Alert Solutions
Alert Solutions, a completely embedded communication suite within Pearson’s PowerSchool student information system, takes a cutting-edge approach to school communication. Using multiple messaging channels, Alert Solutions tailors communication based on school and parent preferences, using real-time contact information every time a message is sent—eliminating the need to sync or transfer data. “Power Announcement reaches parents via their preferred method of digital communication,” says Jill Ayers, technology director at Manhattan Christian School in Montana.
http://powerschool.alertsolutions.com

BiteSlide
Biteslide is an engaging platform for presenting school projects. At the heart of Biteslide are “slide-books,” a creative and fun way to express yourself using text, images, videos, and more. “This program is invaluable to our elementary ICT program,” says Jennifer Simon, technology integration specialist at the American International School in Ho Chi Minh City. “The built-in graphic and image features provide a fun and safe environment for students to create presentations.”
http://www.biteslide.com

Camtasia Studio (TechSmith)
Camtasia Studio helps users easily create professional-quality videos. You can use Camtasia to record on-screen activity, customize and edit content, add interactive elements, and share your videos with anyone, on nearly any device. “With this product, I can, at the drop of a hat, send a teacher an audio/visual/animated response to a ‘How can I…?’ question,” says Tim Haag, instructional technology coach for Greater Albany Public Schools in Oregon.
http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia-features.html

Canvas (Instructure)
Canvas is an easy-to-use, open-source learning management system that is used by more than 400 colleges, universities, and K-12 districts. “The Canvas LMS is head and shoulders above the crowd,” says Lisa Frazier, online education director at Great Basin College in Nevada. “Not only is Canvas intuitive for faculty and students to learn and use, but the way Canvas is designed saves instructors hundreds of hours creating multimedia content and grading. Canvas also excels in product support, [and] this has resulted in a 50-percent drop in help desk calls.”
http://www.instructure.com

2013-2014
Readers’ Choice Awards

This past spring, we asked readers to give us their top picks for school hardware, software, websites, and services. Nearly 700 readers responded via one of our three websites: eSchoolNews.com, eCampusNews.com, and eClassroomNews.com.

In nominating their favorite products, we asked readers to tell us how they’re using these products to improve teaching, learning, or school administration—and to what effect. We then chose the 40 best responses, which appear alphabetically by product name. The result is a list of ed-tech products and services that have proven to be effective. We hope you'll find this information useful as you consider how technology can help transform education in your own schools.

Award Winners

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http://www.instructure.com
Centricity2 (Schoolwires)

Centricity2 is a website and content management system that helps users connect with key stakeholders, securely communicate with staff via an intranet, and improve public relations. “We use this service for our website, and it affects everything we do. We use the calendar to communicate between buildings and with our students and parents. We use our website to communicate with our community, and it has become a way for district to share important information in a cost-effective way. It has opened up opportunities for our teachers to create lessons in … an online format as well, which is moving us in a more technologically sound direction,” says Krissy Machamer, a media specialist at Maysville Local Schools in Ohio.

http://www.schoolwires.com

Collaborate (Blackboard)

Blackboard Collaborate is an online learning and collaboration platform designed specifically for education. Its web conferencing features include two-way VoIP; multi-point video; built-in phone conferencing; interactive whiteboard, application, and desktop sharing; breakout rooms; mobile collaboration; and session recording. Users can join live sessions from mobile devices, and instant messaging capabilities allow schools to support online office hours. “[We] are able to bring NASA scientists and real-life engineering activities to our virtual students through Blackboard Collaborate. [It] bridges the geographic gap between us and our students in a remarkable way,” says Tara Park, an intermediate teacher for the Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School.

https://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/overview.aspx

CrashPlan PROe (Code 42 Software)

CrashPlan PROe is enterprise-level software for backing up information from a number of end points on a network. “With the increasing amount of research data produced and stored on faculty and staff laptops and desktops, our team knew end-point backup was a critical need,” said Tim Winningham, IT projects manager for The Ohio State University. “Since we rolled out the product about a year ago, CrashPlan PROe has … reduced [our] time spent installing and managing data backup by 98 percent, enabling us to focus on other important initiatives.”

http://www.crashplan.com/enterprise

Digital Passport (Common Sense Media)

Digital Passport consists of free, web-based games and videos to engage third through fifth graders in learning about safe and responsible internet use. Collaborative classroom activities reinforce online lessons, and students earn badges toward a Digital Passport. Teachers also receive reports to demonstrate student success. “The students loved the games and were challenged to think more about the choices they make online,” says Jeff Thornton, eLearning coach for Illinois’ Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. “The videos, lessons, and game are all high-quality resources that are easy for teachers to use, and they definitely opened conversations about digital citizenship with our students.”

https://www.digitalpassport.org

Discovery Techbooks (Discovery Education)

Discovery Techbooks help teachers transition to using digital resources instead of physical books. They include videos, interactive lessons, educational games, reading passages, and glossaries, as well as professional development for teachers. They actively engage students to read, write, and think critically, while reaching all learning modalities through the integration of text, audio, video, images, and digital investigations. “I use the Techbook to engage my students in inquiry-based lessons. Since it is self-paced, I can gauge [students’] understanding via the online assessments,” says Wendy Norton, a science teacher in Osceola County, Fla.

http://www.discoveryeducation.com

Enterasys Network Access Control (Enterasys)

Enterasys Network Access Control (NAC) is a complete, standards-based solution for ensuring proper access to wired and wireless networks. “The University of New Hampshire uses the Enterasys Network Access Control and One Fabric to have a complete, real-time pic-
ture of … all devices on the network, and the ability to identify and contact people using the network-connected device,” says IT Network Manager Scott Kitterman. “This product provides security to the BYOD [bring your own device] bonanza.”

http://www.enterasys.com

eTrition (Harris School Solutions)

eTrition is a browser-based enterprise school nutrition system featuring a centralized database. It offers security and central control of important data and tasks, including patrons, users, setup options, food items, and pricing. “This cafeteria management system has streamlined our processes, from the money collection through the children picking up their trays in the cafeteria. Parents can see account balances online, and it is easy to generate reports and reminders for families’ balances,” says Karen Haas, principal of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis schools.

http://www.harris-schoolsolutions.com

Futaba (INKids)

Futaba is a classroom iPad app designed to supports all types of learning activities. It comes with a variety of learning sets, including Dolch Sight Vocabulary Words, Subtraction, Multiplication, Telling the Time, Currency, Countries, and Flags. Users can create their own learning sets and can include audio with their questions. “This is a fantastic iPad app for engaging students in learning. The games are modifiable by the teacher to suit the needs of the students. Very well-thought-out product—and fun!” says Anna Adam, campus technologist at Cedar Valley Elementary School in Texas.


Gizmos (ExploreLearning)

Gizmos are interactive, online simulations for math and science education in grades 3-12. They help students develop a deep understanding of challenging concepts through inquiry and exploration. Correlated with the Common Core standards and more than 300 textbooks, Gizmos are ideal for small group work, individual exploration, and whole-class instruction using an LCD projector or interactive whiteboard. “Gizmos allow my students to have virtual ‘hands-on’ interaction with difficult science concepts. Each student can manipulate the variables, record the results, and arrive at their own conclusions,” says Leslie Leduc, retired instructional technology specialist from Manatee County, Fla.

http://www.explorelearning.com

GoClaim (Go Solutions Group)

GoClaim helps schools streamline the Medicaid reimbursement process, deliver better special-education services, and make faster, more informed decisions. “[Our school] uses the GoClaim system to bill Medicaid/special-education students who receive health care services while at school. It is an easy-to-use system that allows the school to be reimbursed for the services provided,” says Carla Armstrong, a registered nurse for Jesup Elementary School in Georgia.


Google Chromebooks

Google Chromebooks look like laptops, but they run on Google’s Chrome operating system and don’t have hard drives. Booting up in just seconds, they’re designed to connect quickly to Google’s internet search engine and online services; Google describes the devices as a simple, scalable, and affordable way to put technology into the hands of more students. “We are implementing Google Chromebooks in our one-to-one programs throughout the district. Chromebooks offer easy and quick deployment, reducing our initial costs to a couple of hours. Teachers and students adapt to them almost instantly and are productive out of the box,” says Phil Biggs, technology teacher on special assignment for the Lake Stevens School District in Washington.


Google+ Hangouts (Google)

This free plug-in enables users to connect and have voice and video conversations across computers, Android, and Apple devices. “I teach online using a learning management system that does not have video conferencing, so
I use Hangouts to meet with my online students and share my computer screen while I review the feedback on their written work,” says Joanne Heilman, a contributing faculty member at Walden University. “My students love the visual connection with the instructor and being able to see their paper while they hear my comments. … Adding the synchronous aspect makes them feel more connected to me and to other students when I hold virtual office hours with up to eight students [at a time] using Hangouts.”

http://www.google.com/+learnmore/hangouts

Hobsons Retain (Hobsons) Higher-ed Winner

Retain from Hobsons is a student retention solution that ensures students get the most out of their college experience. From introducing students to campus, to accurately mapping a clear path to graduation, to alerting advisors of potential warning signs, Retain allows campus staff to monitor the success of each student throughout his or her college career. “Retain has helped us reach out in various ways, which has [improved our] customer service,” said Dawn Prueter, director of academic services at Baker College Online. “The feedback I have received from students tells me that the product has been successful for us.”

http://www.hobsons.com

In2Books (ePals)

In2Books is a secure online curriculum that matches third through sixth grade students with carefully screened adult eMentors. Students read books virtually with their eMentors and share ideas about important issues via online letters. Teachers reinforce and extend the learning with in-class book discussions and related instruction in genre and literacy skills. “Through this program, our students have become better, [more] motivated readers and are looking forward to reading their assigned texts, just so they can discuss their reading. In2Books truly deserves this recognition!” says Dana Bolohan, a technology assistant for Virginia’s Loudoun County Public Schools.

http://in2books.epals.com

InfuseLearning

InfuseLearning is a platform that lets teachers engage every student on any device and get real-time feedback at the point of instruction. What’s more, this system for empowering “bring your own device” programs enables students to read, listen, and participate in their native language. Students can take part in instruction at the same time from any location via the internet. InfuseLearning is “a great tool for quick check-in assessments with your students,” says Angie Kalthoff, technology integrationist for St. Cloud Area School District in Minnesota. “I like that it has the ability to change languages.”

http://www.infuselearning.com

Insight 360 (eInstruction)

Insight 360 is a digital teaching solution that gives educators mobile desktop control on their Mobi 360 wireless device, or on their iPad with the Insight 360 Teacher app. Teachers can facilitate lessons, give assessments, and access data sent from a variety of student devices, from anywhere in the room. “As we move into our second year of teaching to Common Core State Standards, assessment needs to be viewed as a continuous and interactive process between teacher and student. Insight 360 has met this need, and the Insight 360 Student app for iPad has allowed for a more collaborative learning environment, rather than just focusing on a set curriculum,” says Carmen Trujillo, instructional coach for Albuquerque Public Schools.

http://www.einstruction.com/insight-360-overview

Interactive Campus Map (NuCloud)

NuCloud’s Interactive Campus Map platform enables colleges to design and make easy edits to their campus map. Adding a map to a website is as simple as copying and pasting an embed script code—and because your map resides in the cloud, it’s hosted from multiple server locations to provide optimal speed and performance. “The nuCloud interface allows us to easily manage and customize components of our campus map and tour, including text content, photography, video, and audio,” says April Taulbee, webmaster for D’Youville College in New York. “The software produces web, mobile, Section 508 compliant, and Facebook versions of the map, which is a huge benefit to our users.”

http://www.nucloud.com
Lexia Reading (Lexia Learning)

Lexia Reading advances reading skills for students in pre-kindergarten through fourth grade and helps accelerate learning for at-risk students in grades 4-12. Its scope and sequence incorporates all five of the core reading skills determined essential for reading proficiency: phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. “I use Lexia when I work one-on-one with students,” says Barbara Kries, Exceptional Student Education teacher for Pinellas County Schools in Florida. “It is a good way to start an academic session, because students can independently log in and work at their own pace. They can work on lessons specifically designed to meet their academic needs.”
http://lexialearning.com/product/lexia-reading

Luna Interactive Projection Camera (Learning Resources)

This easy-to-use digital projection camera is also a web cam and photo/video camera; it’s a great tool for helping students create multimedia projects across the curriculum or for whole-class demonstration of manipulatives in action. “I’m using this camera to get a closer look at everything in our learning environment,” says Erin Klein, a teacher in Cranbrook, Mich. “It’s made a world of difference getting to have students see their writing projected on the screen. My second graders are growing so much!”
http://www.learningresources.com

My Learning Plan

MyLearningPlan, an online professional development management platform, offers fast and easy planning, tracking, and evaluation of all forms of professional learning in one system. “We use the system to generate reports and transcripts for re-licensure, certificate renewal, verification of paraprofessional training, focus on priority learning, and much more,” says Carolyn Good, instructional project specialist for Olathe Public Schools in Kansas. “We just held a district K-5 symposium with five time slots and almost 200 breakout sessions that was attended by 1,000-plus elementary staff. Since we could enter those sessions as an event in MLP, staff were able to plan … sessions to meet their needs and pre-enroll through the MLP District Catalog.”
http://www.mylearningplan.com

Observe4Success

This is a web-based tool for streamlining the classroom observation process, eliminating paperwork and automatically storing and sorting all collected data. Administrators can create and use their own observation forms, and teachers are engaged with timely feedback to help improve their practice. “[We have] used observe4success to perform classroom walkthroughs and easily provide feedback to teachers using smart phones or iPads. It is so much easier to use than our previous walk-through software,” says Lisa Todd, deputy superintendent at Greenbrier School District in Arkansas. “It has saved principals much time and energy.”
http://www.observe4success.com

Office 365 for Education (Microsoft)

Office 365 for Education provides students, teachers, and staff with enterprise-grade communication and productivity services, such as free eMail, websites, online document editing and storage, instant messaging, and web conferencing. “We are using [the software] to connect with teachers and administrators across the state for professional development, including a Lync TeachMeet that took place Feb. 28 and had an average of 85 people connected.”
online at any given time,” says Patti Oakley, instructional technology specialist at Murray State University in Kentucky. “The product not only gives teachers and students free access to Lync, but also to Outlook, SharePoint, and the Office apps. It’s just another way to bring equity to students and schools.”

http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/academic

ParentSquare

ParentSquare is an online platform for home-school communication and organization. It’s an intranet, private for each school, that offers news sharing at the school, grade, and class level; school and class directories and calendars; volunteer scheduling; wish lists for needed items; eMail alerts that inform users about messages relevant to them; and optional fundraising services. “ParentSquare has made it easy to keep parents informed of school information. It saves greatly on paper costs by not having to copy multiple flyers to send home,” says Lisa Andresen, a secretary at Los Olivos School in California. “It is very convenient to post to one location and be able to share with one grade, a few grades, or the whole school.”

https://www.parentsquare.com

Remote Proctor (Software Secure)

Remote Proctor allows students to take online exams under secure conditions, ensuring the integrity of online courses. “When students who are failed for cheating come in, they are generally silenced when shown that they used Google to find answers (documented via screen shots), talked to others about the test while they were taking it (documented via full audio), or pulled out notes during the test (documented via full video),” said Suzanne Cummins, a senior lecturer at the University of Arizona. “Most importantly, Software Secure has experienced, affordable reviewers who differentiate rule violations from genuinely suspicious behavior, and who tab events for the professor to review efficiently to determine the level of student misconduct.”

http://www.softwaresecure.com

SAFARI Montage

SAFARI Montage is a comprehensive solution for K-12 schools’ digital media distribution needs. It gives educators and administrators a single interface for accessing all visual resources from inside the school district intranet or from home. SAFARI Montage servers also come preloaded with educational video titles from leading publishers, including Schlessinger Media, PBS, The History Channel, National Geographic, Scholastic, Disney Education, BBC, and more. “With SAFARI’s help, Forsyth County Schools migrated 12,000-plus digital assets from the previous LMS to the SAFARI Montage [system] in less than a month,” says Jill Hobson, director of instructional technology. “We have dramatically reduced our spending on textbooks, from about $3 million per year in 2007 to about $500,000 currently—a drop of roughly 85 percent.”

http://www.safarimontage.com

SAM Animation (iCreate to Educate)

Through a simple, user-friendly interface, this program for PCs and Macs enables students of all ages to visually express their ideas within minutes using stop-motion video animations. Students can snap images frame by frame, add narration and background sounds, make time-lapse movies, edit with paint tools, then share their creations through YouTube and other video sharing sites. The software “has been a huge hit in our K-8 charter school,” says Shane Vander Kooi, director of innovation and operations for Gardens School of Technology Arts in Florida. “We initially envisioned introducing our kids to SAM as a technology tool to promote creativity, story-telling, and animation, but it has become an important tool that we’ve infused into all classes to support all subjects. I couldn’t recommend any other tool more.”

http://icreatetoeducate.com/store/sam-animation-desktop

SCORE21 (TE21)

Developed by teachers for teachers, the SCORE21 formative assessment builder helps prepare students for...
Common Core assessments by providing an item bank of more than 16,000 high-quality questions. Teachers can use SCORE21 to build rigorous ELA and math practice tests in minutes. “Our teachers were in need of an instrument that could provide specific data on each student in reading and math,” says Sylvia Schmidt, a principal in North Carolina’s Cumberland County Schools. “Our school uses the test item bank on a daily basis. It has proved valuable to our teachers and instructional coaches. Test results are detailed and specific, as well as very user-friendly.”

http://www.te21.com

SNAP Health Center (Professional Software for Nurses Inc.)

SNAP Health Center is a comprehensive medical documentation and tracking software suite that manages every aspect of student health related data. “This is the program we use to document everything we do with the students, teachers, staff, and family within our district,” says Lisa Crawford, staff nurse at Gadsden Independent School District in New Mexico. “It thinks the way nurses do by putting everything together into body systems, and it has the capability to do anything we need as the first line of health care in our more rural district.”

http://www.promedsoftware.com

Student Lingo (Innovative Educators)

StudentLingo is a series of interactive, on-demand workshops and action plans focused on helping students achieve their academic, personal, and career goals. “With more students in dire need of personal services, Student Lingo workshops help meet students’ needs when they want it,” says Lisa Santiago, Title III retention specialist for Iowa’s Southeastern Community College. “With fewer staff and an increase in student needs, these workshops have helped us to help our students, in ways we could not otherwise afford.”

http://www.studentlingo.com

SymbalooEDU

SymbalooEDU is the educational version of Symbaloo, a free social service that lets you organize your teaching resources in one place and share them easily with others. “SymbalooEDU keeps my software organized and gives me another resource for presentations,” says Dorothy Chase, a professor at the College of Southern Nevada. “My students benefit because they have a place to sample the software I place in the sandbox. Also, they have an opportunity to use Symbaloo to create their own web mixes, lessons, and presentations. SymbalooEDU has the added benefit of being ad-free.”

http://www.symbalooedu.com

TalentEd (Netchemia)

TalentEd is a web-based personnel and talent management suite for K-12 districts. The software “has helped our human resources department move toward our goal of being paperless regarding our hiring process,” says Tracey Wallace, executive director of human resources at Coppell Independent School District in Texas. “Through this online application system, we are able to review applications, conduct background checks, gather information from references, prescreen applicants, schedule interviews, recommend applicants for hire, and then show them as hired. Throughout this process, eMails and notification to applicants as well as district administrators can be put in place so that everyone is on the same page.”

http://www.netchemia.com

Tales2Go

Tales2Go is a mobile children’s audiobook service that streams thousands of name-brand titles from leading publishers to mobile devices and desktops in the classroom and beyond. The service gives educators and parents unlimited access to play titles on desktops, laptops, and Apple mobile devices, all for one low annual price. Titles and series range from Clifford and Curious George to 39 Clues, Gulliver’s Travels, and Little Women. “As I explored this application, I thought of our struggling readers and how they could find a love of reading by hearing those books that they want so badly to read,” said Andrea Gardner, instructional technology specialist at Westford Public Schools in Massachusetts. “It’s [also] a great addition for any … parent getting their child to love reading!”

http://www.tales2go.com
**TreeRing Yearbooks (TreeRing)**

TreeRing creates yearbooks for the internet generation, taking advantage of digital printing and the collaborative power of online social networks to create personalized, printed-on-demand yearbooks that commemorate each child's unique school experience. “For the past 10 years we were losing, on average, $700 per year” by having to pre-order a minimum number of yearbooks, says Kevin Steinhauser, yearbook and newspaper advisor for Florida’s Poinciana High School. “Now that we’ve found TreeRing, the yearbook is no longer a financial burden for the school, because parents purchase the yearbooks directly from TreeRing—and the school is removed from the purchasing process.”

http://www.treering.com

**WalkKits (The Walking Classroom)**

The Walking Classroom is a nonprofit program that promotes health literacy and supports life-long fitness habits for all students, while addressing different learning styles. The method combines standards-aligned academic content and exercise during the school day. WalkKits are audio players pre-loaded with the information kids need to help them master their curriculum—and students listen to the content as they walk. “Students actually enjoy learning with this technology and can’t wait to hear the next podcast,” says Jasselle Cruz, an educator at a Philadelphia school district. “The Teacher’s Guide has complete lessons that include assessments for students to take upon returning from their walks. It is one of the only times that students do not complain about having to take a quiz!”

http://www.thewalkingclassroom.org/content.php

**Zinch (Chegg)**

Zinch is a website that helps colleges connect with prospective students. Students create a profile similar to a college application, and then colleges can search through these profiles and reach out to top prospects. “We use Zinch as an integral part of our outreach,” says Teege Mettille, associate director of admissions for Lawrence University in Wisconsin. “Zinch creates an environment for genuine, student-directed connections between colleges and prospective students. Every time we reach out to a student on Zinch, we don’t have to do it to their personal eMail account (or their parents’!)—and [this] helps to de-clutter the college search process.”

http://www.zinch.com