

The Myth of the 'One-Size-Fits-All' K-12 Buying Cycle

What *your* selling cycle should look like based on the product *you're* selling to schools and districts

WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT THE K-12 BUYING CYCLE

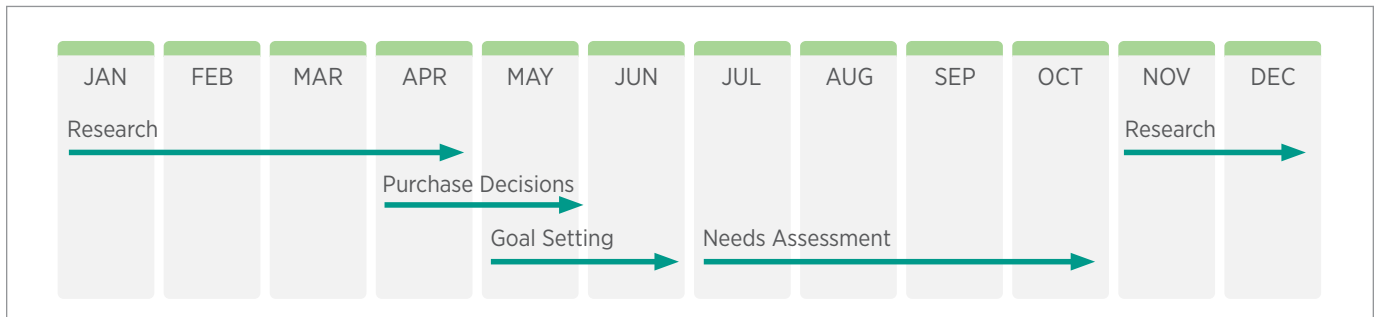
We all know the K-12 school and district buying cycle is long. Very long. And it includes many phases from awareness to interest to purchase to implementation, and several in between. Most organizations putting out guides like this will have you imagine that the K-12 buying cycle is the same for all companies and products. You may have seen charts that paint a picture like this:



Or like this:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Assessing needs												
Setting goals												
Gathering information												
Purchasing												

Or like this:



They all look pretty much the same, right?

WHAT YOUR MENTOR DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT THE K-12 BUYING CYCLE

The truth is that not all budgets are the same, and not all products are the same (especially not yours!), so not all buying cycles are the same.

From 2015 to 2017 EdSurge ran a service called Concierge which helped schools evaluate which technology tools and products best fit their needs. Over the course of eight quarters we supported 185 independent, public and charter schools and districts in finding solutions for their technology needs.

What we noticed was that schools did not evaluate and purchase all their edtech at the same time of year, as the seasonal buying charts above suggest. We analyzed the data to see if there were trends in the types of tools that are most commonly evaluated each season. This data is limited but indicates that there are additional opportunities for selling education products outside of the traditional procurement cycle.

We found that while schools and districts tended to identify their new technology needs in the summer, followed by spring and winter (we saw a dip in fall when they're extra busy implementing, implementing, implementing), the *types* of needs, and therefore the types of solutions they'd be looking for, were disproportionately distributed.

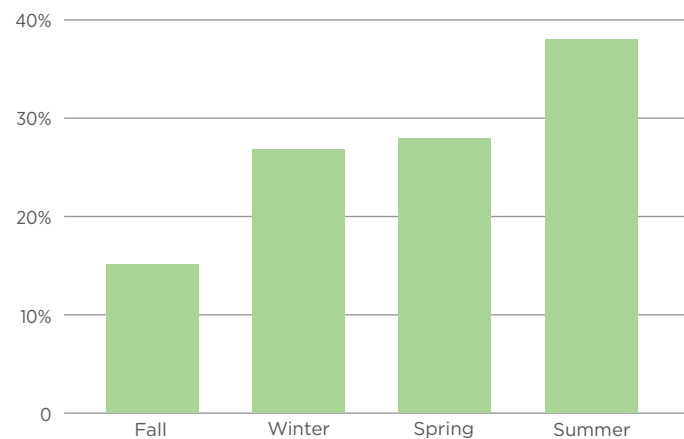
In the chart on the right you can see that:

- Although only 27% of total needs were identified in winter, **44% of LMS needs** came in that season.
- 30% of the needs were identified in summer, but **38% of curriculum needs** and **50% of professional development needs** came at that time.
- Winter and fall accounted for 42% of all needs but **60% of all assessment needs**.

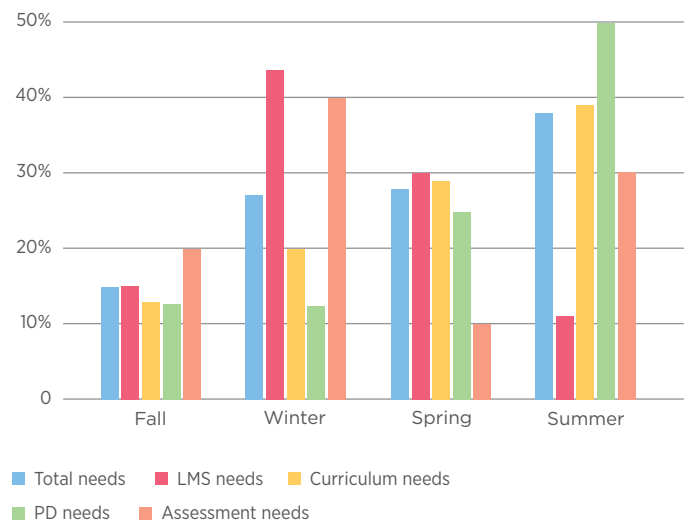
Why might that be?

Did administrators realize in October that the back-to-school technologies

TECHNOLOGY NEEDS IDENTIFIED



TECHNOLOGY NEEDS BY TYPE



they bought last May didn't meet their needs? Did fall term benchmark and midterm exams help teachers realize their assessment techniques weren't cutting it and they needed to push for investment in a new tool? By November 1st educators have likely seen a snapshot of how their students are doing against goals and are starting to think about intervention strategies for those who may fall behind. Are they considering totally new learning solutions too? Is the LMS buying cycle longer than most? Did districts wait until the last minute to purchase their summer professional development programs for their educators?

While we don't have the answers to these questions, and we can't say for sure that in each of these cases the schools brought their needs to EdSurge immediately when they recognized them, the data does suggest that the K-12 buying cycle is not one-size-fits-all.

What does this mean for you?

The disproportionate distribution of identified needs for certain types of products—LMS, curriculum, professional development and assessment tools and resources—shows that, based on this limited sample, there's not a single approach to when schools and districts make purchasing decisions, or when you should be focusing your marketing and sales efforts.

But what about the budget?

While [the school budgeting and spending calendar](#) still comes into play, when every education company aligns their marketing and sales messages to the same calendar, school and district administrators are inundated with the same kinds of content, pitches and asks all at the same time—making it all the easier to ignore them.

Here are [three more reasons to sell across seasons](#):

- Different funds are released at different points in the year. Some may be ready by the summer, but other funds are dependent on the demographics of enrolled students, so can't be calculated until the school year has begun.
- Administrators may not have used the full fund when it was first released, so they may still be looking for products for their funds' balances into the winter and even late spring.
- Schools are always looking for new better products to improve student learning outcomes. If you pitch a great tool at any point in the year, but there's no budget for it at the time, administrators will remember it when the money opens up. (And a persistent salesperson will help them remember!)

TOWARD A DIFFERENT KIND OF K-12 SELLING CYCLE

You can avoid boring—or burning out—your prospects and competing with every other edtech company for your prospective customer's attention by aligning your marketing and sales efforts to the type of product you're offering.

Consider where *your* edtech solution fits in:

	<p>Spring is the traditional “sales season” because that’s when budgets roll over, and it’s still the best time to close sales for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Products that require significant investment ▶ Products that will be implemented across a whole school ▶ Products that take longer to approve <p>These edtech products will be on a more traditional K-12 selling cycle, with awareness, learning, evaluation and justification campaigns running through the fall and winter.</p>
	<p>In summer educators are more available to pick up what you’re putting down.</p> <p>Teachers spend part of their summers planning for the upcoming school year. They’ve also got more time to spend browsing social media, opening newsletters and reading user reviews. It can be a great time to reach them about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Curriculums and lesson plans ▶ Professional development ▶ Tools they can adopt for their own classrooms <p>Remember, June, July and August are when EdSurge saw a disproportionate number of curriculum and professional development needs come in—and teachers are often involved in purchasing decisions about these types of products.</p> <p>IT folks who are (relatively) free from the onslaught of student and staff technical issues will have more time to take calls about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hardware, which can have a shorter timeline to approval <p>You may find that admins in general are more open to exploring new ideas or engaging in deeper conversations.</p>
	<p>Late fall also seems to be a great time to check in with your prospective customers about their</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Assessment needs <p>Are the tools they’re using this year working for them? Do they need something else to fill in the gaps—or save the day?</p>
	<p>Winter (December, January and February) is prime time for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Grabbing the last of any smaller, unallocated funds before your customers “use it or lose it” ▶ Marketing your LMS for that spring sell ▶ Making those assessment purchases

Hat tip to [The Tech Advocate](#) for some of these tips.

Above all, you must consult your own hearts and data to know when is the best time to reach your target audience with a hard sales message, a user story that shows how your product can be effective or that feel-good publicity that makes your brand shine. Just remember that your product is unique and your sales cycle is too!