

How to Tackle K-12 IT Workforce Shortages with Technology Services



The Great Resignation.

The Big Quit.

The K-12 Staffing Crisis.

Whatever you call it, K-12 school districts have a retention problem and it's not unique to teaching staff – superintendents, principals, nurses, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and others are departing in droves¹.

Between the pandemic's disruption on student learning, overloaded schedules, and increased workloads, staff are burned out, frustrated, and leaving for enterprise roles or retiring.

Already tasked with managing a plethora of networks, devices, and applications critical to the mission of learning, IT teams have now been elevated to a strategic role, charged with driving multiple digital transformation initiatives across their districts – often with little increase in team capacity.

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These challenges are not unique to K-12, which means IT leaders are in high demand in the job market. As a result, IT retention grows more challenging every year and can impact district innovation if unaddressed. Recent studies found IT workers have the lowest intent to stay in their jobs compared to all corporate functions² and 7 in 10 digital leaders say their company is unable to keep pace with change due to worker shortages³.

But IT teams don't need to throw in the towel – leveraging technology services and/or partnering with experienced managed service providers (MSP) are strategies IT teams can use to mitigate these challenges, reduce burnout, and improve retention.



Technology Services to the Rescue

Before we dive into the details of how, let's first define the technology services we're talking about.

Professional Services: Typically associated with project-based consulting work including assessments, design, implementation, and migrations of technology that are shorter-term in nature, taking a few weeks or months to complete, with clearly defined deliverables

Managed Services: Longer-term partnership for services that support the ongoing maintenance and optimization of diverse technology systems

Admittedly, technology services can't magically solve 100% of your IT woes, but they can help districts maximize IT investments, cut expenses, and significantly reduce the pain of workforce shortages – here's how:

1. A Reprieve for Your Team

The sheer number of systems, devices, data, compliance, networks, etc., that education IT teams oversee is staggering. IT workloads were already increasing before COVID-19, but the pandemic accelerated 1:1 initiatives, leading to an explosion in connected devices needing support, networks needing optimization to handle the surge in connectivity, and systems needing protection from increasing cyberattacks. The result? Stressed and overburdened technology teams with too much on their plates and forced to ruthlessly prioritize, often resulting in day-to-day maintenance falling through the cracks.

Your internal IT team's time is too valuable to spend on cumbersome maintenance – offloading these tasks to an MSP delivers relief from this mountain of work and opens up time for your team to focus on district innovation, technology strategy and architecture, and serving your teachers, staff, and students. Less stress. Happier employees. Win-win.

2. Industry Experts – at Your Service

You know district connectivity and cybersecurity needs are complex. You also know you need to bring necessary expertise to the table, but what if your team doesn't have specialized network staff and resources in-house? Hiring expert talent is expensive and extremely competitive, but gaps can potentially lead to cybersecurity and network vulnerabilities – which if exploited, could cause devastating disruptions in student learning and even close schools or entire districts for days⁴.

With technology services, districts can access the expertise they need without hiring additional staff. These services extend your internal team with easy access to certified engineers who have a deep understanding of K-12 technology requirements. Your team will be able to collaborate with and lean on world-class network and cybersecurity experts to optimize your environments. Some MSPs also provide optional on-site personnel for districts wanting dedicated and exclusive support.

While the thought of relinquishing network control and access to an outside party can be uncomfortable for some, handing over complicated and time-consuming tasks to niche professionals can actually be more secure and elevate your district's overall security posture.



3. Flexibility is the Name of the Game

No two districts or IT departments look the same. With technology services, flexibility is on your side because there is no “one size fits all”.

No matter your needs, technology services can help you stay on top of your specific critical IT activities, bring valuable insight to strategy and architecture decisions, and can be used in conjunction with each other for full lifecycle support. For example, districts will often use professional services for initial consulting, assessments, and remediation strategies, then choose fully managed or co-management services for ongoing support and maintenance.

Some common use cases districts engage technology services for include:

- Networks assessments for WAN, LAN, WLAN, and private LTE networks
- Project definitions to help inform a scope of work for a vendor, or proposal to a school board, etc.
- Cybersecurity assessments including pen testing, NIST Cybersecurity Assessment, and more
- Managing complex environments or security systems, including:
 - WAN, LAN, and WLAN connectivity networks
 - Systems and applications environments
 - Network and firewall security optimization
- 24/7 support for a specific vendor’s equipment
- Help desk support

4. Who Are You Going to Call? Only One Vendor

Picture this – your network unexpectedly goes down, but instead of having to juggle communications with multiple unresponsive and unhelpful carriers, you only make one phone call to one vendor who urgently manages the troubleshooting process by collaborating with and working alongside your team to reach resolution.

It’s not too good to be true – whether you need general support, advice, guidance on a product, or troubleshooting an issue with your network, you’ll only have one vendor to call – your MSP. They’ll work directly with your equipment or hardware manufacturer to troubleshoot the problem(s) and oversee carrier management on your behalf, no matter how many underlying providers there are. Additionally, many MSPs proactively monitor your systems and can often address problems before you’re even aware of an issue, minimizing downtime and saving precious money and resources (*cue happy dance*).





We've Got You Covered

ENA – A Trusted Service Provider to Hundreds of School Districts

Whether you're looking for end-to-end, co-managed, or one-time professional services, ENA can help. Our turnkey connectivity, communications, cloud, and cybersecurity solutions enable districts to optimize their digital environments and reduce stress. Additionally, our technology services portfolio delivers flexible management terms and a la carte professional services for K-12 school districts, including:

- Consulting and advisory services
- Assessments for WAN, LAN, WLAN, cybersecurity, systems and applications
- Network design, implementation, activation, and validation
- Ongoing management and support with optional on-site support

To learn more or schedule a consultation with an ENA team member, visit www.ena.com/ally.



SOURCES:

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4 <https://www.ciodive.com/news/harvey-nash-digital-leaders-tech-skills/609591/>

5 <https://districtadministration.com/cyberattacks-ransomware-close-schools-more-often/>