

As a technologically literate educator, I have a firm belief that technology has the potential to enhance any student's experience in the classroom. As an educator with computer-savvy students, I have come to realize that many students are not only able, but *eager* to use computers and the Internet to learn independently. I believe that improving student access to the Internet should be a priority for these early years of the Twenty-First Century. Unfortunately, I recognize that obstacles exist which will slow our society's progress in this direction. The most significant problems include limited technology in the classroom, lack of Internet access in students' homes, and computer-illiterate educators.

My state boasts that "there is a computer in every classroom," but placing a single computer in a classroom of twenty-five or thirty students does little more than give the teacher an electronic grade book. To fully take advantage of the Internet, schools must place at least enough computers per classroom to accommodate six or eight students at a time. Even for teacher-oriented whole-class instruction, the computer will be of limited use unless the instructor has a computer display large enough for the entire class to see (such as projectors or large-screen displays). If the computer screen cannot be read by students on the opposite side of the classroom, most of the students will not benefit from the computer's presence.

Of course, students could be given Internet-centered activities to complete at home, but many families still do not have Internet access. If a student is unable to use computers or the Internet at home and is unable to travel to a friend's house, the homework will not be completed. In even my limited teaching experience, I have seen a clear divide between the level of engagement and growth demonstrated by students with home Internet access and those without. One of the many consequences of limited home access is

that even when students are given Internet access at school, those who do not have access at home cannot navigate the Internet efficiently. Despite the efforts of website designers to provide novice-friendly interfaces, the Internet as a whole takes some practice to get used to.

Finally, too many educators have limited skill in using what technology they have been given. Professional development programs exist which give educators instruction in using computers and the Internet as powerful educational resources, but workshops and courses which meet only a handful of times after school or on weekends can only accomplish so much. Teachers, too, need to access the Internet at home with some frequency in order to become skilled in its navigation and use. Computer use is like any skill — only frequent, extended use can build fluency.

With improved Internet access at school and at home, as well as greater technological fluency in our educators, our education system can truly enter the Twenty-First Century. Without these improvements, educators will find themselves increasingly disconnected from those students whose technological abilities and expectations differ widely from their own. The tools we need to greatly enhance our students' learning exist. These tools are affordable for most communities, especially with government subsidization. We as educators, community leaders, and parents must now find ways to make sure that access to these becomes universal so that everyone can benefit.