Edtech Evidence Exchange Merges With InnovateEDU

[Daniel Mollenkamp](#)

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There's [growing interest among schools](#) in looking for evidence of how effective edtech products are before making purchases, but leading advocates for efficacy research say more needs to be done.

To help make that push, two nonprofits in the space—Edtech Evidence Exchange and InnovateEDU, which operates Project Unicorn—[are merging](#), arguing they'll be more powerful together than apart.

"If there's one thing that I want to get across, it's about critical mass: it is time for the EdTech Evidence Exchange to reach critical mass," says Bart Epstein, director of the EdTech Evidence Exchange.

Providing feedback on pricey edtech products from tens of thousands of educators will allow districts a clearer window into the efficacy of edtech

tools, and it's something that Epstein says the recent merger facilitates. For example: the exchange says that the consolidation will help to make the organizations more efficient in pursuing their "compatible" goals, reducing costs like HR, legal and fundraising.

Spendthrifts

The merger is happening at a moment of serious pressure on schools to spend more.

By one count, less than 15 percent of the federal funding schools received last year has been spent. That has led to concern that schools will fail to make up the learning lost so far during the pandemic.

Calls for schools to spend have grown more rapidly in recent weeks, after the NAEP assessment scores—understood as a "report card" on learning outcomes in the U.S.—revealed "historic" declines in math scores and also a fall in reading scores.

But to Epstein, speedy spending won't necessarily help the nation's nearly 50 million K-12 students. In fact, it isn't really known how effective the federal money being spent by districts even is, according to Epstein.

Right now, for example, the federal government doesn't enforce its "tiers of evidence" framework which is meant to establish best practices. That has left a relatively few number of school and district leaders to keep the pressure on edtech companies to ensure that their products actually help students learn.

Without that pressure, a lot of critical resources could end up being squandered. In North Carolina, for instance, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools had to cut a third of edtech companies from consideration for their $50

million in tutoring contracts after it [found that the companies had no evidence their services were effective](#).

One of those companies, the online tutoring service Paper, [got $10.7 million from the Mississippi Department of Education](#) to tutor students across the state's 121 districts. But few students may ever even use that service, according to [a recent report from researchers from Brown University and the University of California, Irvine](#).

Schools and districts need to thoughtfully plan out spending based on evidence, Epstein argues. It's a time-consuming process that includes assessing their needs, looking into their options, understanding the research and figuring out how to implement a product.

Epstein says that the merger will help the exchange to complete its critical initiatives, such as its partnership with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics which is [paying math teachers to collect evidence about how they use edtech products](#).

In the hopes of building up EdTech Evidence Exchange's platform, the Overdeck Family Foundation has also renewed its investment into the nonprofit with a two-year $1 million grant.