



## Equity in Practice

# ISSUE ORIENTED

**Y**ou have classroom Internet access, and you have multiple digital tools and resources provided by your school district or local educational service agency. You are eager to try out and support new learning environments for students, and the necessary staff development is available.

You want students to be blogging; podcasting; researching via the Internet at home and in class; creating new knowledge by themselves and with their peers; creating digital products to communicate their knowledge; accessing your Web pages for assignments, background information, lessons, and digital resources; or possibly taking an online course. Learning can and should be 24/7. But that goal is a little difficult without 24/7 access to technology.

What if you are not involved in a one-to-one computer environment, and you know that not all of your students have access at home? What can you do that is equitable for all students?

Teachers can survey their students to see what they do have available at home. Don't limit this to a computer. But if students do have a computer, find out if they have Internet access and how many people have to share it. Do they have cell phones? If so, what features/services do they use? Do they or their parents have a PDA that no one is using? Do they have an MP3 player? Do they have a friend who lets them use his or her computer? Find out their perceived level of expertise with whatever they have. Who is a power user of their tools? Who wants to learn more? Who wouldn't mind helping a classmate with is or her technology? (Parts of this survey could be useful in wealthy schools and in one-to-one programs,

especially if students don't take the computers home.)

With this knowledge you can begin to work on solutions. As much as possible without highlighting who is a have and who is a have-not, involve your students in the solutions. Use the challenge as an opportunity to begin forging a learning community in your classroom.

You can start by enlisting students' help in finding resources—district or community organizations that refurbish and donate computers; businesses that want to donate used equipment; parents, friends, and neighbors with needed expertise; local library resources and hours; wireless hot spots in your area. Students will probably have many other ideas. If you are a middle/high school teacher, try it with just one class—perhaps your most motivated, or least.

Working out solutions will certainly take some creativity, but by now you should be armed with the knowledge you need and a great opportunity for getting to know your students. Taking advantage of the technology that students have will take some special knowledge, but most likely you can tell your students what you want to do and they can figure out how and teach you.

Administrators and tech coordinators can encourage and support teachers in these efforts at the district level. Beginning on page 15, Don Hall provides ideas for the building/district level. Teacher educators can be sure their teacher candidates are aware of equity issues and have ideas about solutions. We do all have a role to play in the equitable distribution of resources for students. We can't wait for funds to materialize for one-to-one for all students.

**By Anita McAnear**

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