inquisitive, and eager to explore new concepts. Accessible materials allow me to fully realize my potential."

- Post-secondary student with a visual impairment

1. **Train and support educators.** The use of accessible* technology requires job embedded training, technical assistance, and professional development for educators. Merely having accessible edtech is insufficient if educators lack the necessary skills and support to implement them effectively.
2. **Test tool accessibility.** Prior to entering into contracts with companies, it is essential to test the accessibility of the tools. Procurement decisions should involve educators and learners, both with and without disabilities, to ensure inclusivity. Here is an example [guide for accessible procurement processes](#).
3. **Ask questions.** It is perfectly acceptable to be new to the concept of accessibility. Recognize that it can be overwhelming, but remember that there are abundant resources available to support you such as the [American Printing House](#), [AEM Center](#) and [Described and Captioned Media Program](#).
4. **Ensure interoperability.** When procuring edtech, don't buy tools that are not compatible with the existing devices that learners use every single day. For example, ensure that a new learning tool or software is compatible with a learner's assistive technology (AT)*, such as a screen reader.
5. **Empower learners.** When edtech is accessible, it empowers learners to thrive in the classroom. Their eagerness to explore, their curiosity, and their dedication to learning can be fully realized when learning experiences and materials are designed accessibly.

5 Things Educators Want You to Know

"Schools need to procure edtech that is accessible and includes evidence-based strategies for learners with disabilities. If only they knew how much time educators use to make their own materials when they don't have access to accessible tools." - High School Speech-Language Pathologist

1. **Provide more time.** Time constraints represent a major obstacle to accessible edtech. Educators often lack the time to locate evidence-based resources and test for accessibility. Consider this [example from CAST](#).
2. **Create a resource repository.** Educators might be unaware of the edtech options available to them through their districts. Establishing [comprehensive online repositories](#) that list available, accessible edtech tools and provide resources for training and technical assistance on their usage is of utmost importance.
3. **Train educators.** Educators need training and technical assistance on effectively using available and accessible technology. Professional development programs should allocate time for educators to familiarize themselves with the edtech tools purchased by the district and offer opportunities to practice using them.
4. **Streamline processes.** Establishing streamlined processes for integrating edtech and AT is crucial. Existing processes can often be burdensome and confusing and educators often receive minimal training and support for finding, implementing, and evaluating edtech and AT.
[AT Center](#).
5. **Create opportunities for collaboration.** Learning from others doing work well is a key to success. In the current system, it can be difficult to collaborate and align across schools, districts, and regions. Districts should reach out to their peers to learn together; you don't always have to re-invent the wheel!

Looking to learn more about accessible edtech? Check out [OET resources](#) and [New America resources](#)

* Definitions for the terms "accessible" and "assistive technology" can be found on the [AEM Center's website](#)