

# Five Ways To Get The Most Out of Your Computer Lab Right Now (without spending a dime)

- Lab Schedule
- Free Programs
- Desktop Folders
- Teacher Demonstrations
- Faculty Meeting in Lab

Computer labs are not inexpensive; that's for sure. Today's labs, even those purchased five years ago, are a gold mine for our students. Is your school taking advantage of Web 2.0 technologies and innovative ideas for those machines down the hall? Here are five ways to get the most out of your computer lab right now.

## 1. Create a firm lab schedule for each class in the school to utilize the computers.

This sounds simple enough, but many schools do not formally schedule when teachers should attend the lab with their students. If teachers are given a set time to attend computers each week, even those reluctant to use technology have a starting point; a foot in the door. This step, in conjunction with the following recommendations, will not only make going to computers an easy experience; it will make it a regular one.

## 2. Utilize the surplus of FREE educational programs and websites available to you and your students.

Money is no longer an issue when it comes to resources for the teachers. Thanks to a plethora of free programs and safe websites, preparing the computers (even outdated ones) for your children is a cinch. Most of these stand-alone applications are very small, and the

academic websites don't necessarily require the latest computer capabilities.

Visit [www.planetbravo.com/links](http://www.planetbravo.com/links) for a California content standards-based approach to educating with the web. Websites are just the beginning. Visit [www.k12opentech.org](http://www.k12opentech.org) to read about "Open Technologies" and how they are saving school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars while giving children access to innovative learning and productivity tools.

## 3. Create two prominent folders on the desktops of the lab computers that contain shortcuts to: "Programs" and "Websites."

Integrating technology into the curriculum does not have to be stressful. With two prominent folders on the desktops filled with shortcuts to websites and programs, teachers can simply direct the students to click, launch and begin exploring. This method is already being employed by scores of schools to great success.

Fun fact: Did you know that you can simply drag the address of a website

from the address bar onto your desktop or into a folder and it will form an icon link to that website?

## 4. Conduct a survey for your teachers that asks for technology integration ideas. Then compile and share with the faculty.

Providing tech-savvy teachers the chance to share and demonstrate their innovative lessons is a thrill for them... and an eye-opener for others. One short demonstration or write-up each month will place a solid spotlight on technology integration and familiarize teachers with its potential in the classroom.



## 5. Hold a faculty meeting in the computer lab.

Holding a faculty meeting in the computer lab not only gives you the chance to expose every teacher to the lab environment, but you can take a moment to have everyone go to the district and school website and see what is currently posted. Visit some of the websites listed in this document and have the teachers compile activity ideas for their scheduled lab time.

Sure, there are dozens of approaches to improving your school's computer lab. Some might entail investing in software or a lab aide. Nevertheless, these five steps have been proven effective as first steps; especially in schools aimed at placing an emphasis on increased, competent technology use.

Danny Pezzotta  
Academic Director

## Three Advanced Steps to Achieve Even More...

### • If you have a computer server, give students their own login accounts.

Students in grades 2-8 should be given the chance to be responsible for a username and password, not to mention the opportunity to save their work remotely and retrieve it from all school computers via their usernames.

### • If possible, utilize PTA or school funds for a tech aide to oversee lab time.

Having a capable aide available during computer class makes coming to the lab much less intimidating for teachers who may avoid it.

### • Use Screen-Sharing applications such as Apple Remote Desktop for Macs or NetSupport School for Windows to teach.

Sure, SmartBoards and LCD projectors are great for some classrooms, but a computer lab already has personal TV screens ready to go in front of each of your students. Why do they need to look across the room at a wall? Bring the learning to them with this very engaging form of teaching.



[www.planetbravo.com](http://www.planetbravo.com)

## PlanetBravo

Since 2003, PlanetBravo programs have helped local schools achieve more with integrated technology units and enrichment classes. From standards-based productivity lessons to dazzling multimedia projects, students explore technology while developing critical skills for the 21st century.

PlanetBravo offers online resources, school-day curricula, after-school enrichment, and its award-winning multimedia summer camps.

## At A Glance

- Based in Los Angeles.
- Programs in over 20 schools.
- Over 2,000 students in 2007.
- Currently partnered with local schools teaching day-time K-5 technology courses in basic skills and content-standards integration.
- After-school enrichment courses include web design, animation, video game creation, robotics, and digital video editing, to name a few.

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