

# SIMPLIFY TO AMPLIFY, RETHINKING EDTECH INNOVATION

By Derek Moore, Chief Technology Officer, Palo Alto Unified School District

*Derek R. Moore is a seasoned education technologist and author dedicated to improving digital learning in schools. With extensive experience implementing user-friendly, scalable EdTech systems, he champions simplicity, reliability, and classroom impact to support teachers, students, and lasting educational outcomes.*

In an exclusive interview with Education Technology Insights he shared invaluable insights on simplicity and reliability in education technology, emphasizing that stable, user-friendly systems empower teachers, support students, and create lasting impact without distraction.

## The Power of Boring Tech in Education

The real promise of educational technology isn't the next shiny thing, but the quiet work of making learning easier, safer, and more human. In other words, make educational technology boring.

Let's begin with a look at some of the persistent challenges we face in educational technology today:

- **Cognitive Overload:** A growing number of disconnected platforms contribute to confusion, inefficiency, and reduced instructional focus for both staff and students.
- **Student Data Privacy:** Concerns about data collection, usage transparency, and vendor security practices require stronger oversight and clearer policies.
- **Teacher Burden and Burnout:** Educators are often expected to adopt new technologies with minimal training, increasing workload and reducing morale.
- **Data Integration and Interoperability:** Siloed systems and manual processes waste time and prevent holistic views of student progress.

To make this concrete, let's borrow an example from outside education: driving directions.

I'm old enough to remember using paper maps to get to a friend's house. Then came MapQuest where I could print step-by-step directions, an incredible leap forward. Today, I hop in the car, my phone connects wirelessly via CarPlay, and I simply ask Siri to take me where I want to go. Five seconds later, directions appear on my dashboard. Amazing!

The outcome hasn't changed; I'm still going to spend time with a friend. The difference is that now I don't have to think about how to get there. Technology removed the friction from



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the task and made the experience seamless.

This explosion of convenience has also led to an explosion of apps, on our phones and in our schools. But here's the catch: most people only use a few apps daily. The constraint isn't choice, it's time.

The same holds true in education.

We've seen a proliferation of edtech tools, each promising to fix a problem or boost a performance metric. Yet the fundamental constraints remain unchanged: there are only so many hours in a school day, and the human brain (student or teacher) can only absorb so much.

## So, what outcomes should we focus on?

I'd argue the same ones Horace Mann envisioned nearly two centuries ago: to develop responsible, literate, and productive members of society. The question, then, is how we use technology to support that mission, not distract from it.



In education technology, boring isn't bad, it's reliable, scalable, and exactly what schools need to focus on what truly matters: learning

The path forward lies in adopting a small set of stable, adaptable, and trusted tools and platforms that are versatile enough to support learners of all ages and relevant across multiple subjects. If that core is consistent, we create room for thoughtful, specialized additions without overwhelming our systems or people.

Most drivers don't care how CarPlay works; they just want to get where they're going. Likewise, students and teachers shouldn't have to worry about the complexity behind their tech tools. They should be free to focus on learning, growing, and connecting.

That's what it means to be boring.

And that's exactly the kind of edtech we need. **ET**