AFTERSCHOOL TRAINING TOOLKIT

Planning for and Managing Technology in Afterschool

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Developing a successful technology component for your afterschool program requires a dedicated effort. Here are some considerations for your planning and management process:

Know what student-centered, technology-enriched instruction looks like.
You need to know how technology can and cannot help kids to learn. Try to observe others practicing technology-supported instruction. Technology in creative activities may involve changing from an instructor-centered environment to a more student-centered environment in which the instructor acts as a facilitator to help students work cooperatively to make decisions and solve problems. Unless afterschool leaders like yourself know what effective technology-based instruction looks like, it will be difficult to foster its growth among your instructional staff.

Create a strong vision.
You do not need to be a technology or curriculum expert, but you do need a strong vision. As is true of starting any new effort or program, seeing the "big picture" and understanding the possibilities, requirements, and challenges of technology use is a necessity!

Identify a need.
Instructional needs must be at the center of your technology planning. Begin with a question: What are our instructional needs; and how can technology help us achieve the teaching and learning we want in our program? Consider what you want students to learn, not just about computers, but also in all subject areas. Consider the instructional strategies needed to achieve those learning outcomes. Then consider the ways technology can help.

Ask yourself:

- How can technology-enriched activities help expose students to new concepts, ideas, and information?
- How can technology-enriched activities help students academically?
- How can technology-enriched activities help students work collaboratively?
- How can technology-enriched activities help students communicate more effectively?
- How can technology-enriched activities help students become more creative with original projects?

Develop a basic familiarity with technology terminology.
For most of us, the technical aspects of computers and networks seem endless – and hopelessly complex. As an administrator, you should be able to get by without learning an entirely new language, but you will need a basic familiarity with technology terminology, equipment, software, and networking operations in order to assure good decisions and to monitor implementation. Electronic networking through the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) is the major focus these days; and that is where we recommend you focus your own learning.

Know your supporters.

You will need to know how interested teachers, students, and community leaders are in bringing technology into the afterschool program. If interest is low, you will need to take steps to find it and/or build it. Technology that is imposed on unwilling participants will wind up shelved, along with other unimplemented instructional innovations.

Develop a useful plan.

You will need to know who to involve and how to develop a useful program plan. Alignment of your afterschool plan to the school or district's technology plan could be beneficial for long-term support and program sustainability. Because of complexities in technology implementation, effective planning becomes a "make or break" activity. You will need to know how much things cost, how to secure resources, and how to access help. You will also need to know where you can and cannot cut corners, and how to avoid common mistakes such as taking on a project too complex for your staff or technical capacity.

Find out who is interested and who is not.

It is almost never enough to have a visionary program director, or a small band of forward-thinking teachers with an educational innovation, forging a lonely path through the wilderness. There will be other interested parties such as a superintendent, principals, teachers, school board members and parents who will all have questions. Support from local business and community groups will also be important, since you're likely to need volunteer help and donations of funds or equipment. In addition, the business community needs to know the importance of your efforts.

Here are some strategies for helping to generate interest and support:

- Arrange for a visit to another afterschool program that is doing interesting things with technology.
- Network with other program directors or coordinators.
- At a PTA, civic club, or school board meeting, demonstrate some simple technology applications. Even better, have a student conduct the demonstration.
- Hold a technology open house for parents. Ask local businesses to donate door prizes.
- Show how technology can engage students and support their success in academic content areas.
- Take the lead in the process of developing the vision and goals for how educational technologies can improve teaching and learning in afterschool.

Create a planning committee.

Establish a small technology planning committee that is representative of day school, afterschool and the community. Two common mistakes often disable technology-planning efforts before they begin. The first is to involve too few people; the second is when those few include only an administrator and resident technology enthusiasts. Having a broadly representative planning committee helps ensure a plan will be sustainable in spite of leadership changes, teacher turnover, or other personnel surprises.

Develop a technology plan.

Set your goals and benchmarks, and develop an action plan once you have determined your needs. Identify instructional staff and support resources. Also, identify and plan for financial resources.

Prepare staff.

Staff development can take many forms - short and long-term, face-to-face and online via the Internet, tutorials, and print materials. Providing time for staff development is key to your overall program's success.

Prepare students and parents.

Confirm that each student and parent has signed a copy of your school or organization's "acceptable usage policy" regarding Internet use. Keep a copy in your afterschool program folder. Visit The American Library Association's *Especially for Children and Their Parents* Web site at: http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/foryoungpeople/childrenparents/especiallychildren.htm.

This site provides up-to-date information concerning online safety for young people. Communicate with your students' parents when you are planning a project that involves email. Ask them to sign a permission slip assuring them that all their work will be monitored and students will not be sharing personal identification information such as phone numbers, last names, personal pictures, or addresses.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Moving ahead without gauging people's interest or securing commitment to change

Taking time to lay the proper groundwork may be the best investment you can make.

Having only one or two people develop the technology plan

Working by committee may seem cumbersome, but in this case it's a necessity. Above all, you need a group capable of envisioning the ways in which technology can support effective teaching and foster the kinds of skills students will need in their adult lives.

Thinking that once you've finished with your technology planning, you're through

The biggest job of implementing your plan is maintaining your instructional vision. Strong leadership and on-going support are essential. Moreover, you'll need to revisit your planning process in order to keep your program functioning.

Failing to match technology resources to the local infrastructure

We know of one program that can't run its air conditioning system and its computers at the same time. Careful pre-planning could have uncovered this problem.

Relying on "soft money" for your technology program

Technology requires a solid source of funding. While grants may provide an initial bounty of hardware, software, and training, you must establish or identify an internal support system for staffing, training, program support and maintenance.

Falling prey to hype about a particular piece of hardware or software

Beware of technology vendors, and you own well-meaning technology staff, whose enthusiasm for the latest hardware and software may outweigh its instructional value.

Making short-term purchase decisions that don't allow for growth, or that create compatibility problems

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the danger of making poor purchasing decisions in an effort to hold down costs.

Under-investing in ongoing instructor training/staff development

Inadequate training of instructional staff is a major barrier to effective integration of technology into afterschool programs. Consistent and ongoing professional development empowers instructors with skills necessary to effectively integrate technology into the afterschool program.

Not planning for technical assistance

You have probably learned at least two lessons about fixing problems: One, the instructional manuals don't always help. Two, you can't always rely on intuition or experience to figure out a solution. Your staff will need someone they can call on for technical assistance.