Equitable Access Blog can be found at <http://samonett.weebly.com/blog/equitable-access-for-all-students>

## [Equitable Access for All Students](http://samonett.weebly.com/blog/equitable-access-for-all-students)

4/12/2015

Equitable access of digital tools and resources is a concept that is misunderstood by many.  While many school districts such as my own strive to “equal the playing field” in terms of access to technology, the educational system alone can not fill all gaps that are created by economical and family situations outside of school.  [Common Sense Media’s article Zero to Eight](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/zero-to-eight-childrens-media-use-in-america) argues that impoverished families with an income of $30,000 or less a year have a drastically lesser percentage of technology in the home including smartphones, tablets, and other devices that provide access to the Internet  (Rideout, 2011).

Although no one sets out to put his or her child at a disadvantage, Rideout concluded from her research that many gaps in access to digital tools and resources are created before a child reaches the age of two (2011).  Socioeconomic status and family background play a pivotal role in forming a child’s prior knowledge and experiences from the time they are born.  By the time a child enrolls in school for the first time, many differences can already be found in those who have been raised in an environment rich in experiences and those that have not (Barron et al., 2010).

To help create a fair starting point for all students, teachers strive to create shared learning experiences that all students can benefit from.  In many cases, it is up to the teacher and school to provide access to digital tools and other resources that will enhance the child’s learning and skills needed for success in the future.   Even though some students have technology at home, the family views on the purpose of the technology can differ.  Some families may only see it as a way of communication and entertainment while other families see that as a feature, but not the primary purpose.   Research has concluded that students from higher socioeconomic families are more likely to use home computers for educational purposes than those from lower socioeconomic homes (Barron et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, the funds needed to provide devices and digital tools is lacking in many districts across the country.  There are many grants available for school districts as well as individual classroom teachers, but the competition for the monies is fierce as all educators are hoping to increase or improve their current technologies available for student use.

In Georgia, the department of education and state legislators are working to provide districts with the funds needed in their budgets to increase technology in the schools as we push for more standardized testing on computers with the End of Grade Milestone Assessments.  The price of computers or digital tools is a hefty one, but in many cases not as hefty as the price tag associated with creating and maintaining an infrastructure and network that can support not just the teachers using the Internet, but also all students.  Newer school buildings tend to be more equipped with an infrastructure that can handle current and future needs, while many of the older school buildings would require major renovations to be able to handle what is being asked of schools.  This means that equitable access to digital tools and resources may rely heavily on the place in which a person lives and the schools they attend.  To ensure great equitable access for all there has to be a push from the top down to get the funding in the hands of those schools and districts that are stuck with older building and limited outside donors.

Equitable access to technology is also something that has to be addressed in terms of teachers.  It is common to walk around a school and find that some teachers seem to have every digital tool or resource imaginable to use for instruction while others depict more of a classroom from the past with very limited digital resources other than perhaps a teacher computer.  Products such as interactive white boards, clickers, iPads, and iPods can have a great impact on the level of engagement a teacher is able to create during a lesson.  Without equitable access to these devices or any other software that might be purchased for a classroom or school, teachers are put at a disadvantage when preparing their students for the next step or even just the future outside of education.

All schools need to set-up policies and procedures regarding the best practices relating to the usage and access to technology in the school.  Before a child is allowed to use technology in the school, it is imperative that the teacher or educator make contact with the parents and give a clear picture as to how technology will be used both inside and outside of school for educational purposes.  If a child is allowed to take technology home, written consent from the parents must be obtained first.  In the case that a parent does not wish to have their child bring home technology, it must be respected by the school and alternative resources should be made available to that child.  Many educators feel the need to help fill the gap for students who do not have technology in the home, but often times if there is not currently technology in the home there is a reason why the family has shied away from it.

For any technology to serve a positive educational purpose there must be a clear partnership between the family, school, and community.  Positive outcomes have been linked to not just involving the students in technology experiences and expectations, but also the families and community (Hohlfield, Ritzhaupt, & Barron, 2010).  This might include parent classes in the community on how to use certain programs on the computers, or even just providing a place where adults can come and use the technology with their child.

When technology does become available for students and teachers in a district or school there should be a plan in place for where that technology will be allocated and whether or not it will be assigned to a certain classroom, or if all people in the school will have the opportunity to check-out the resources and it be housed in a central location.

As a school district we have begun to supply devices that students can rent for the year and take home each day as needed.  While providing this opportunity has been extremely helpful for some of our lower income families, this alone has left many students still without equitable access to the needed resources outside of school.  In some cases the families are unable to pay the rental fee and although the students were told that no one would be denied a computer for financial reasons, many are still too embarrassed to express their financial need.  Other students found no need to rent a device because they did not have access to the Internet outside of school.  In my community, free access to the Internet can be located at the regional library, community center, and a variety of restaurants.  The only problem with this, the students, specifically younger students who cannot drive, are unable to get to these places.  Most of our lower income students live in an area that is not located near the part of town where most restaurants are located.

I support programs like the one [Mitchell County Schools](http://www.mitchell.k12.ga.us/) have started called the Magic School Bus to combat this issue.  Mitchell County took a retired school bus and renovated it to house laptops, Internet, projector, and an interactive white board.  This mobile computer lab goes from neighborhood to neighborhood to allow all students a chance to have equitable access to the technology outside of school.  Teachers wishing to help support the students in their educational endeavors outside of school staff the bus.  In areas like mine, this would be a great way to reach those neighborhoods with less access to technology.  Another idea to help fill the void my district has considered is to create areas such as pavilions outside of the elementary schools that would house wireless Internet access.  It would be imperative that strong Internet filters were in place to ensure that it was being used for educational purposes, but our elementary schools are located in the neighborhoods where most kids would be able to walk or ride their bike to gain access to the Internet.

References

Barron, B., Walter, S., Martin, C., & Schatz, C. (2010). Predictors of creative computing participation and profiles of experience in two silicon valley middle schools. Computers & Education, 54, 178-189.   Retrieved from <http://www.life-slc.org/docs/Barron_etal-Predictorscreativecomputing_2010.pdf>

Hohlfield, T., Ritzhaupt, A., & Barron, A. (2010). Connecting schools, community and families with ICT: four-year trends related to school level and ses of public schools in Florida. Computers & Education, 55, 391-405. Retrieved from<http://www.aritzhaupt.com/eprofessional/papers/2010/HohlfeldRitzhauptBarron_CE.pdf>

Rideout, V. (2011). Zero to eight: children’s media use in America. Common Sense Media.  Retrieved from<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/zero-to-eight-childrens-media-use-in-america>