

## Technology

VICKI HANCOCK

### Getting School Administrators Online

Are the administrators in your school district the last holdouts for computer use? Do they delegate tasks that can be done electronically to secretaries and other office staff? Do they still scribble memos on scraps of paper to leave for someone to polish and distribute? Do they stand by with quizzical expressions while someone else retrieves school management data from a terminal? It's about time school administrators became models for computer use rather than tentative proponents.

Just as teachers need computer skills to perform their job tasks more effectively, so do school administrators. And just as staff development activities enable teachers to acquire useful computer skills, similar activities provide administrators with the tools and competencies they need to do their jobs more efficiently.

### Essential Skills

To become effective computer users, school administrators need at least five basic competencies. *First, they should use computers for personal productivity by learning the basic operations of word processing, database, and spreadsheet software.* As they become comfortable with these packages, they can issue their own correspondence, create and manipulate name and address lists, and develop and analyze rudimentary budget information. Their competence in these functions leads to autonomy in basic administrative tasks, freeing more time to interact with students, teachers, and parents. By introducing computers as personal tools, staff development programs cultivate participants' enthusiasm for work-related tasks.

*Second, administrators should be aware of the many administrative tasks microcomputers can simplify.* Student records, scheduling, atten-

dance accounting, and grade reporting are the most popular areas for administrative computer applications in schools. But there are others: instructional management, inventory records, media center transactions, athletic statistics, guidance information, and staff/personnel records. Staff development leaders should use hands-on activities to expose participants to a variety of school management software packages. By seeing firsthand the computer's value in day-to-day operations, administrators can identify their own priority areas for implementation.

*Third, building administrators should learn to determine appropriate computer applications for their schools.* It's easy to become enamored of the computer's potential, but discerning administrators will assess the costs and benefits for potential electronic applications. To make these decisions, they must understand thoroughly the software applications and the conditions that will affect their success in a particular school. They must know how to collect data, make informed decisions, and write proposals for funding.

*Fourth, administrators should be informed enough to select the most appropriate hardware and software to meet their schools' needs.* Once they know what the computer system must accomplish, they need to identify the best computer and programs. An important part of this competency is knowing what questions to ask: Does the hardware/software system do everything we want? Is it easy to learn/use? Is it compatible with the hardware/software we already have? Will much user training be required? Can it be upgraded or expanded to meet our changing needs? Administrators must learn to be discriminating consumers as well as skilled computer users.

*Finally, having acquired hardware and software for administrative appli-*

*cations, school leaders should be able to develop thorough plans to implement their features.* They must consider staffing requirements, training needs, physical setup and location, and security, backup, and maintenance procedures. When making decisions about structural change, administrators must also carefully consider human impact. Success in using technology depends largely on cultivating the enthusiasm and support of staff members with vested interests in the proposed changes.

### Staff Development Opportunities

Ideally, all administrator preparation programs would require computer training. However, in a majority of graduate programs, it is only a recommended option. In fact, many computer literate school administrators have acquired their skills from a personal interest in micros rather than from a formal course or program. To assure continuity among schools in a district and a consistent background of knowledge among building administrators, individual school systems can develop their own inservice programs, perhaps initiated by a principal who has introduced electronic applications for management tasks in his or her school. In the absence of a district computer coordinator or staff development expert, this principal can act as a mentor/trainer for his or her colleagues by developing, teaching, and modeling effective computer usage for administrative tasks.

Perhaps the greatest value of inservice for computer use is its potential for direct impact on individual schools. As administrators participate in staff development activities, they should anticipate increased independence in performing administrative tasks, more cooperative



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March 7-8	March 7-8
April 8-9	April 11-12
Bloomington, Ind.	Secaucus, N.J.
October 18-19	October 25-26
April 11-12	March 25-26

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work with building computer committees, better communication with district technology coordinators, and more satisfaction with the efficiency of school operations. And as informed advocates of computer use and more effective managers of computer-literate students and teachers, administrators can expect an additional benefit—increased credibility with their school faculties. □

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#### In the November issue. . .

##### "Social Responsibility"

*Educational Leadership* examines the challenge of preparing young people for citizenship in the modern world.

★ Ernest Boyer notes the reawakening interest in civic education and the growth of community service programs.

★ Donna Fowler reports evidence from a national survey showing that American teenagers lack understanding of what citizenship entails.

★ Walter Parker probes how the social studies program contributes to education for citizenship, suggesting ways schools can assess "civic virtue."

★ Tom Sobol explains New York state's controversial plan for a multicultural curriculum that will reflect the diverse heritages of American society.

A Contemporary Issues feature describes two school-university collaborations—one on the East Coast, one on the West—that sponsor a wide variety of activities intended to develop students' social consciousness.

Plus other heartening reports of programs in which youngsters are learning to be good citizens and compassionate human beings—as part of their schooling.

Coming in the December/January issue: "Choice" — conflicting views about the advisability of student and parent choice of schools, with reports on how the idea is actually working.

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