

The State of School Purchasing Report 2026

Insights into how school and district
leaders identify needs, evaluate
vendors, and manage budgets in a
resource-constrained environment.

Data

Online survey conducted with **1,094** US-based
education decision-makers within the
SmartBrief & Tech & Learning audiences.



The Timeline — A Constant Cycle

EdTech procurement is no longer a seasonal summer rush. Modern school districts are moving away from traditional buying windows, adopting an agile, year-round approach to discovering and acquiring tools.

Identifying
Needs

62%

of school
leaders identify
purchasing needs
on an ongoing
basis.

Evaluating
Products

67%

evaluate products
continuously
throughout the
year.

The Final
Decision

54%

make final buying
decisions on an
ongoing basis,
though a notable
33% still finalize
choices during
Spring/Summer.



Who Holds the Power?

Successful vendor outreach requires knowing exactly who sits at the decision-making table. While district-level buy-in is important, localized building administrators and frontline instructional staff hold the most significant sway over what actually gets purchased.

Building Level Administrators

61%

Instructional Staff

59%

Instructional Directors

54%

Technology Directors

52%

Superintendents

46%

School Board Members

24%

Parents

15%



Where the Dollars Are Going (12-24 Months)



Faced with funding challenges, the AI explosion, and staff shortages, school districts are targeting their funding toward professional development and instructional products.

Top General Spending Plans:

Educator Professional Development: 68%
Instructional Tools & Systems: 63%
Hardware (Laptops/Tablets): 48%
AI Tools: 37%



Top Teaching & Learning Products Being Considered:

Assessment Tools: 41%
Reading Curriculum: 38%
AI Tools (Chatbots, lesson creation, etc.): 37%
Math & STEM Curriculum: 36% each



Hurdles & Deal-Breakers

To combat tightening budgets and maximize ROI, school districts are taking a close look at overall costs, ease of implementation, safety, and interoperability when making purchasing decisions.

Top Deal-Breakers:

Subscription Costs

63%

Lack of Alignment with State Standards

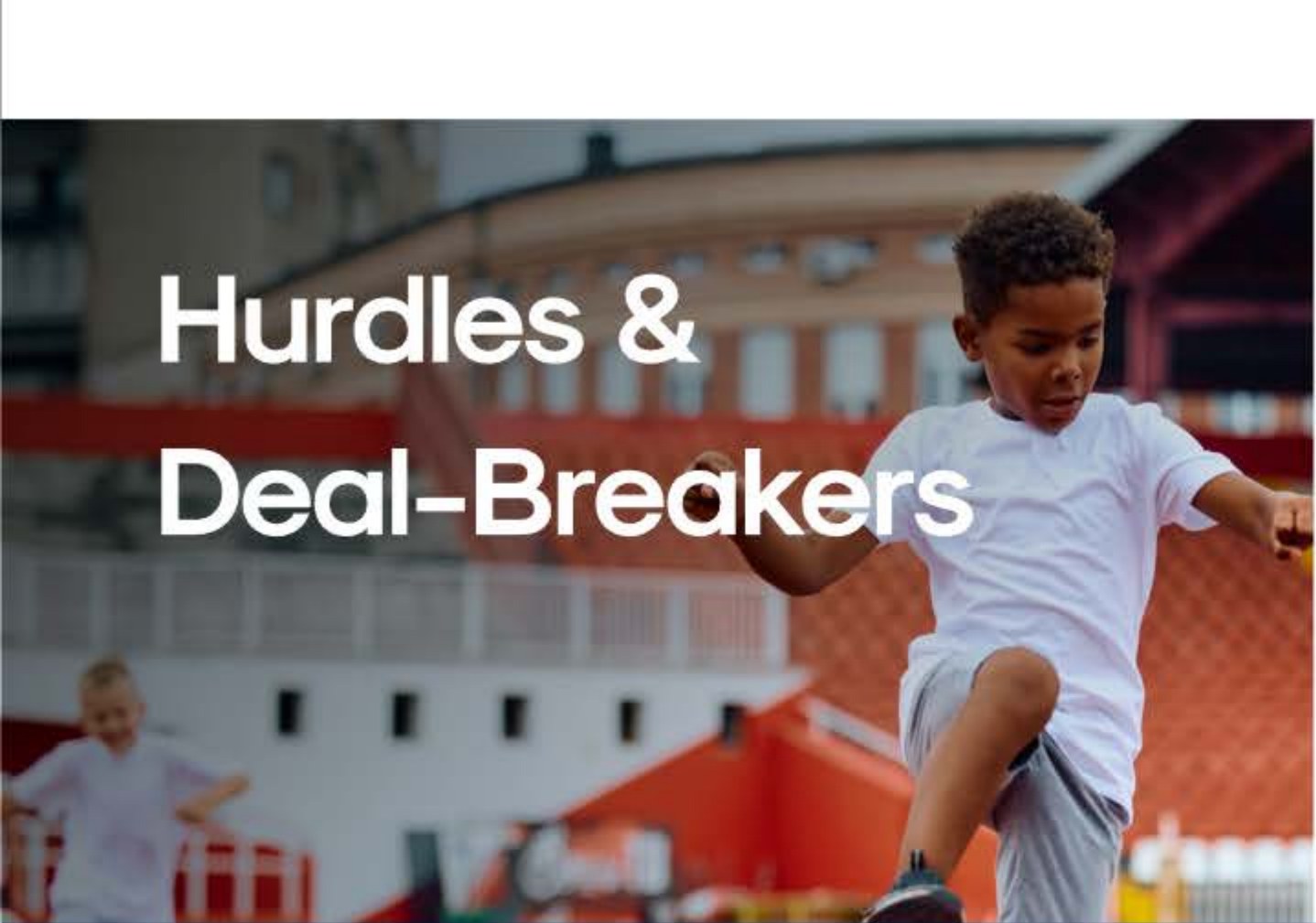
47%

High Complexity of Implementation

41%

Inability to Integrate with LMS/Current Systems

37%



Hurdles & Deal-Breakers

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Macro Pressures Impacting Plans:

80% of respondents cite Funding/Budgets as their biggest current challenge, followed by Staff Shortages (**45%**) and AI Concerns (**39%**).

Altogether, **76%** say these challenges moderately or significantly change their purchase behaviors.



The Evolving Role of AI & Screen Time

Despite heavy national media conversations around student screen time and rapid artificial intelligence rollouts, school policies remain steady. Rather than enforcing outright tech bans, administrators are opting for pragmatic, case-by-case evaluation.

Screen-Time Concerns

Surprisingly, **44%** of educators state that national screen-time trends have not affected their tech purchasing habits.

AI Procurement Policies

57% report no significant policy changes regarding AI, continuing to evaluate tools contextually.

The AI Dichotomy

While AI is helping streamline purchasing predictions and strategic planning, leaders remain cautious regarding privacy, security, and the rapid pace of tech evolution.

How to Reach Education Buyers

Traditional sales pitches fall flat in the K-12 environment. Educators lean on authentic peer networks and actionable, real-world case studies to cut through marketing noise and find tools that actually work.

How Products Are Discovered

Teachers & Peers (72%) and Education Publications (69%) are the top trusted discovery channels, ahead of standard vendor outreach (56%).

Preferred Content Formats

Webinars (65%) and District Case Studies (52%) are ranked as the most helpful resources.

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71% prefer hearing peer-led presentations from fellow educators and getting insight into product implementation from vendors (56%).

Key Survey Takeaways for Education

Strong vendor partnerships are built on trust, clear communication, responsive support, and a deep understanding of school needs, with educators placing particular value on long-term collaboration, flexibility, and ongoing support beyond the initial sale.

Macro Pressures Impacting Plans:

The Bottom Line: Schools want transparent, long-term partners who understand their budgets, deliver on their promises, and provide ongoing support. To find these partners, they turn to trusted brands like **SmartBrief** and **Tech & Learning**. Contact your sales rep today to discover how our comprehensive advertising solutions can position your brand as a trusted partner to nearly 1 million education buyers.

