

MONEY MATTERS

Strategies and solutions your schools need right now

10

ways to save
on school
budgets

How to trim
the fat without
hitting the bone



Also inside:

Grant-seeking skills
you can bank on

Going 'green' to
stay out of the red

Keeping ed tech off
the chopping block

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From eSchool News...

Huge challenges, potential opportunities

MONEY MATTERS: It's true all the time, but never more so than when times are tough. And that certainly describes the current fiscal climate.

A survey conducted in October by the American Association of School Administrators revealed that schools already have begun belt-tightening measures in response to shrinking budgets. More than a third of superintendents say they've reduced instructional materials or delayed technology purchases—and many fear they'll lose the academic gains their schools have fought so hard to achieve.

And the worst is still to come: According to a report from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), states will be struggling to close an estimated \$97 billion in budget gaps over the next two years.

“These budget gaps are approaching those seen in the last recession, which were the worst since World War II—and [they] show every sign of growing larger,” NCSL Executive Director William T. Pound said in a statement.

State legislatures will have to raise taxes or cut programs, because unlike the federal government, states must balance their budgets. And that will mean even less money for local school systems and state colleges and universities.

Arizona is expecting a budget gap that will exceed 24 percent of its general operating budget in 2010, according to the NCSL report. Other states expecting huge budget shortfalls include New York (20 percent), California (18 percent), Wisconsin (17.2 percent), Minnesota (14.7 percent), and Kansas (14.5 percent).

Facing such a bleak forecast, school leaders will be challenged to weather the storm without losing valuable educational programs. And this guide is designed to help.

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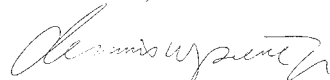
- You'll get expert advice on how to cut costs without cutting vital school services (page 6).
- You'll learn about a new resource that can help you implement energy-saving strategies (page 9).
- You'll find a checklist of practices employed by savvy grant seekers (page 12).
- You'll discover ways to raise funds when the grants landscape dries up (page 16).
- You'll learn how to shield important ed-tech programs from the budget knife (page 20).

Interspersed throughout this publication are stories from advertisers, explaining how their products and services can help save money for your schools. We couldn't bring you this timely advice without the generous support of these companies, so I encourage you to read what they have to say.

Speaking in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 3, Microsoft founder Bill Gates described the current financial crisis as a chance for innovation. “Difficult times can launch great ideas,” the world's leading philanthropist noted, as he called on President-elect Obama to channel stimulus spending toward education and technology to make the U.S. more competitive for the 21st century.

Although it might be hard to fathom now, the budget barriers you face in your schools present an opportunity as well: to innovate, to streamline, to focus on what's most important, and—with the help of this guide—to implement smart spending and fund-raising practices that will serve your stakeholders well. And when this gloomy fiscal outlook finally brightens, your schools will be stronger for it.

Best of luck,



Dennis Pierce, Managing Editor

It's 3:30pm, do you know where your laptop computers are?

Managing and securing laptop computers for cost savings and accountability in K-12

What did we do before laptop computers? Truly, the availability of cost-effective, powerful and easy-to-use portable computers has changed education process – extending the school day, assisting faculty in maintaining a better work/life balance and delivering lesson plans that simply were not possible before. So, utopia then? Not so if you ask a K-12 IT asset manager, or better, a district superintendent.

What portability giveth, portability can also take away. Laptop, MacBook and tablet computers have introduced new challenges to school districts: data security for regulatory compliance, theft prevention and, importantly, effective management of computers that regularly leave the school grounds. Given the economic outlook, districts are also looking at squeezing another year out of their investments in laptop computers. Many school districts are struggling with these new challenges and the lack of technology that specifically addresses these concerns.

One district is taking advantage of a unique new tool to demonstrate accountability for its laptop learning investments.

Located in Kent Washington, Kent School district welcomes more than 27,000 students through its doors each fall and manages more than 12,000 computers in the hands of students, administration and faculty. According to the district's Executive Director of Information Technology Thuan Nguyen, "As we toured other districts, we quickly learned that notebook computers pose two huge challenges: theft deterrence and IT asset management. Essentially, they told us, you need to know where they are and stop tampering and theft. Then, our computer manufacturer recommended that we look at Absolute's Computrace to help with this."

Typical of many larger districts, Kent SD's funding is achieved through a very public process.

Every four years, the district puts forward a detailed plan outlining planned technology expenditure. The plan is then reviewed, voted on at the community level and district residents are responsible for funding as a portion of their annual



property taxes. Over the course of its annual notebook computer audit, Kent SD's IT staff struggled to locate computers locked in filing cabinets, taken home by students and a host of other backwaters mobile computers can fall into. "We literally had 10 people with barcode scanners attempting to find 12,000 computers. It was a great effort. With Computrace, we always know where our computers are. What was once a three-month process is now as simple as running a five-minute report that is more than 99% accurate. That, is accountability."

Today, by logging in to Absolute's online management center, Nguyen and his team have access to at-a-glance information on every computer they are responsible for including: its location and user, hardware and software installed, current virus protection status – even whether students have installed prohibited software or tampered with hardware. And, if a computer is stolen, the Absolute Theft Recovery Team will use Computrace to locate the computer, work with local police to recover it and assist in the prosecution of thieves.

With efficiencies, comes cost savings. Districts, like other organizations, benefit from deploying laptop management solutions aimed at security and cost savings. At Minnesota-based Allina Hospitals & Clinics for example, IT staff saved the health provider more than \$400,000 in a single quarter by using Absolute's system to reallocate unused software licenses.

So, while new and challenging, both computer manufacturers and their partners are focusing on management and security options for school laptops. With the fruit of these collaborations in place, school districts can now say with confidence that they know where their laptops are after 3:30.

How it works

Absolute's Computrace system is based on patented software that is pre-supported in the BIOS of computers from common K-12 suppliers like HP, Dell, Toshiba and Lenovo. Once activated by subscription, the software "calls home" to Absolute's monitoring center to report each laptop's location, installed software and other essential security and inventory information. If a computer is stolen, the embedded software can be used to remotely delete sensitive data, track the stolen computer and log evidence for prosecution of thieves.

A LAPTOP FOR EVERY CHILD \neq INCREASED IT MANAGEMENT COSTS

Absolute[®] Software makes managing laptops easy

Manage your entire computer population from one website, so you can do more with less and focus on what matters – the kids. Absolute's patented firmware-based software is delivered over the Internet – so you don't have to spend money on infrastructure.

- ▶ Guaranteed recovery of missing computers*
- ▶ IT asset management – on or off the LAN
- ▶ Theft deterrence



* Certain conditions apply. For full details visit:
www.absolute.com/Service_Agreement.pdf



Ten often-overlooked ways to save on school budgets

Experts offer advice on how cut costs without cutting the essentials

By Meris Stansbury, Assistant Editor

As the harsh economy wrings precious dollars out of school budgets, education leaders face tough choices regarding what to keep—or cut. Before you sacrifice valuable learning resources in your own schools, however, consider the following advice.

We polled several education executives to find out how schools might cut costs without cutting vital services, and we've assembled their ideas in this list of 10 often-overlooked ways to save money.

1. Send records electronically.

Technology solutions firm ConnectEDU is building a national network to move student records electronically between 2,000 high schools and 275 colleges during the college admissions process. This function is part of a larger college and career planning web platform that is available to high school counselors, students, and parents free of charge.

Students use the Connect! or Prep HeadQuarters platform to manage their college applications and meet admission officers. The cost savings accrue when the guidance office clicks a button instead of processing hundreds of requests for printed transcripts—thereby saving on transcript paper, letterhead, printed envelopes, processing time, and postage.

Patti Mucenski, Advanced Placement coordinator for Lisbon High School in Lisbon, Maine, estimates her school's annual cost savings in using the service as follows: (96 students) x (6.5 colleges on their list) x (cost of sending documents three times: \$1.93 for initial mailing with letter of recommendation + \$1.82 midyear cost minus LOR + \$1.82 for sending final transcript) = \$3,475.68.

By sending records electronically, the school will save nearly \$3,500 for a class size of fewer than 100 students. The savings build as class sizes increase.

"There are other eTranscript solutions in the market [that] are standalone solutions," says Mucenski. "But I like this solution because, for one [thing], the student and school never pay, but even more important, the students, counselors, and parents receive a complete college and career planning tool they can use beginning in grade nine."

2. Implement online learning programs.

With school districts facing significant budget pressures, it can be hard to meet the needs and interests of all students by investing in staff and specialists for individual or small-group instruction. Online learning can help fill this need,

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allowing schools to make better use of their most valued resource: their teachers.

Cheryl Vedoe, CEO of Apex Learning, says her firm provides a set of online courses in math, English, science, and social studies—all of which reportedly align with state standards.

“We have foundational courses, courses for remediation, complete high school courses, and AP courses. We teach to everyone—from at-risk to accelerated learning,” she said. “All courses [are] taught by a certified teacher, but students also can be assisted in their learning through teacher guides in the classroom. All courses also can be accessed any time, anywhere.”

Vedoe explains that online learning programs are a great fit for schools that can’t justify assigning teachers to courses that only a few students want to take. “This way, teachers can be leveraged, and schools can save money,” she said.

Prices vary, but Apex offers a single-semester, full-curriculum course at \$300 per student. In ten years, Apex has reached 4,000 districts nationwide, with a total online enrollment of 1.5 million students.

3. Consider virtual field trips.

Virtual field trips typically involve students using video conferencing software or using a simple web browser to visit an online destination, such as the web site of a national park or museum, that offers virtual tours through the facility and up-close, three-dimensional views of geological formations, art work, and so on.

“We are frequently told that with budget cuts, virtual field trips are the only way schools are able to sustain their ability to provide field trip experiences,” said Ruth Blankenbaker, executive director of the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC), which organizes virtual field trips offered by institutions such as the Bronx Zoo.

By participating in virtual field trips, Blankenbaker said, educators also have discovered they are able to go more places than they are with “land-based” experiences.

Besides CILC’s opportunities, educators also can explore virtual trips offered on institution-specific web sites. Well-known museums, such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, offer virtual field trips. National and state parks departments are good starting points as well.

4. Pilot ‘cloud computing.’

“Cloud computing” refers to the use of software running on remote servers and accessible via the internet. Provided you have enough bandwidth to employ this approach, cloud computing can free you from the cost of storing, updating, and distributing software programs for your students and staff. And, because these programs are processed remotely, you can save money by purchasing inexpensive, “thin-client” computers as well.

Porter Graham Elementary School in Chapel Hill, N.C., is using SIMtone’s Universal Cloud Computing services to provide some 600 students and faculty with “PCs in the Cloud,” usable anywhere they have internet access.

“There are clear cost savings from using our terminals, [called] SNAPbooks, versus expensive computers,” said SIMtone’s Lorenzo Mejia. “Our model uses central IT administration instead of distributed IT support and PC maintenance. This cost benefit is one of the areas specifically being evaluated in the pilot.”

SIMtone SNAPbooks do not have an operating system or any internal processing, Mejia added, so they’re less expensive than traditional computers.

5. Take advantage of software virtualization.

To help save on IT infrastructure costs, Indiana University is using Microsoft’s server virtualization technology.

One of the largest state university systems in the U.S., with nine campuses, 100,000 students, 7,000 faculty members, and 11,000 staff members, IU said its Auxiliary Information Technology (AIT) department had a hard time keeping up with the server growth needed to support services in places such as residence centers. The university also wanted to eliminate server failures that interrupted services and revenue flow.

IU turned to server virtualization using Windows Server 2008, and as a result, its AIT department has whittled its physical servers from 150 to 32, has trimmed server deployment time by 90 percent, and can meet new service requests faster. The department also is saving \$85,000 annually in hardware costs.

Janssen Jones, associate director of AIT infrastructure, estimates that IU’s first 110 virtual machines have saved the university about \$100,000 in hardware and software licensing costs. Going forward, instead of adding 20 physical servers each year, AIT will add only three. AIT also has successfully slashed its rack count from five to two, saving \$10,500 annually on data center rack fees.

6. Use open-source technologies and open content.

Tired of investing in expensive textbooks and proprietary software programs, Florida education officials are looking to an open online-learning platform to teach students basic reading skills.

FreeReading.net is a free, sequential, research-based reading intervention program designed for students in kindergarten and first grade. Educators are invited to participate in discussion boards; take part in the full, 40-week scope and sequence of lessons; or tailor materials to their students’ individual learning needs.

The site’s content is provided under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License, which lets any site visitor

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“Schools spend a huge chunk of their budgets—nationally, approximately seven to eight billion dollars per year—on textbooks and instructional materials. That leaves a much smaller pie that schools must slice to purchase formative assessment, professional development, and other initiatives that help teachers do their jobs well,” said Larry Berger, co-founder and chief executive officer of the program’s creator, Wireless Generation.

Berger said he believes FreeReading.net, and other open educational resources, can help free up funding for other services that can improve teaching and learning.

7. Make data systems interoperable.

Since the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) first was announced nearly a decade ago, school leaders have heard the promises: SIF will make school software programs interoperable, regardless of their manufacturer; it will eliminate the need for multiple data entry; and it will streamline school administrative functions. Recently, an independent study of three school systems that have adopted the technology confirmed that SIF can, indeed, lead to measurable cost savings as a result of these efficiencies.

Joe Kitchens, superintendent of the Western Heights School District in Oklahoma City, Okla., says his suite of interoperable software applications allows him to track and report student data more accurately, including weighted counts of special student populations such as gifted students and those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. And that, in turn, has allowed his district to recover more government funding to support these special populations.

“Using a series of exception reporting routines developed by our technology integrator, we have been able to increase both state and federal revenue each year,” Kitchens said. “Over the past four years, the total funding increase that can be attributed to the exception reporting model has increased our operating budgets by more than 10 percent. For our district of 3,400 students, this has meant a \$3 million increase in regular and recurring operational funds.”

8. Sell used or unused equipment.

Jenny House, CEO of RedRock Reports, which offers funding strategies, says schools should sell obsolete equipment and unused supplies through InterSchola, which sells surplus educational items on eBay.

InterSchola is working with educational institutions throughout California and New York, with more states on the way. Clients include school districts, county offices of education, community college districts, charter schools, private schools, and other educational organizations.

9. Redesign bus routes.

Carol Miller, transportation supervisor for Michigan’s Eaton Rapids Public School District, uses bus routing software from VersaTrans to save her district money by calculating the most efficient routes possible.

“In our first year of using the software, we were able to cut three bus routes and save \$33,000” in fuel costs, Miller said. And the savings have continued from year to year.

10. Implement shorter weeks.

Schools and universities are taking cues from the business world and implementing four-day weeks in an effort to reduce energy costs.

Schools in Kentucky, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Utah are among those that have eliminated Friday from their work schedule during the past year, adding a few hours to the end of each school day to make up the lost hours.

Rex L. Facer, an assistant professor of public finance who has studied alternative workweeks at Brigham Young University in Utah, said school officials began exploring non-traditional work schedules when employees’ daily commutes began to have a major impact on their finances. He said numerous studies—including published work Facer has helped research—that show employee production and contentment rises with the option of a four-day week has made the decision easier on many campuses.

LINKS:

ConnectEDU
<http://www.connectedu.net>

Apex Learning
<http://www.apexlearning.com>

Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration
<http://www.cilc.org>

SIMtone
<http://www.simtone.net>

Microsoft Virtualization
<http://www.microsoft.com/virtualization/default.aspx>

Schools Interoperability Framework Association
<http://www.sifinfo.org>

InterSchola
<http://www.interschola.com>

VersaTrans
<http://www.versatrans.com>



Going 'green' to stay out of the red

New resource helps schools implement energy-efficient technologies

By Meris Stansbury, Assistant Editor

At the National School Boards Association's Technology + Learning (T+L) Conference in October, the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) launched a new initiative aimed at helping ed-tech leaders improve the energy efficiency of their schools.

With its Green Computing Leadership Initiative, CoSN is providing tools to help school technology leaders reduce their school's or district's carbon footprint by conserving energy and reducing waste—while at the same time saving money.

Growing concerns over the effects of greenhouse gases, the safe disposal of electronic waste, and the need to conserve funding are forcing schools to address green computing issues as a matter of conscience, budget, and political values, said CoSN.

With support from Cisco, Dell, Faronics, Gartner, HP, IBM, Microsoft, Pearson, SAS, SMART Technologies, and Toshiba, the green computing initiative focuses on three major areas: technology energy use, green computing purchase and disposal, and reducing waste and saving natural resources.

"From responsible computer purchase, operation, and disposal, to using computers to reduce waste throughout the district, schools can do a lot to minimize their carbon footprint and reduce energy expenditures," said Keith Krueger, CoSN's chief executive.

As part of this new initiative, CoSN has developed a resource web site, www.cosn.org/greencomputing, that provides information on topics ranging from making responsible computer purchases (with consideration for disposal) to using technology to reduce waste and preserve natural resources.

According to the site, for every 12 consumers who keep the energy-saving power settings enabled for their monitors and PCs, carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to removing one average automobile from the road will be avoided.

Other energy-saving tips listed on the site include choos-

ing printers that allow for two-sided printing to reduce paper and energy usage; considering video conferencing as an alternative to district travel; converting paper forms, notices, and communication to online or eMail format; using flat-panel liquid crystal display (LCD) monitors instead of conventional CRT monitors; consolidating servers and using server virtualization technology; adjusting your data backup schedule to run during the workday, so you don't have to leave your computer on at night; putting cooling devices and thermostats closer to your servers and networking heat sources; and moving cables to allow for better airflow.

The web site also features an energy usage calculator that allows school tech leaders to estimate their kilowatt-hour use and related costs for current and planned computing and network infrastructure.

"Schools are a critical constituent in the neighborhoods in which they are situated, and they serve as an integral partner in the communities around them," said Rich Kaestner, project director for CoSN's Green Computing Initiative. "Schools, therefore, play an important role in helping set an example for students and the community at large. On the issue of environmental sustainability and reducing human impact, schools have a political, ethical, and social responsibility to effect change. Our goal is to help them do so."

Additional resources include case studies from schools that have saved money by going green, as well as general information to help school leaders set achievable goals—such as how schools can qualify for energy-efficiency certificates. The web site also lets users sign up for a free green computing newsletter and RSS feeds.

LINK:

Green Computing
<http://www.cosn.org/greencomputing>

Adaptive Curriculum – Once Experienced, Never Forgotten

The Challenge

Today's tough economic times demand that schools leverage every budget dollar and each classroom hour to engage and motivate students which results in a better understanding of math and science and ultimately higher student achievement. Teachers are also tasked with providing instruction that helps students develop 21st century math and science skills, all while staying within budget and keeping a close eye on how their teaching impacts the environment. Faced with these challenges, educators seek innovative, affordable programs that support current standards-based classroom curriculum. Specifically, teachers want programs that help them become more effective at teaching hard-to-understand math and science concepts, but which also allow students the ability to guide their own learning while using clean technology.

The Response

To answer this need, Sebit LLC developed Adaptive Curriculum, an award-winning, online, subscription-based library of Activity Objects targeted at the middle-grades. Activity Objects incorporate 3-D graphics, high-definition audio and real-life storylines to create an engaging, online learning experience. Teachers may use Activity Objects as instructor-led lessons, using an electronic whiteboard or not, or

choose to assign specific Activity Objects to individual students, groups of students or whole classes.

Each Activity Object is a full lesson, allowing teachers to provide differentiated instruction based on students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Progress information by Activity Object is reported back to the teacher for each student. Free initial product training and optional fee-based professional development for teachers, or a train-the-trainer model are also available.

Adaptive Curriculum provides teachers of middle-grade level math and science with:

- An extensive library of over 200 complete, affordable standards-based math and science lessons
- 24/7 access to supplemental lessons via any Web browser at home or school
- Cross-curricular lesson content
- Lessons that teach difficult to understand concepts in science and math
- Science simulations and experiments and electronic math manipulatives that support project-based learning
- Creative, interactive lessons that work perfectly with existing electronic whiteboards
- An award-winning, proven program that improves student attitude and achievement in math and science

The "Green" Connection

Research shows that students learn by doing, which cannot be accomplished through science and math textbooks alone. For example, science Activity Objects are very realistic and allow students to test their hypothesis by interacting with real-life online experiments in a safe environment. Our math Activity Objects let students experiment and test concepts with online manipulatives and simulations that might be hard to create in the classroom. These real-life simulations, coupled with appropriate hands-on classroom science and math activities, create the best combination of traditional and virtual learning. And, it is accomplished without the need for textbooks thereby saving trees.

The Affordable Solution

Adaptive Curriculum is offered on a flexible, year-long subscription basis. Districts may opt to buy for a single school or classroom, for both math and science, or individual subject. Charter and virtual schools may offer Adaptive Curriculum through their own learning management system (LMS). The annual student subscription cost for Adaptive Curriculum starts at \$10 per student with discounts for volume purchases. Anyway you look at it, this low-cost solution for providing world-class lessons is extremely affordable and compelling.

Experience Adaptive Curriculum in your classroom today! Log onto our website at www.adaptivecurriculum.com and sign up for your free 30 day trial or call us at 888-999-9319. Learn how Adaptive Curriculum will positively impact your school's math and science performance and their love of learning



Isaac Middle School has discovered an effective, unique program that not only has contributed to an increased interest in math and science, but has also resulted in higher achievement scores. Visit www.adaptivecurriculum.com to see how you can engage today's technology-native student, keep costs down and achievement up, with a smaller environmental impact!

Minimal Impact



Maximum Effect

Adaptive Curriculum Engages Math and Science Learners through Online Experiences and Simulations

- Online supplemental activities that enhance mastery of subject matter without the additional cost of print materials.
- Continuous updating of lessons in the program adds value without the purchase of new materials.
- Online and on-demand, video-based professional development reduces travel costs.
- Activity objects that make use of technology already available such as electronic whiteboards and Internet connections.
- Access to real-life scenarios online eliminating the need to travel to a specific location.



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Ten habits of highly effective grant seekers

Strategies for success you can bank on

By Deborah Ward

This tough economic climate is making everyone jittery. Should you give up pursuing grants until the economy improves? Not necessarily, but you do need to realize that the competition for grants is likely to become fiercer as foundations scale back their giving. Still, grant seekers can weather the storm by adopting the following habits.

1. Do you make a plan for seeking grants? Do you have a list of projects that your organization would like funded this year? Finding grant opportunities is much easier when you start with some concepts for projects to match with potential funders. Otherwise, you'll be looking at grant opportunities and trying to develop projects that fit those parameters.
2. Make sure your project matches what the funder wants to fund. Private funders will not change their areas of emphasis, nor will public funders ignore legislation that creates a grant program, because a proposal is submitted that doesn't fit with their funding priorities.
3. Are you willing to meet with program officers? Sometimes it can be beneficial to meet face to face with program officers to discuss your organization and the project you are proposing to implement.
4. Do you have a well-conceived project to write about in a proposal? Have you identified goals and objectives? Can you describe the methodology you'll use to carry out the project? Have you included all of the project expenses for the budget—but only those that are allowable expenditures? The most complete proposals demonstrate that the grant writer has put time and effort into the project development phase.
5. Are you willing to collaborate on projects? Many funders expect this kind of collaboration, and in some cases, they'll specify the necessary collaborating organizations

(such as museums, libraries, or higher-education institutions). If you are not willing to collaborate, your proposal might not be funded.

6. Can you write succinctly and fit all necessary information within the specified page limits? Grant writers must be able to discuss their proposed project in terms that each and every reader can understand.
7. Are you well-organized? Most proposals are organized section by section, and one section has to flow into the next. Some proposals can be very lengthy, and grant writers must be able to keep all of the information organized and place it in the correct section of the proposal.
8. Can you meet deadlines? There is no official "grant period" during the calendar year. With the vast number of both private and public funders, there are grant deadlines nearly every day (usually not on Saturdays and Sundays, though occasionally I've seen deadlines during a weekend) of every month of every year. Grant applications that are received after the deadline are not reviewed.
9. Can you read and understand Requests for Proposals? You will need to understand grant terminology if you plan to write grants, and if you don't know what a word or a phrase means, you'll need to ask another grant writer or a program officer to explain precisely what they mean. "Guessing" is not a good idea when you're writing grant proposals.
10. Do you have persistence? Competition for grants can be fierce—and in these tough economic times, it's likely to get even worse, as more districts decide to pursue grants to fund new projects, because they don't have any extra money in their budgets. I don't know any grant seeker with a 100-percent success rate, so don't give up if your proposal is rejected. The best grant seekers use rejection as a learning experience for all of their future proposals.

In cooperation with TCEA, the eSchool News Network presents . . .

The eSN “Ed-Tech Best Practices Summit”



eSchool News
‘Best Practices Summit’
Wednesday, February 4
Thursday, February 5

During the 2009
Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA)
conference in Austin, the eSchool News Network hosts a
two-day “Conference Within a Conference” – **FREE** for TCEA attendees!

Here's your chance to get a first-hand, in-depth briefing on some of the most effective practices in education technology today. Leading companies will be on hand at the eSN "Best Practices Summit" with their key executives and educator customers who can answer your questions, share experiences, and give you practical insights into solutions that might be exactly what you're looking for.

A selection of the nation's most important ed-tech companies will join forces with America's No. 1 ed-tech publication network to present real-life examples of the Best Practices that are transforming schools, school districts, state education agencies, colleges and universities throughout North America.

Educators attending the 2009 TCEA Conference will meet some of the field's most dynamic technology providers and receive a first-hand, personalized briefing on how these companies are working with educators to improve learning, enhance school performance, operate more cost effectively, bolster safety and security, and increase achievement.

At no additional cost, TCEA attendees will meet and talk with a select number of leading TCEA exhibitors in a special, limited-attendance professional development event presented by America's No. 1 ed-tech publication network—eSchool News, eSchool News Online, and eSN-TV.

Minnesota school district uses Skyward's School Business Suite to streamline processes, reduce costs and increase productivity

Located southeast of St. Paul, Minn., South Washington County School District 833 is a suburban school district with approximately 16,400 K-12 students in its 14 elementary schools, four junior high schools and two high schools.

For many years, the district struggled to maintain a payroll and time-off system that had steadily outgrown the capacity of its administrative staff—specifically the Payroll Department and individual school building secretaries and office coordinators—to support and manage it. The challenges for the district included:

Limited pay stub information that resulted in numerous employee inquiries to the Payroll Department to find out about available time off or other details.

Staff limitations that resulted in payroll processing taking an increasing amount of time (because of employee growth) to the point where the Payroll Department struggled to get payroll done on time.

Increased costs for printing paychecks and envelopes and related mailing costs that had risen proportionately with growth of the district's workforce.

Extra workload demands placed on secretaries and office coordinators in filling out teachers' time-off vouchers and then following up to make sure the vouchers were completed.

"Our employees were pleasantly surprised with how well it worked, how much information they had and how simple it was. They really liked it."

– Patty Norwig, payroll manager,
South Washington County School District

In 2002, the South Washington County School District decided to switch to the School Business Suite, which is a component of Skyward's School Management System. Shortly after changing to the School Business Suite, the district also decided to adopt the Employee Access module as a way to get more employees involved in direct deposit, streamline internal processes and reduce costs.

According to Patty Norwig, the district's payroll manager, one of the immediate benefits of Employee Access was that it allowed district employees to see much more information about their earnings and time off than was available previously with their pay stubs.

Norwig says initially there was some apprehension among employees about the district's change to direct

deposit with Employee Access but these concerns gradually disappeared. "Our employees were pleasantly surprised with how well it worked, how much information they had and how simple it was. They really liked it."

Adopting Employee Access reduced the number of phone calls to the Payroll Department. Employees can now quickly go online and find the latest information about their time off, check history or run their own scenarios for deduction/benefit changes. This has saved a significant amount of time for payroll staff allowing them to focus on other tasks.

Another positive outcome of Employee Access is that it has helped place the responsibility on individual teachers for managing their time off. Teachers can now go online to immediately determine their available time off, and they can complete and submit vouchers themselves. This change has allowed secretaries and office coordinators to reallocate their time to perform other important duties.

Payroll specialists have also benefited by teachers involvement in their time-off management. Previously, the specialists had to manually key in teachers' time-off vouchers, which added to their workload and frequently required overtime to ensure that payroll would get done. Since this change, their overtime hours have been substantially reduced.

Norwig says an additional helpful tool is the program's profile data capability report, which the district uses to provide employees with a snapshot of their current insurance and flexible spending elections. Also, the district uses the program's defined fields and data mining reports for purposes that include creating surveys and determining if employees' insurance enrollment forms have been submitted.

By adopting Employee Access, the district has been able to virtually eliminate printed paychecks and dramatically reduce costs for postage and printing envelopes.

Norwig says the district is saving over \$15,000 a year in bank, printing, supplies and mailing costs, and adds that this number represents true "out of pocket" expenses that are no longer incurred.

Through Skyward's School Business Suite, the South Washington County School District has been able to use the program to help it enhance communication, streamline operations, reduce payroll processing costs and improve time-off management and reporting.

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Gary Allen, IT Director
Amarillo ISD, Texas





Beyond grants: How to raise funds in a crummy economy

Endowments are shrinking, and grants are harder to come by. Here's how to cope.

By Maya T. Prabhu, Assistant Editor

The recent crisis on Wall Street has ravaged stock portfolios and shriveled the endowments of private and corporate foundations, resulting in less money available for education grants. When you consider that budget constraints could force more schools to seek grants to help pay for projects, that means the competition for already-scarcer grant dollars is sure to be stiffer yet.

By law, foundations have to give a certain percentage of their endowments per year, said Deborah Ward, an independent grant-writing consultant and eSchool News columnist. But with less money to give, Ward said, many foundations are likely to cut back or even suspend their awarding of new grants, focusing instead on honoring their existing grant commitments.

Ward said one of her colleagues recently received an eMail message from a grant program she had applied for. The message said that “[because of] the impact of the stock market on their endowment, they would be giving away fewer grants than they thought they would,” she said.

A research advisory issued by the Foundation Center suggested that the potential impact of the current economic crisis on foundations might not be as bleak as some people think. The Foundation Center is the nation's leading authority on philanthropy, maintaining a comprehensive database on

U.S. grant makers and their charitable giving.

For the research advisory, Steven Lawrence, senior director of research, analyzed existing data and discovered that foundational giving historically has remained relatively stable in prior recessionary periods and times of economic distress.

“Foundations are not immune to economic downturns,” Lawrence said in a press release. “But we expect that the impact of the current crisis on their overall giving will be far less than current market conditions might suggest.”

Lawrence's advisory states that since the Foundation Center began collecting data on all grant-making private and community foundations in 1975, the country has weathered several recessions. During each of these recessionary periods—1980, 1981-82, 1990-91, and 2001—U.S. foundational giving in inflation-adjusted dollars did not decline and, in fact, often increased slightly, he said.

However, just after the most recent recession, foundational giving did decline from \$30.5 billion in 2001 to \$30.4 billion in 2002 to \$30.3 billion in 2003—the first consecutive years of decline tracked by the Center. But Lawrence said the 0.6-percent reduction (4.4 percent when you factor in inflation) was modest compared to the inflation-adjusted 16-percent drop in

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foundational assets recorded between 2000 and 2002.

Still, experts advised school leaders to diversify their fund-raising approach in anticipation of the greater competition for grant dollars.

Ward said smaller community foundations are likely to be hit the hardest. She suggested that schools look for grants and donations in places they might not have considered before.

Local philanthropists are one option, she said, and schools also can ask parents and alumni for help. Even donations of time or equipment—such as volunteering to help with after-school enrichment programs, or software training for teachers—can make a huge difference during tight budget cycles.

School leaders might consider seeking parental support as part of an annual giving program, Ward said. Annual giving most often is done through the use of direct-mail appeal letters that are mailed (or eMailed) to potential donors on a regular basis, she explained. Phonathons, in which trained callers use a script to contact donors and ask them either to give at the same level as before or consider increasing the size of their last gift, also can be used.

Developing an annual giving program should involve the use of a database system to enter donor information and keep it up to date, acknowledging gifts in a timely manner and keeping track of donor gifts, Ward said.

She added: “You will need someone who is skilled at crafting appeal letters that present a compelling ‘call to action’ and result in donations being made. If you plan to conduct a phonathon, you will need a group of volunteers, and you’ll need to provide training and scripts in advance so callers know what to say and how to respond appropriately to various donor reactions. This cannot be left to chance!”

Internet fund-raising also can play a role. Schools can host online auctions, post donation “wish lists” on their web sites, and use other strategies that take advantage of the internet’s reach.

A number of web sites have sprung up to help educators leverage the power of the World Wide Web in soliciting donations. For instance, DonorsChoose.org has raised more than \$8.2 million for school projects since 2000, when it was pioneered by teachers at a New York City public high school.

Linda Erlinger, executive director of DonorsChoose Chicago and Donors Choose Indiana, said the program provides an outlet for donors who support education causes.

“People want to help schools, but they don’t know how,” she said. “They’re not going to walk over to the neighborhood school and drop off a \$100 check. DonorsChoose is a way they can do it at their desk at work or at home with their kids, picking out projects together.”

Another fund-raising tactic that schools can employ is to host a special event, Ward said.

Events such as golf tournaments, silent auctions, and special



“My advice would be to focus more on federal funding, because it’s not going to be immediately affected by the economic downturn.”

dinners “can result in a significant amount of money raised; however, keep in mind that putting on a special event often takes a great deal of planning—usually several months to a year—and can involve a significant number of volunteers, depending on the type and size of the event,” she said. “This might not be a viable option for small districts with a small volunteer base.”

Ward recommended a resource titled *Big-Time Fundraising for Today’s Schools*, by Stanley Levinson. In this book, available from Corwin Press, the author discusses a variety of solutions for supporting school finances, borrowing fund-raising strategies used by many colleges and universities.

Although the Wall Street crisis has caused problems for foundations, grants still should be still available at the federal level, said Marissa Berg, outreach manager for Resource Associates.

“My advice would be to focus more on federal funding, because it’s not going to be immediately affected [by the economic downturn],” she said. “Private schools might suffer a harder hit, but studies have shown that donations—personal giving—don’t really decrease in times of economic hardship.”

Berg said the increased competition for funding will require school leaders to outline their needs and present their case in a clear and compelling way.

“But the best advice I could give would be don’t panic, stay informed, and ... don’t be discouraged,” she said.

LINK:

Foundation Center
<http://www.foundationcenter.org>



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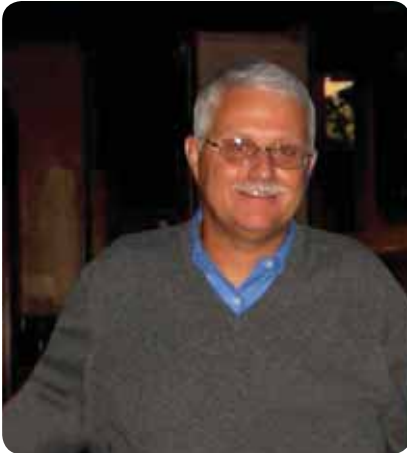
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Thank you for your dedication to academic excellence and believing in the potential of our students' future. We look forward to serving you in the future.

Tim McEwen

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim McEwen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Chief Executive Officer
Study Island

For more information call 800.419.3191 or email savings@studyisland.com





Defending your ed-tech budget when times are tough

Technology can be a hard sell during a soft economy—
but not when you follow this advice

By Laura Devaney, Senior Editor

Technology can be expensive, and many school leaders still view it as a luxury instead of an integral part of a school system's infrastructure. That's why, with school budgets already stretched thin in a weak economy, funds for technology often are the first to be cut upon a school budget review.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Experts who spoke with eSchool News offered these four key strategies for keeping technology off the school budget chopping block:

1. Get decision makers to see the larger picture.

"The biggest thing is to take a holistic view of the ramifications of budget cuts," said Rich Kaestner, director of the Consortium for School Networking's green computing and Value of Investment projects. "What I mean by that is to look at the total cost of ownership for technology, and understand that if you cut back on computer purchases or staff time," there can be unintended consequences.

In calculating the total cost of ownership (TCO) of technology systems, ed-tech coordinators should look at the time users spend in dealing with system issues, Kaestner said. If a school system cuts back on support staff, it might look favorable in budget calculations—but open for debate is whether those cutbacks have really reduced the cost to the district, because the work is merely pushed to teachers and other staff members who aren't trained in supporting computer system issues.

"Sometimes cuts like that are necessary, but you certainly have to understand the ramifications and what you're doing—you're really not helping the efficiency of the operation," Kaestner said.

Jim Hirsch, associate superintendent for technology at the Plano, Texas, Independent School District, said school boards "appreciate knowing the full cost of any [technology] implementation—including professional development, support, and maintenance—all well beyond the initial cost."

Hirsch said the key to his success in presenting projects to school boards for more than 20 years has been giving board members a complete TCO picture of each project, each time.

"Take the time to do a full analysis of everything that is needed to make a project successful," he suggests. "Work with vendors to help them understand the unique needs of your situation, and negotiate for extended warranties, installation, and related services as part of the initial purchase. This keeps you from going back to the board for budget amendments when these costs start showing up."

2. Suggest other, better ways to save money.

"There are hidden expenses that district business leaders don't spend a lot of time looking into," Kaestner said.

One of those is energy. School systems typically receive

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multiple power bills each month, or they follow a billing structure they have set up with their local utility company. Kaestner said many districts pay these power bills without analyzing what is causing an increase in fees or using the kilowatt-hours of energy.

“Green computing can reduce energy use, and simple things like turning computers off at night” can go a long way in reducing bills as well, he said. Data centers are good places to start if you want to find areas where reducing energy consumption might offset new ed-tech expenditures.

Often, investing in new technology can help create these very cost savings.

This past summer, the Round Rock, Texas, Independent School District opened four new buildings with data projectors and document cameras in every classroom.

“We should not think of technology as an add-on to the curriculum, but as a necessity to learning, just as utilities such as electricity, water, and gas are necessary to operate our school buildings.”

“By simplifying the voice, video, and data infrastructure and eliminating televisions, overhead projectors, and custom furniture for the televisions, we were able to add value to these campuses without greatly increasing the construction cost,” said Ed Zaiontz, Round Rock’s executive director of information services.

In short, school boards might be willing to maintain or increase technology budgets if ed-tech leaders can offer a solution to the budget problem by reducing costs in other areas.

3. Highlight technology’s value as a learning tool.

School technology leaders must “be passionate about the integration of technology into teaching and learning, and they must believe that technology is a tool that allows educators to personalize [instruction] and overcome barriers of time and place for every learner,” said Zaiontz.

Ed-tech leaders also must ensure that every student has equal access to technology and the opportunities for learning that it affords.

“The passion of district technology leaders must be contagious throughout the organization, including school board members and other district leaders,” Zaiontz added.

School boards are concerned first and foremost with student

achievement, and they’re often thinking about ways to boost achievement. Ed-tech leaders should keep that in mind when explaining technology’s value.

Student testimonials can provide powerful evidence of technology’s potential to transform education. Creating videos, podcasts, or other visuals that show how technology is changing classroom instruction also can help sell your ed-tech programs.

Round Rock technology leaders created digital stories about how teachers were integrating technology into high school math, science, social studies, and language-arts classrooms.

These digital stories, Zaiontz said, were “an effective way to show the Round Rock ISD community—especially individuals who were not able to observe classrooms during the day—what happens when you create a technology-rich learning environment.”

Tough economic times, Zaiontz explained, “will cause school boards and district leaders to make tough decisions about funding priorities.” Ed-tech leaders will need to demonstrate that technology engages students and prepares them to be 21st-century learners.

“We should not think of technology as an add-on to the curriculum, but as a necessity to learning, just as utilities such as electricity, water, and gas are necessary to operate our school buildings,” he concluded.

4. Advocate for technology throughout the school year.

Making the case for technology shouldn’t be done only at budget time; ed-tech leaders recommend voicing loud and consistent support.

“If school district IT leaders are not making the case on a day-to-day basis, then there is little that can be done in a crisis mode,” said Bob Moore, executive director of IT services for the Blue Valley School District in Overland Park, Kan.

“In this day and age, any district looking to slash costs by cutting too much from technology suffers from a lack of informed leadership,” Moore said. Instead, he said, school IT leaders should look to cut costs by restructuring contracts, rethinking replacement cycles, implementing energy- and dollar-saving green initiatives, and—only when necessary—cutting staff.

“Become part of the solution, not just the problem,” Moore concluded.

LINKS:

Round Rock ISD Digital Stories
http://209.184.141.5/edtech/digitalstories/showcase_high_index.html

CoSN’s Value of Investment Leadership Initiative
<http://www.edtechvoi.org>

Rethinking the Cost/Benefit Analysis of 1:1 Computing

The TeacherMate® Handheld Computer System

Are budget constraints making you wonder whether 1:1 computing will ever be financially viable in your elementary classrooms? With recent dramatic reductions in the cost of educational technology, your district could actually save money by implementing a 1:1 learning system.

Innovations for Learning, a Chicago-based nonprofit, has recently developed the TeacherMate handheld computer, which features a complete reading and math curriculum for K-2 classrooms. The TeacherMate System is in use in over 250 schools in Chicago and has been enthusiastically received by district administrators, principals, teachers and students.

The Shrinking Costs of 1:1 Computing

The conventional wisdom is that computer technology is prohibitively expensive as a 1:1 solution for elementary schools. In addition to the cost of hardware, schools have historically had to pay substantial sums for educational software, maintenance, training and support. Many districts have concluded that this expense is not justified by the use of the technology in the classroom.

Districts need to rethink the cost/benefit analysis of 1:1 computing with the new TeacherMate System. The TeacherMate System is a low cost alternative that includes the handheld computer, the storage/charging/synching case, headphones, and a comprehensive suite of reading and math software. When all of the hidden costs of owning and maintaining a computer in a classroom are considered, the TeacherMate System reduces technology costs by over 90 percent.

But the financial analysis does not end there, because actual cost savings can be achieved by providing a handheld computer to every student in the classroom. The TeacherMates are easy for teachers to use to differentiate instruction and to assess student progress. They are more engaging for students and are far superior to printed workbooks and other consumables used in elementary classrooms. The TeacherMates contain hundreds of fully illustrated books that can supplement the reading library—these books will never get lost or torn. The TeacherMate math lessons eliminate the need for certain manipulatives and other math tools that often need constant replacement.

Benefits of 1:1 Handheld Computing

The most dramatic benefit of the TeacherMate System is the fact that teachers use it. An independent research study conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago found that teachers on average use the TeacherMate System three to four times per week. The teachers report that they “see the learning” occurring on the TeacherMates due to the tight integration of the activities with their primary reading and math curricula.

At the beginning of the year the teacher tells the TeacherMate



management system on the teacher's PC which reading curriculum and math curriculum is used in the classroom. Once per week the teacher takes a minute to update which unit of the primary curriculum the class (or each group of students) is working on. This information, together with information about the guided reading level of each reading group, is synched to all the TeacherMates. Each student then has an individualized lesson plan on the TeacherMate, which directly ties to the school's primary reading and math curriculum.

During the weekly synching, all of the students' scores, together with all the students' voice recordings on the TeacherMates are synched to the teacher's PC so that the teacher can do running records and conduct ongoing assessment of student progress.

The TeacherMate System is based on Innovations for Learning's 15 years of experience developing and using reading and math software in the Chicago Public Schools. Innovations for Learning created the TeacherMate handheld computer to affordably scale their award-winning English and Spanish software solutions to all elementary schools, first in Chicago, and now throughout the country.

Grant funding for pilot implementations of the TeacherMate System is available for major urban cities courtesy of the JP Morgan Chase Foundation. Smaller districts should consider Donors Choose and national and state programs that fund educational technology purchases.

With or without outside funding, every district needs to carefully reconsider the cost/benefit of computer technology, especially with tightening budgets. For a forward-thinking administration, the implementation of 1:1 computing can be the answer for providing a more effective education on a smaller budget.



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www.innovationsforlearning.org

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Currently being used in 250 schools in Chicago, the TeacherMate System is now being offered nationwide. For more information about the success of the TeacherMates in Chicago, or to obtain a demonstration unit, contact info@innovationsforlearning.org.

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