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ABSTRACT

This document lists 55 ideas for organizing and lending computer equipment, switches, adapters, and software. The first section lists general organizational hints, including labeling of equipment, maintaining regular inventories, and establishing a crisis phone number and contact person to help people figure things out. The second section lists ideas for toys, switches, and adapters, including keeping a large supply of adapters, checking batteries before sending them home with families, and investing in switch interfaces. A section on computers and software recommends making several copies of the documentation that comes with each piece of software, and keeping in or on each disk sleeve the major commands used to make the program work. A fourth section contains check-out hints, including listing all items checked out as they are checked out and considering a self-checkout system for certain easy-to-access items. The next section includes recommendations for making the loans more available, including setting up regular drop-in hours at school and using stickers to color-code equipment to help people know what gets plugged into what. A final section on getting new inventory suggests checking with parents and staff about what equipment is most needed before spending a lot of money. (CR)

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IDEAS FOR ORGANIZING, STORING, AND USING EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS

GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL HINTS

If you have a central location where materials are checked out:

1. Label everything. Even (and especially!) label the cords for your computers.
2. Ensure that the labels you put on materials correspond to the labels you use (a) in your written inventories, and (b) in your storage areas (e.g, on drawers, walls, shelves, etc.).
3. Put labels to designate storage areas for certain materials. For example, put labels on drawers, sections of the wall, shelves, boxes, etc.
4. On your labels for storage areas, put word labels along with pictures. Pictures can be (a) line drawings; (b) xeroxes or cut-outs from catalogs; or (c) photos.
5. On your labels attached to materials and storage areas, also assign a number which is individualized for each and every piece of equipment.
6. Do regular inventories--not just when you think something has been lost or misplaced.
7. Maintain a "crisis" phone number and contact person to give help to folks when they can't figure things out.

TOYS, SWITCHES AND ADAPTERS

8. Keep a large supply of adapters of the sizes needed for your toys and switches. Ensure that the toy and switch are compatible size-wise before checking them out.
    a. If a family is taking a toy home and has a switch at home, know the size of the plug (you can even keep a record of it), so that you are sure of what size adapter to send home.
    b. Keep adapters on certain switches or toys, if the plug is a size that causes "problems." For example, keep an adapter on the 3/32" plug on your standard tape recorder, so that it can be readily used with an 1/8" or 1/4" switch.
    c. Post a chart in your check-out area, showing pictures of the different adapters and various combinations of switch-toy compatibility.
    d. If toys and switches are stored in classrooms, ensure that adapters of all sizes are kept in a convenient, central location for ready access.

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9. Take the batteries out of all toys, switches, and switch interfaces when not in use.
10. Check batteries before sending them home with families, taking them on the road in home-based programs, or checking them out of central locations.
11. Make it someone's job to re-charge batteries or keep a stock of batteries available.
12. If you use rechargeable batteries, be sure to keep a location for used batteries that is AWAY from your stock of charged batteries, to avoid confusion.
13. Don't buy adapted tape recorders. Just be sure to purchase standard tape recorders that have a "REMOTE" jack in the side. A 3/32" plug will fit it. If you don't have switches that small, just use an adapter.
14. Keep a stock of blank audiotapes for staff and families to use, to tape voices, favorite music, etc.
15. Keep a stock of blank audio outgoing message tapes for staff and families to use, for children to use for conveying messages on the tape recorder.
16. Make the investment in switch interfaces, if you don't have any. They can make or break the ease with which certain children can use adapted toys. Of all the switch interfaces, one of the most useful both at home and school is the environmental control unit, so that adaptive switches can be used with most electrical devices that plug into the wall.
17. Consider the growing line of "standard" toys that need very little or no adaptation. For example, the new Fisher-Price line has things that function like "roller switches" on some toys.
18. Don't wrap cables from switches around the switch when storing...it puts wear and tear on the cable.
19. Try storing switches in labeled ziplock bags. But be sure to punch lots of holes in the bags, as a safety precaution.

COMPUTERS AND SOFTWARE

20. Make several copies of the documentation that comes with each piece of software. Put the original away in a safety deposit box (or some other hidden area). Send home copies of software manuals when software is checked out. Also keep a copy on file in a central location in your program, so that staff and families can review it (if they want) before using or checking out software.
21. On each disk sleeve, record the list of all equipment needed (including computer peripherals) to use the software.
22. Keep in or on each disk sleeve the major commands used to make the program work.

23. Keep a notebook or filebox with short descriptions of all software in your inventory. Take these descriptions from sources such as software review books, the backs of the boxes the software came in, Closing The Gap's annual software review, etc.

24. Along with descriptions of software you keep on file (see #23), consider keeping a log that invites staff and families to write down what they liked or did not like about software. In this way, you can build on the experiences of a larger pool of users to help other users choose software.

25. If you have a Fingerprint card, do a small screen dump of a scene from the software and put it right on a sticker on the disk or disk sleeve. If you don't have this capability, you can xerox a picture from the software box.

26. Be sure to include a surge suppressor as required equipment with each computer that is used either at school or home. For equipment that is loaned to families to use at home, send home a three-prong adapter with your computer equipment, in case there are no accessible plugs.

27. Get, make, or have made good, solid containers for transporting computers and peripherals. In school, use sturdy carts on wheels. Outside of school, use well-padded carriers that allow folks to carry computers in their component pieces, to reduce their overall weight and bulkiness.

28. Make it a practice to help families load equipment in their vehicles, if they are checking out equipment for home use. Help them secure the equipment in their car, so that no damage will occur in transportation.

29. For computers that are used by different people for different purposes, with multiple peripherals, consider purchasing a porter. This will cut down on the number of times peripherals need to be connected and dis-connected from your computer.

CHECK-OUT HINTS

30. On all check-out materials, be sure to include the specific material checked out, along with either a description and/or the material's assigned inventory number.

31. Make a list of all items checked out to a family or staff member, as you check them out. Send the list with them. Tell them to check off each item as they put it back in the box or bag used for transporting. Then use the same list (or a copy) when you check them in.

32. Consider a self-checkout system for certain easy-to-access items. If you do that, ensure that your system makes it very easy for ANYONE to record what they have taken. For example, one self-checkout system we have heard about works like this: Each piece of equipment has a photo card, on which is written the name and the number corresponding to the inventory list. All photo cards are stored in clear plastic slotted pages in a centrally-located IN STOCK notebook. When someone checks something out, s/he takes the photo card out of the notebook and puts it into the clear plastic pocket in the CHECK-OUT NOTEBOOK.

33. POST YOUR CHECK-OUT PROCEDURES! Use clear, concise language to tell people what you expect.

34. If your program has rules regarding learning how to use equipment before checking it out, be sure that:

    a. The rules are prominently displayed.

    b. You set up staffing so that there is the flexibility to teach people how to use equipment, without making other people wait just to check something out.

35. Make it a practice to routinely ask staff and parents about what worked and didn't, and what they liked and didn't. Do this in a "formal" way with a little feedback form that folks fill out when they return equipment. Then use this information to change your practices, inventory, staffing, etc.

36. For family Loan Programs, have an area and stock of toys for children to play with while their parents are browsing, having things demonstrated, and checking out equipment.

MAKING IT EASIER ON FOLKS

37. Don't set up artificial rules for staff or family use of computers and software.

38. Set up regular (announced) "drop-in" hours at your school, so that staff can come in to try out equipment or software, to learn more, or just to experiment with your help.

39. Set up regular (announced) "drop-in" hours at your school, so that families can come in and use them or try out equipment/software with help.

40. Use stickers or permanent markings to "color-code" or otherwise help people to know what gets plugged into what.

41. Ensure that materials are accompanied by written directions--with drawings, if possible--to tell how to assemble and use them.

42. Use bags, boxes, and other containers that make transporting equipment as easy and as safe as possible. Attach to these containers the logo of your program, as well as your phone number.

43. Run frequent, short optional trainings on different topics.

44. Make Loan Program or central storage accessibility hours coincide with optimal use times.

45. Put directions for assembly/use into alternative formats such as large print, audiotape, or alternate languages.

GETTING NEW THINGS

46. Before spending a lot of money on new equipment, ask parents and staff what equipment is most needed. Be sure to check your check-out logs to see what items are most used--you may want to get more of certain items.

47. Don't use just your own preferences to decide which toys your program should have. Most important, use family preferences. Also think about the types of toys and preferences of age-equivalent peers.

48. Keep your stock of catalogs up-to-date, so that when you are ready to order, you don't have to send away or call for new catalogs.

49. When you see a catalog or newsletter announcement, write away or call immediately...don't put it in a "to-do" pile.

50. Visit and spend time in the exhibit halls of all conferences you attend.

51. Ask local equipment vendors in to do shows of new things, as a special feature of a meeting being held by your Loan Program or school program. Use this as a way to keep families and staff abreast of new things on the market.

52. Subscribe to good newsletters and magazines that routinely review new products.

53. SHOP AROUND! But remember that things get a lot of wear and tear, so you want to guarantee reasonable quality.

54. Build in lots of time and money for repair and cleaning of everything.

55. Make it a practice to call vendors and ask about new products, things you have heard about, or how to use things you have gotten. Don't let things sit on the shelf!

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