Find the Right School ERP Provider:
6 Questions to Ask

Choosing an enterprise resource planning (ERP) software provider is a consequential decision with long-term ramifications for school districts. It's anticipated you "will become a partner with the chosen (ERP) vendor for the next 10-plus years. You want to make sure the partnership will last," according to the Government Finance Officers Association.[1]

Much is at stake, including the financial and resource commitment to initial implementation and the day-to-day functionality of dependable, user-friendly software that is the backbone of financial operations. Because selecting the right partner is paramount, vendors require thorough vetting. Here are six key questions to consider when selecting a provider that will meet your district's needs now and in the future.
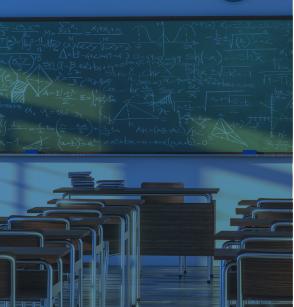
1 Stability: Will the provider be your partner for the long haul?

It's imperative to know that the provider has a strong foundation and that you can count on your vendor to meet expectations next month, next year, and beyond.

A recent history of being sold or radically restructured is a possible warning sign of vendor instability. Employee churn often follows a company's sale or other uncertainties. Unfortunately, departing employees often include the most experienced workers who choose to take positions at more stable companies.

Ask how new owners plan to maintain standards going forward and if the new owners have experience with the K-12 sector. Decades of experience in the public sector is usually an indicator of a solid foundation. A stable company has more consistent access to resources to build upon its current offerings, support its clients, and innovate for the future.

2 Deployment: How does the provider approach implementation?

Implementation of a new ERP solution is a significant undertaking. The good news is that an experienced provider will have established systems in place to minimize the pain. For starters, the company's implementation team should follow Project Management Institute methodology. In addition, the vendor should have experience with successful remote implementations, which are becoming increasingly prevalent because of cost savings, more flexible scheduling, and more efficient use of vendor hours.

An experienced ERP provider will be much more agile in responding to (and solving) inevitable issues. A valuable asset for implementation teams are workers with K-12 experience who can help clients get the most out of their ERP software.

To assess a vendor's implementation capabilities, it's vital to look at past implementations and talk to current clients. If you want to understand a company's core, it's important to see how a company performs with complicated deliverables and if it has a history of successfully going live on time and within budget.

[1] Government Finance Officers Association. (2018.) Transparency: A Means to Improving Citizen Trust in Government. https://www.gfoa.org/sites/default/files/TransparencyApril2018.pdf

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3 Support: What's the commitment to supporting clients — now and in the future?

ERP software and data integration are complicated. Questions and issues are inevitable. The key is how quickly and competently issues are resolved. Experience, resources, accessibility, and responsiveness are the building blocks of top-tier customer service for ERP providers. It's not just the number of people operating phones and handling email and message queries; what counts is the experience, expertise, and dedication of the support staff. Discussions with a vendor's current clients will provide insight into how a provider's support promises intersect with reality.

Digging into client retention numbers is one way to gauge the quality of client support. A rate of more than 95 percent indicates a high level of client satisfaction.

4 Public Sector: Does the provider understand the unique needs of school districts?

A company specializing in K-12 understands a district's unique needs. The optimal provider knows that districts can't simply adopt software designed for the private sector.

Ideally, a company selling ERP software to districts has employees with real-world experience in school finance. These employees understand:

- Financial transparency requirements
- Mandated data security and privacy rules
- The need for systems that break down silos and ensure seamless data flow throughout districts
- State-specific and federal reporting requirements

Finally, an experienced ERP provider understands the importance of dependability and security. System downtime can paralyze district operations. Therefore, the provider must have the resources and expertise necessary to help schools avoid disruptions and quickly resolve issues.

Providers dedicated to K-12 understand clients depend on their software to meet the needs of the community day in and day out. Successful ERP providers share this responsibility each day.

5 Cloud: Does the vendor offer a proven cloud solution?

Districts are increasingly turning to cloud solutions because of many advantages, including:

- Elevated data security
- Scalability for optimized performance
- Reduced hardware and infrastructure responsibility and expense
- Access to new, evolving technologies

Because of this trend, it is becoming increasingly crucial for ERP providers to have cloud capabilities and experience. Companies with expertise in software-as-a-service (SaaS) and cloud services can deliver a dependable, easier-to-deploy, and always up-to-date solution. A proven, well-supported cloud environment is the foundation of a cloud solution you can count on.

6 Innovation: Can integrations improve operations?

It's important to have confidence that a provider will continue to innovate and have a strong vision for the product's future. Forward-thinking providers offer software ecosystems that eliminate data silos and ensure information flows seamlessly between departments.

This connected vision can best be achieved through the selection of a provider that offers a breadth of products and services that are easily integrated. Choosing a provider with a comprehensive collection of school ERP suites can aid in a simpler implementation process and provide data integration throughout a district since the software modules are purpose-built for integrations.

For example, integration of finances, payroll, human resources, purchasing, fixed assets, revenue streams, and more simplifies the user experience and connectivity within an organization — in comparison to stitching together solutions from multiple vendors. A strong ERP candidate will be able to offer specific examples of success.

If you'd like more information about ERP solutions, contact us at info@tylertech.com or visit tylertech.com.