Complete instructions are attached\*\*\*\*

In this policy memo you are the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in a large city school district. Like many such districts there is a troubling proportion of schools in every level in your district—elementary, middle, and high schools—that have chronically low student achievement levels, but there are also schools at all levels that have exhibited an ability to help students achieve at levels far above what their demographics might predict.

Also like many other large city districts your district is facing a severe budget crunch and tough decisions have to be made about how to best deliver instruction to the district’s 100,000-plus children in the coming years. The teachers’ union contract is up for renewal next year and there is the opportunity in the collective bargaining around a new contract to make changes, even if only incremental, in the composition and size of the teaching workforce in the district. It is also the case that a combination of factors including the growth of charter schools in the city and a declining K-12 school-age population will likely lead to some school closings and teacher layoffs in the coming years.

You are lucky to be working for a superintendent who is dedicated to and focused on the children in the district. This superintendent has a history of making tough decisions that she thinks are in the best interests of the children under her stewardship, and in this large city district the children come from a many different cultural, racial/ethnic, and economic backgrounds. She is also a superintendent who, as much as possible, makes decisions on the basis of solid evidence. She is now turning to you for some advice.

Given the challenges of educating a diverse population of students, given the fact that the district still has much room for improvement when it comes to raising the achievement level of many of the students in the district, given the looming budgetary challenges, and given the upcoming negotiations with the teachers’ union, the superintendent wants to better understand the opportunities and challenges posed by technological innovations in the education space. She knows that this is a broad issue and that a full understanding of the issue will take time and research on the district’s part, and will not be accomplished with a few memos, emails, or staff meetings. Nevertheless, she would like to get the process started and her first step is to request a memo from you, the Asst. Superintendent of Instruction. Here is her request:

Dear \_\_\_\_, As you know I have been thinking about the possibility of an increased educational

technology presence into the district. I know there are many issues and challenges, along with possible opportunities, to consider. I would like for you to develop a memo for me that will help me think about and frame further work on the question of whether, to what extent, and in what forms we should consider increasing educational technology in the portfolio of what we do in the district. I would like for your memo to highlight the key issues I need to consider, share any relevant statistics that buttress any of your key ideas, point to any evidence (or lack thereof) on what we might expect to gain or lose from various technological offerings, and I would like, by the end of the memo, for you to offer some concrete suggestions on what you think the district should do on this front, at least initially.

I know that whatever we eventually decide to do will follow substantial time spent on serious research and planning, but my experience is that it is important to start with a set of concrete proposals that can serve to structure the ensuing discussions. I would like for you to offer your proposals, backed by the most solid reasoning you can muster (something you always do, which is one reason I’m turning first to you on this). As you know, I value your understanding of the economics of situations, and by this I don’t just mean the pecuniary value of different decisions. Perhaps more than your eye on the district’s dollar, I value your understanding of incentives and tradeoffs, and how you economists think about things like “production” and “efficiency” in education. I know you will bring this background and knowledge to bear in the memo, which is, again, a reason I’m turning to you first. While this is a big topic, I must ask you to keep the memo short. Please no more than 1,000 words. I look forward to hearing what you have learned, and I look forward to reading your recommendations.

Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_