



# Connection Reflection

## Money—Always a Concern!

*Editor's Note: **Money** . . . It is a big concern for everyone during these economic times. Not that I have to tell you, but your school district is probably no better off than the rest of us these days! So, what can you do to make your technology needs known to your Technology Director and stand a chance of getting those needs filled for your classrooms? This month's Connection Reflection is hoping to add some perspective for you on this issue.*

## Questions to Consider When Asking for Technology

By: **Dr. Henry Thiele**  
President

Budgeting for technology purchases can be a tricky problem from both the Administrator's and the Teacher's perspective. I have been on both sides of the issue. As a teacher, I tried really hard to get everything I needed (or wanted). As a Technology Director I am trying to meet everyone's needs and must separate the **needs** from the **wants**. Usually both the administrator and the teacher walk away dissatisfied because there just are not enough financial resources to give everyone what they **want**.



**Dr. Henry Thiele**

This month I wanted to help teachers get everything needed out of a technology budget while helping technology directors with strategies on how to meet the needs of their programs.

A good technology director is constantly thinking through a bunch of questions to help them with the budgetary cycle. My common questions look like this:

1. What about the tech stuff?
  - a. Can we better use the stuff we have?
  - b. What kind of stuff do

we need to add to meet the needs of our curriculum?

- c. Can we use any of our old stuff in new and better ways?
2. What current practices are working and what changing practices are coming?
  - a. As we add/change stuff how much does our curriculum and instruction change?
  - b. How much can we change from year to year?
  - c. How do these changes help us to improve learning?
  - d. Are we willing to change? If so, how can we make change occur?

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### Special points of interest:

- Have you checked the "stuff" you already own when it comes to technology?
- Communication between Technology and Special Education is key.
- The ACE Model—some free websites worth checking.

# Preparing the Special Education-Technology Portion of Your Budget

## *A Note to Special Education and Technology Departments*

By: **Judy Okazaki**  
Executive Director



**Judy Okazaki**

As you work on your budget for the upcoming year, please take time to examine the technology available for special education. If you are in charge of the special education budget, you may know a lot about the assistive technologies but may not know that there are all kinds of other technologies that can be used to support students' individual IEP's cost effectively. In fact there are an extensive number of technologies available for free or for a minimal price.

If you happen to be a technology director or instructional technology support person, have you examined how you can support the needs of special education? During the last couple of years I have had the chance to ask technology directors and staff about how they support special education and to often the response is that, knowingly, this is an underserved area. A way to move forward could be to begin a discussion of some of the technologies that are available during the time of budget preparation.

Whether the funds come from the special education budget, technology or elsewhere the two departments would

reap valuable benefits from a collaborative effort. Budget preparation time offers a great opportunity for the two areas to meet and learn about ways to work together. If dollars are being spent anyway, it will help to assure that they are spent most effective way.

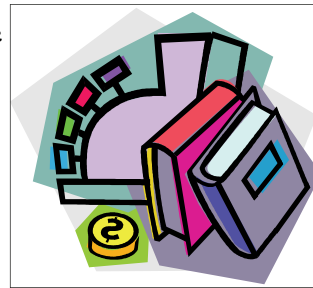
SET Connections has developed the ACE Model as a means of categorizing the technologies available to special education students. ACE refers to three categories of technologies; **A**dministration, **C**ommunication and **E**ducation. Special education students can be supported by administrative technologies such as calendars, homework tracking and time management. Communication technologies support communication between: teacher and student; school and home; academic and resource teachers ; and between administration and staff. The area of education technologies includes skill reinforcement, content review, critical thinking and production tools, to name a

few. By dividing technologies into these three areas we have attempted to make it easier to examine what technologies are available to address students as individuals and then provide support.

So, special education and technology educators, as you work on your budgets for the upcoming school year, please schedule some time to work together. Special education departments take time to let your technology department know what you do and what problems you have. You may want to invite assistive technology support staff to attend those meetings. They may be able to serve as a liaison between the technology and special education departments. Technology departments,

take some time to inform special education departments of some of the fantastic options that are out there. Brainstorm ideas of how they might find answers to their problems using the available technologies. Provide examples of how solutions can be practically implemented.

Just getting together to talk could be a big step forward. Over the next few years we hope to see special education and technology departments developing and maintaining strong relationships.



## ACE Categorizes Special Education Technologies

As mentioned in Ms. Okazaki's article above, SET Connections uses the ACE Model to categorize technologies available to special education students. Here are a few examples of websites for free tools which are part of the ACE Model. One of these tools might be just what you and your department need to support special education at the right price:

Administration (Student Planning/Organization): <http://www.comapping.com>, <http://www.pageflakes.com>

Communication (Between Teacher and Student): <http://www.polleverywhere.com>, <http://www.edmodo.com>

Education: <http://www.flashcardexchange.com>, <http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games>

# Budgeting is Just a Matter of Balance

By: **Alice Schmitz**

Director of Education and Professional Development

Budgeting, it sounds so easy. It is just a matter of balance, is it not? As Dr. Thiele wrote: needs vs. wants! Oh, I wish it were this easy. Not only is it a matter of dollars and cents, but it is also a matter of emotions. All educators are trying to do what's best for **their** students.



Dr. Thiele asked that you consider some questions as you begin the budget review. Mrs. Okazaki discussed the fact that the special education department and the technology department need to work together. Here is yet another perspective, maybe not anything new, but hopefully a few things to think about as we look at budgets and the decisions we make for students.

In thinking about the process, it seems to go pretty much the same in most school districts. An administrator gives you a budget amount. You sit down and excitedly make a list of needs for your classroom. Then you total the list, and the amount is over by several times

what you were allotted (just like home, isn't it?) As a classroom teacher, I always hoped that someone else in my department wasn't asking for anything. Then, I could have that individual's portion of the budget. As a department chair, I again hoped that some department wouldn't need their portion of the budget—what **was** I thinking? As a technology coordinator, the "game" was over. Not only did I have to stick to my "share" of the budget, but I also had a responsibility to every student and teacher in the building to do the best I could with the money I was given to support their needs. Here are a few things I found helpful:

*Look for alternatives*—are there things you already have that can work. Can some sharing take place? Dr. Thiele asked you to consider these options in his article on the first page of this newsletter. It works. Sometimes there are tools available which can be repurposed . . . and, believe it or not, sometimes people are willing to share the tools they have!

*Don't play the budget game*—I see no good reason to go into the budget process with the mentality that you



Alice Schmitz

should request more than you really need because you'll be cut anyway. Why not be honest? Ask for what you **need**. Try to get it to fit the numbers. If something extraordinary is required, discuss it with your administration. Ultimately, your reputation and your sincerity will win.

*Develop a list of budget items that you believe in and are willing to fight for*—This is where you really examine your needs vs. your wants. What's on your list this year? Is it really something your students need? Or, would it just be a nice addition and maybe not a necessity?

*If you are responsible for a group budget, include input from everyone*—sit down and discuss everyone's needs. This accomplishes two things. First, it gives everyone input; and, second, it allows all to see and hopefully understand each other's needs. If you are responsible for the department budget or a portion of it, meet with the other teachers for their input. If you are responsible for a building budget, you could set up a committee with departmental representation to have input into what everyone needs.

. . . and, if all else fails, start selling candy bars! Just kidding. Happy budgeting!

## Are You Interested in Attending a Conference?

- **ATIA (Assistive Technology Industry Association) 10th Annual National Conference**, Wednesday, October 28, through Saturday, October 31, 2009, Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center Schaumburg, IL (Next year in Orlando) Exhibit Hall Admission Free (Thursday - Saturday) <http://www.atia.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3530>
- **5th Annual State Transition Conference**, Sunday November 8, through Tuesday, November 10, 2009, Renaissance Hotel & Convention Center, Schaumburg, IL <http://www.illinoistransitionconference.org>. This conference is for high school aged students and young adults with disabilities, their family members and teachers, vocational professionals, caregivers, health care professionals, college students pursuing careers in special education and community advocates.
- **Non-Public School 3rd Annual Special Education Conference**, Monday November 16, through Wednesday, November 18, 2009, Hilton Hotel, Oak Lawn, IL [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/np\\_handouts/2009/np\\_registration.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/np_handouts/2009/np_registration.pdf)
- **IETC - Illinois Educators 16th Annual Technology Conference** Wednesday, November 18, through Friday, November 20, 2009, Crowne Plaza, Springfield, IL <http://www.il-edtech.org>

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### Bring New Tools and New Media to your Classroom

**Break the Digital Ice**—Check out VoiceThread ([www.voicethread.com](http://www.voicethread.com)) to help your students get better acquainted. Allow students to post a VoiceThread with their goals for the year or an image of how they are feeling about this school year, or anything else you feel would be worthwhile. Everyone can then comment. You'll be letting students know your classroom is a place for productive conversation where everyone's voice matters!

**Find Your Classroom Experts**—Take advantage of the technical know-how in the room. Your students spend much more time with technology than you do. Look to them for expert help . . . And learn with them!

**Get Off to a Good Start**—It's all about organization! An organized teacher website will help students throughout the year. After setting it up, be sure to point students to your website often.

**Think Globally**—Cyberschoolbus ([www.cyberschoolbus.un.org](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org)) is a global education project of the United Nations. It includes interactive games, WebQuests and other resources to promote global citizenship. There are others. Work to expand your students' horizons.

**Take Meaning from Word Clouds**—Wordle ([www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net)) is a website that turns a block of text into a cloud pattern. Use it for prereading, analyzing student writing (did they use the same word too often?), or determining "hot topics".

(Source: [www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org))

## Technology Tools Help Us Recognize Contributions and Needs

(Continued from page 1)

3. How do we keep all this stuff working?
  - a. How much staff do we need to keep stuff working - and, if we add stuff do we need to add staff?
  - b. Where can we put all this stuff and will the building's infrastructure support it?
  - c. How much can we change each year and have staff to support it?
  - d. When do we expect to get help with stuff that doesn't work?

Part of technology planning and budgeting is weighing these pieces against one another. If you **want**, or even better, if you **can** demonstrate need for a piece of technology in your classroom start out with the questions

above. Define your educational goal and how the technology will help you attain the learning experience you want to create for your students. Early in the year (like now) demonstrate how this will help your students learn and bring in research from other schools that have used these resources effectively (Note: promotional marketing from the vendor does not count as research). If you can better use something that has already been purchased, you have a much greater chance of getting what you need. Have a plan for how you will learn to use the new resources effectively and how you will share what you learn with the rest of your team. Finally, always be up front with how much support you will need. Installing a program on one computer is much different than adding it to a lab or on every computer in the building. Remember a good technology director is

weighing the needs of the teachers against the ability of the technology staff to meet those needs. Just because something is cheap (or free) does not mean that the technology staff can support the technology.

Every administrator should be working to meet the needs of their teachers. Helping them to make well informed decisions by teaching them about what you need to meet your educational goals will go a long way toward getting technology resources. Remember, many technology plans and budgets are designed around a three-year plan; so it may take some time to get what you need. Stay positive, talk about students and their successes with the technology, start the process early, and be prepared. With all of that in mind you still won't always get what you want, but hopefully you will eventually get what your kids need!