Does Your School Need a SWAT Team?

As long as there is technology in schools, there will be a need to include students in technology leadership programs. Educators recognize these programs' potential to encourage student leadership skills and to inspire teachers to integrate the newest technology into their instruction. Technology integration also leads to student-centered classrooms, which increases students' self-esteem (Davis, 1997).

There is an increasing number of schools that depend on student technology leadership programs for support and guidance, particularly at the middle level. Bracewell, Breuleux, Laferriere, Beniot, and Abdous (1998) write that integrating technology into the classroom "typically leads to increased student interest and motivation in learning, more student-centered classroom environments, and increased real-life or authentic learning opportunities." For example, the Students Working to Advance Technology (SWAT) program encourages students to use technology to enhance learning experiences.

The objectives of the SWAT program are to promote student leadership training while addressing technology competencies, providing outreach to the community through parent involvement, corporate support, and student community service, and encouraging national collaboration among student SWAT teams. The program's resource materials address intended learning

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outcomes, assessment strategies for student understanding, computer competencies, and student leadership skills. SWAT is based on the belief that although today's technology skills will become obsolete over time, the acquired skills of a thinker, an inquirer, a communicator, a risk-taker, and a knowledge-seeker will last a lifetime.

Students who participate in a SWAT program feel that they are active participants in the education process and that their contributions are valued. They develop a stronger sense of ownership

over their own learning and they also become popular as tech consultants among their peers—which can mean the difference between failure and success in school for some adolescents.

Cathy Williams, principal of East Garner Magnet Middle School in North Carolina, is enthusiastic about the program. "SWAT is a wonderful opportunity for our students to increase their skills as they prepare to enter the 21st century as competent and competitive individuals," she says. "SWAT provides our students with the opportunity to generate ideas, create plans, and see the plans through to fruition, all of which are necessary leadership skills. We are so fortunate to have talented students and teachers willing to collaborate to make our SWAT Club a success."

How SWAT Works

The SWAT program is made up of specialized task force teams, which address the technology goals and needs at a school. The teams can provide:

- Webmasters who create and maintain the school's Web site;
- Teacher support for Internet research and special projects;
- Computer buddies and support for younger students;
- Media assistance with school announcements and broadcasts; and
- Computer maintenance to resolve daily technical operations.

In addition, SWAT teams can provide valuable research on computer basics as well as new tech trends for school staff, parents, and the community. For example, SWAT adviser Anna Pollard trains students at East Garner Magnet Middle School to use new Web 2.0 tools and to apply them where appropriate in the school and community. Pollard's students design podcasts that instruct others on how to use programs like Access and Excel to prepare other students for the North Carolina Computer Skills test required of all eighth graders.

Julie Hill, another SWAT leader in

Lisbon, Iowa, is training her students in basic troubleshooting and maintenance of the 300 computers at her school. Her SWAT team consists of students acting as computer buddies, and others providing audio/visual support and advanced technology troubleshooting.

Creating a SWAT Program

A school's SWAT team can be created and directed by a motivated teacher, technology coordinator, parent volunteer, or a school district leader. The team can be comprised of any number of students who wish to form a structured group to advance the technology program at their school. The program allows students to advance their level of technical skills while learning about new trends in technology. Follow these nine steps to create a SWAT program at your school:

1. Assess the technology needs of your school and community;

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2. Communicate your findings to the administration, teachers, and community;
3. Develop your mission, goals, priorities, plan of action, and evaluation methods;
4. Announce the plan to the students via announcements and classroom visits;
5. Distribute applications and gain parent permission;
6. Conduct student interviews;
7. Select team members;
8. Train the team; and
9. Monitor and evaluate the program.

Newly learned technology skills and soaring student self-esteem are products of every SWAT program. As the team becomes an integral part of the school and community, its efforts increase student awareness, which in turn motivates other students to get involved. In this way, programs like SWAT promote and foster a generation of technology leadership in the middle grades. **P**

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References

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