

ITSF: Intentional Technology & Screen Framework

A decision framework for school leaders ready to move from default to deliberate.

The screen debate has been hijacked by two bad options: uncritical adoption and reflexive rejection. The ITSF offers a third path — grounded in what research from UNESCO, the U.S. Dept. of Education, and the American Academy of Pediatrics actually says: that intentionality, teacher preparation, and purpose are everything. Duration is almost beside the point.

01 Purpose Before Platform

What is the specific learning goal this technology is serving, and could that goal be achieved without it?

Most edtech procurement happens outside the classroom — filtered through budget cycles, vendor booths, and neighboring-district decisions. UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report is explicit: technology purchased outside the education sector will not necessarily address education's needs. Every lesson using a device should have a one-sentence rationale connecting the tool to the learning objective. If that sentence can't be written, the device shouldn't be open.

02 Active Over Passive, Always

Are students doing something with this technology, or having something done to them by it?

A 2024 ScienceDirect study of nearly 10,000 youth found that mentally passive screen time — watching, scrolling, clicking through pre-set modules — showed negative associations with curiosity, memory, and resilience. Active use at moderate levels showed the opposite. Active looks like: producing, coding, designing, analyzing, collaborating. School leaders should be able to classify every tool in their building — and suspicious of any tool that resists classification.

03 Teacher First, Technology Second

Has the educator been prepared to use this technology pedagogically — not just operationally?

There is a difference between knowing how to use a tool and knowing why to use it for a given student toward a given learning goal. UNESCO identifies teacher preparation as one of three essential system-wide conditions for technology to reach its potential. Research from PMC confirms: insufficient preparation is among the most significant barriers to effective integration. Sustained, contextually relevant professional learning communities — not August workshops — are what produce real instructional change.

04 Communicate the Why to Families

Can we explain our technology decisions clearly and honestly to the families we serve?

When families don't understand why a device is in their child's hands, they fill that gap with their own theory. The CoSN 2025 Blaschke Report identified family communication as one of the most critical and most underserved areas in the screen time conversation — and published an entire toolkit because most districts haven't had these conversations at all. The solution isn't a better FAQ. It's genuine, recurring dialogue: what screens are used for, what the learning goals are, and how families can reinforce these principles at home.