Donations: Spending the Money


Q: My organization is considering a multi-year project of donating a lot of resources to schools that serve disadvantaged students. The goal is to help increase the level of computer-oriented technology' literacy of a very large number of disadvantaged students throughout the United States. What are your recommendations?

The previous issue of The Computing Teacher discussed the magnitude of the task of trying to reach a significant portion of disadvantaged students. The goal might be to have a significant impact on 10,000 schools in a multi-year project budgeted at $5,000 per school per year.

Some of the needed components for successful use of technology in schools include hardware, software, curriculum materials, stakeholder support, and staff development. In the previous article, I indicated that I would use only about 20 percent of the $5,000 per year for hardware, software, and curriculum materials. I would focus the rest of the resources on obtaining continuing support from the various stakeholder groups (parents, school administrators, school boards, local businesses) and on staff development.

Let me talk about the stakeholder approach first. To a large extent, education is political. There are many different stakeholder groups that have powerful voices in our educational system. They need to be fully represented in school technology planning, and it is essential that they be provided with information that will help them to make good decisions. The goal is to enlist these groups as full partners working to improve the educational system.

ISTE has published a book, The Technology Advisory Council: A Vehicle for Improving Our Schools. It discusses the creation of a Technology Advisory Council (TAG) and the types of work that a TAG can do. I would put resources into the creation and continued work of a TAG for each school involved in the project. This does not take much money—probably $500 per school per year would suffice. Quite likely, these funds can be leveraged into projects such as creating school-business partnerships that have a high return on the dollars that are invested.

This leaves the issue of staff development. We have about $3,500 per year left, and I would put that into creating and supporting the development of a two to three-person team of classroom teachers at each school. These School Technology Leadership Teams would be committed to:

1. Role modeling appropriate use of technology as a personal productivity tool for themselves and students and as a vital component of content in whatever areas they teach.

2. Being unselfish in their continuing support of their fellow teachers in helping them to learn to make use of technology.

3. Being committed to lifelong learning to keep themselves at the forefront of the field of technology in education.
4. Working with the TAG and others to develop and help implement a long-range plan for technology in education for their school.

I would allocate approximately $2,000 per year to each Leadership Team. The Team could use these funds as they see fit—for a phone line, to attend conferences, to acquire software. They might develop a Future Technology Educators club. Students in the club would help teachers and fellow students make effective use of educational technology.

The remainder of the funds—approximately $1,500 per school, or $15,000,000 for the 10,000-school project—would be used to provide centralized services and as general overhead on the project. These might include:

1. Both an 800-number telephone service and an E-mail service staffed by people qualified to help answer a full range of questions about educational hardware, software, and curriculum materials.

2. Regional staff development personnel, perhaps one per 100 schools, providing workshops for the Technology Leadership Teams and other teachers. One major goal would be to help members of the Leadership Teams become qualified as teachers of teachers. They might first work one-on-one with teachers in their own buildings, then work with small groups of teachers in their schools or districts, and finally design and run full-blown workshops for teachers in the wider community.

3. Assistance for each project school to set up a teacher-support Resource Center of materials. There are many periodicals that are distributed free to "qualified" individuals. Through proper negotiation at a national level, it seems likely that all 10,000 of the School Technology Leadership Teams could be qualified. Drastic price reductions could be negotiated for other periodicals, reports, and books that are not distributed for free.

4. Publicity and recognition for the School Technology Leadership Teams. At the local, state, and national levels, both the Teams and the overall project would be highly publicized.

5. National efforts to obtain additional resources to support the project.

So my short answer to our potential educational donor is: You could make a significant contribution to technology-supported education with a large-scale project involving $5,000 per school per year. However, the money would need to be carefully allocated, with emphasis on staff development leveraged through a Technology Leadership Team in each school.

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