Letter to Parents


Dear Parent:

Probably you have seen television reports or read articles that say our schools aren’t doing too well. These reports are correct. Our children aren’t getting nearly as good an education as we would like. This is especially true when it comes to learning how to use computers.

When I was a student, we didn’t have computers in my grade school or high school. The computers that existed in those days were big, expensive, and hard to use. This was also probably true when you were in school.

Today, computers are much better and cheaper, and are readily available. Millions of people have computers on their desks at work and/or for use at home. It is hard for an adult to keep up with such rapid change. In many ways, it is much easier for children. They don’t have to unlearn old ways of doing things in order to learn the new things.

Still, the chances are that your children are not learning much about computers in schools. “Not true,” you say. “I know that my kids have used a computer.” The trouble is, they aren’t learning creative uses of computers as an aid to solving problems in all subjects. They aren’t learning to make routine use of computers as an aid to their minds.

Let me ask you a hard question. Why do we consider reading, writing, and arithmetic to be the “basics” of education? Think about some answers before you read the next paragraph.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are the basics of education because they are aids to the human mind. They help the human mind to store and process information, and to solve hard problems. Now a new mind tool—the computer—has been invented. It is an important addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic. Most of our schools, however, are doing a very poor job of helping students learn to use this new tool. It is easy to see why. Most teachers are like you and me—they did not learn to use computers while they were in school. Few textbooks assume that students have good access to computers. Most tests do not allow students to use computers, and indeed, few students have computers to use.

Think about the last sentence for a minute. You would be very unhappy if your children did not have easy access to pencil and paper throughout the school day and as they did homework at night. For millions of adults, the computer is now equally important. They would not think of attempting to do their work without having a computer readily available. This will be even more true by the time your children become adults.

Most of our schools do not have nearly enough computers to allow students to use them whenever it would be appropriate. Even if the equipment were available in classrooms, most of our teachers lack the training to take advantage of it.

Ten or twenty years from now, most students will have easy access to computers. Every teacher will know how to work in a school setting where there are lots of computers. Students
will be allowed to use computers when they take tests. (Why not? Adults are allowed—or required—to use computers when faced with the real-world tests they encounter on the job.)

Unfortunately, these developments may be too late for your children. There are some things you can do about this. Even a very few parents can cause a major change in a school by making their concerns clearly known to teachers, school administrators, and the school board. These are some of the questions to ask educators:

1. Are our children learning to use a computer to solve hard problems in all different subject areas, or are they mainly using computers to help memorize simple facts?

2. Do the teachers feel comfortable in routinely using computers for their work and with their students?

3. Do students get to use calculators and computers when taking tests? If not, why not?

4. Do students have to leave their classrooms and go to a lab to use computers? (If so, they cannot make routine use of computers, and teachers cannot integrate routine computer use into the curriculum.) What are the school and district plans to make computers readily available for everyday use by all students?

Computers are a powerful aid to the human mind. However, it is still very important that students learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and problem solving. All of these ideas and tools should be integrated together and used throughout the day in a modern education.

Let me know about the progress you make in working to improve the education of your children. Please write.

Sincerely yours,