

# STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

## New Tool Expands Tech Access at Home

As told by Kathy Schrock, Nauset Public Schools, Orleans, MA to Suzie Boss

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What will it take to achieve real digital equity so that all students will be able to use technology to the fullest potential, at home and at school? This is a story about an idea in progress.

*All the school computers in the world will not translate to students being able to do the things with technology that they want to accomplish at home.*

My suburban middle school is located in an area that's known as a tourist destination. The school provides at least one good computer in every classroom, but it is not a technology-rich school. Many of my students also have access to a computer at home. Often, though, this is older equipment, lacking a full suite of productivity applications. Families do not always have extra money to spend on things like computer upgrades.

As a technology administrator, I would like to figure out a way to allow sixth-grade students to continue working on class projects at home. But knowing about the limitations of home computers, I cannot expect they will be able work on presentations, spreadsheets, or other projects that require specific software. What's more, I can't assume that students will have access to CD burners. If students are working with hypermedia presentations, photos or other images, students often create files too large to fit on a floppy disk. From talking with the students about their technology wish lists, I also know that they would love to be able to create their own digital music libraries.

So I've come up with an idea that I call S.O.A.P. on a Rope. It's an inexpensive, portable device that acts as USB data drive, MP3 player, FM radio, and voice recorder. "S.O.A.P." stands for "Students Own Applications Personally". "Rope" refers to the lanyard that clips to a belt or neck cord, adding the "cool factor" that middle school students appreciate.

The necessary hardware already exists, and retails for less than \$90. It can be enhanced with open source, no-cost applications. For example, an open-source productivity tool suite includes word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and drawing programs. Free Web browser and email applications are readily available. The software will run right off this USB flash drive.

The result: a powerful, portable device that would allow students to have their music, software, project files, voice recorder, and an FM radio hanging from a lanyard. It's a low-cost solution that would enable students to continue using the computer at home for school-created projects, or for pursuing creative ideas of their own. They could run the programs and access all their files directly off the device from school, at home, at a friend's house, or at the local library.

I shared this idea with the sixth-graders, who are young enough to get excited about new ideas and old enough to generate creative ideas of their own. Their enthusiasm convinced me to pursue a grant. We have not yet received funding to implement S.O.A.P on a Rope. But every day, my students ask about the status of our proposal. You can find out more about the proposed solution at <http://kathyschrock.net/soap/>

Ensuring digital equity is going to take some new ideas and different ways of thinking about technology. All the school computers in the world will not translate to students being able to do the things with technology that they want to accomplish at home—on their own time, and inspired by their own creativity.

To learn more about the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and to view other stories and resources in the Advocacy Toolkit, please visit [www.iste.org/advocacy/toolkit/](http://www.iste.org/advocacy/toolkit/).