

## Tough Economy for School Budgets

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Every year around this time, schools begin to prepare for budget meetings to discuss what the school is going to have in terms of funding to implement programs or purchase equipment *if* state and federal funding is available. Times are tough, school administrations are looking closely at every dollar begin spent, and certain valuable programs don't always survive. I remain optimistic that most school districts will keep technology on the do-not-cut list, as children and schools cannot afford the consequences of falling behind in this area.

One way schools can rise above their economic challenges is to apply for and participate in the E-Rate program. E-Rate provides discounts to assist schools in the United States to acquire reasonable telecommunications and Internet access. E-Rates grant a specific amount of money to schools each year to stay up to date with current technology trends and training. More information about the E-Rate program is available at:

<http://www.universalservice.org/sl/about/overview-program.aspx>

Another, maybe even more beneficial, way schools can overcome budget crunches is to get smart on President Obama's *\$4 Billion Race To The Top*. In a July 2009 speech at the Department of Education, President Obama stated, "This competition will not be based on politics or ideology or the preferences of a particular interest group. Instead it will be based on a simple principle: whether a state is ready to do what works."

The \$4 billion-plus education grant program was created under the \$787 billion economic stimulus plan passed by Congress and signed into law by the president in February. Connecticut has a unique opportunity to position themselves to be recipients of federal funds if they can demonstrate "authentic progress" towards meeting the 8 priority areas set

forth by President Obama including, for example, improving teacher effectiveness and emphasizing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) in the classrooms. Schools that can provide turn-key professional development technology education programs for educators will help their staff effectively engage technology in the classroom. For students, schools that provide hands-on learning which supports STEM and unique uses of technology peripherals as learning tools in the classroom will certainly be on the cutting edge.

One way to improve teacher effectiveness is to engage in teachers professional development training designed to increase technology skills. Some examples include using MS Office Applications as a communication tool in the classroom, using Social Media to enhance their own professional development as well as using 'beyond the basics' interactive white board training to design activities to enhance student learning. Integrating a specialized technology curriculum that actively involves lessons in math, science, critical thinking and problem solving will help students transfer that knowledge to better performance on standardized tests. While implementing a variety of programs ranging from programming robots, engineering, film making, using digital technology for science, etc will establish an unmatched technology program that will enhance each child's education and keep STEM in focus.

Computer technology is exciting and the excitement can be channeled into productive implementation. Whether for students or educators, providing quality technology education opportunities will strengthen both their academic and technology skills so they are more competitive and better prepared for the future. A tough economy, yes, but keeping technology off the chopping block just might help states, and schools, reach the top!

For more information on *The Race to the Top*, visit this web site:

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

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