

# READERS **respond**

## POLL RESULTS

### Are Free Tools Worth the Price?

Most commenters and poll takers agree that free tools are often surprisingly useful in the classroom.

#### Get More Than You Paid For

The old adage “what you pay for is what you get” is no longer true for most open source applications. Many of these applications are as full-featured as their commercial counterparts. As for bugs, the response by the open source community is far more responsive in updating and fixing problems than you will ever get with the large commercial companies. When your curriculum drives you to find a technology solution, look toward open source, and you might be surprised what great tools are available.

*Renee Ramig  
Seven Hills School  
Walnut Creek, California*

#### Caveat Emptor

I have found that any free or open source programs that are available for download are not worth the trouble in configuring or retraining users to accept a different program. Often the “communities” built to support these programs do not have the depth to support them.

*Joe Gruce  
New Hampshire Society for Technology  
in Education  
Hollis, New Hampshire*

#### Just Right for a Down Economy

Many school districts simply cannot afford licenses, lengthy agreements, or upfront costs with today’s economy and budget cuts. Free tools bridge that gap and ensure our students learn in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century environment.

*John David Son  
Kentucky Society for Technology in Education  
Benton, Kentucky*

#### It’s All About the Curriculum

It is important to focus on the reason we use these tools in the first place. Any resource material, technology related or not, should support the curriculum, not be the curriculum. To say that a teacher must revamp the curriculum to either use the tool or compensate for its loss is putting too much emphasis on the tool itself.

*Scott Schaeffer  
Exeter Twp. School District  
Reading, Pennsylvania*

#### Stir Things Up

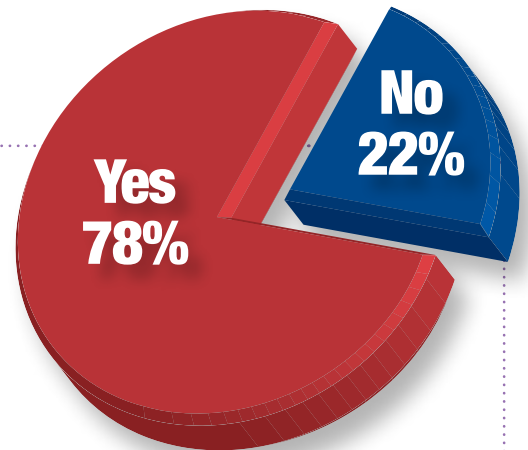
Education needs to move from static objects to dynamic ones. Our students and the world model this behavior regularly. Much the same as textbooks anchor and drive our curriculum beyond usefulness, reliance on too many proprietary software tools can lead to stagnation. A few good purchased tools and a bevy of free ones will keep it moving!

*Mark Hines  
Mid-Pacific Institute  
Honolulu, Hawaii*

#### We Are the World

Free tools are invaluable regardless of the time, effort, and sometimes frustration involved. They are our only option in “flattening classrooms” and engaging students in global collaboration and learning. Free Web 2.0 tools provide a level playing field so that all students worldwide have the possibility to understand one another.

*Barbara Stefanics  
International Schools  
Vienna, Austria*



## LETTERS

### It Isn't Easy Being Green

Caprice Lawless’ article, “5 Steps to Responsible E-waste Management at Your School,” does a great job of outlining the many issues involved with end-of-life electronics.

My school donates equipment to charities but has little insight into what happens to it after that. For this reason, we have added a statement to our donation form that requires organizations to agree to responsibly recycle our donated equipment.

Perhaps a more challenging aspect is that we need to both reduce our overall purchases and buy more durable (and often more expensive) equipment. This runs counter to what usually happens when software developers create larger and larger applications that require faster computers in a never-ending but very profitable (for them) rhythm. Equipment is considered “disposable” because it’s too expensive to repair.

The current state of our economy may force us to deal with issues of sustainability in a way that the abstractness of global climate change has not. But e-waste management is an important part of the technology adoption cycle that we must all take seriously.

*Steve Taffee  
Castilleja School  
Palo Alto, California*