

E-Z Audits: Taking the Sting Out of Accountability
(or, if you prefer...
Accountability Made E-Z)

By

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INTRODUCTION

Accountability is a HUGE issue in schools today—and, with the persistent encroachment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)¹ mandates, it will become still bigger. In all likelihood, this spells trouble for you! Why?? Because here is just *one more thing* for you to juggle in your role as an educational leader.

In an effort to deal with this dilemma, the National Center for Technology Planning (NCTP) offers a variety of services, including a multi-level, comprehensive, unbiased technology audit to help your school assess your current situation—substantiating the progress you have made, as well as the improvements you desire to initiate.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

The following five **QUICK-START** guidelines will help you achieve success in your accountability efforts:

1. **ATTITUDE**

To help you lead your peers in achieving a healthy attitude about technology accountability, here are some guiding questions:

- I. Does everyone understand the importance of technology in a student's life (in and out of school)?

¹ No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, P.L. 107-110 (HR-1), United States Congress, 2001.

2. Does everyone have a good grasp of the important role that technology can play, potentially, in enriching the life of your community—and how the school can be a major “leverage point” in this relationship?
3. Does everyone feel comfortable using technology—in their teaching and their “regular” lives?
4. Does the school have a written, clear statement of philosophy regarding technology?

- The first key to successful accountability is to develop a good *attitude*. This may sound trite or unimportant, but it is absolutely crucial—as a matter of fact, it’s foundational!

- Attitude is contagious. If a negative attitude is allowed to exist, then it can spread until it completely pervades the school environment, On the other hand, if an upbeat, can-do attitude is developed, nurtured, and encouraged, the entire school community will face challenges more readily and embrace an expectancy for winning!

- Winning schools WANT to show their accountability. They *yearn* to demonstrate—give evidence to—the excellence they have achieved. Yes, they even want to discover their weaknesses so the weak areas can be made strong (or removed, if necessary). This is an **ATTITUDE** of excellence.

- You, as the leader, can take on the responsibility of helping your colleagues adopt a “can-do” attitude about technology accountability. You can show your peers how, as a coherent team, you all can attack this much-feared task and transition it into “a piece of cake.”

2. **ORGANIZATION**

- This is the most comprehensive phase when preparing for an accountability audit. You will group a broad range of activities into this category—in each instance, your goal will be to bring *order* to what has been casual, chaotic, or merely rejected.

- To *organize* assumes that you *collect*, first. You can’t organize what you don’t have (think of an interior designed who walks into an empty house.) For example, data must be collected and *then* organized. You will arrange data into categories that make them more usable.

- Several aids to help you organize your materials and information may be:

- √ inventories

- √ surveys
- √ needs assessments
- √ talent searches

Each of these is a “gathering” tool; a device to help you glean information about what is going on in your school (and impact area). Upon completion of gathering your data, you will want to have a system for organizing and categorizing, so you then can analyze your findings in order to prepare a synthesis report. When a robust, yet appropriate, system is in place, your job in this area can be made far less burdensome.

- Form *teams* of people—people who will “jump in” and accept mature responsibility for accomplishing the task before you. Become like a heat-seeking missile in your pursuit of data and other information that will help to portray the actual picture of what occurs in your school. To help you both collect *and* organize, your peers, parents, and students may help by identifying such things as:

- √ areas of future emphasis
- √ past successes
- √ outdated inventory (equipment, hardware, software, supplies, materials, etc.)
- √ policy statements and/or documents
- √ building/campus blueprints

- You will think of many more activities, categories, and areas in your school environment that need to be organized. As you approach each of these, you will learn more about your school. To the extent you document your experiences, your accountability report will be enhanced. The result of this will be that you—as well as your peers, parents, and students—understand your school and community more completely. Suddenly, the “onus” of accountability won’t seem like such a bad thing at all. To the contrary, you will become immersed in an attitude of “bragfest”!

3. **MAINTENANCE**

- Once you have ensured that a fresh *order* in your school has been achieved, your task will be to *sustain* that kind of condition. This is much like when you were a teenager and you had to clean your bedroom. After you had expended the significant effort to *organize* your room, you felt a compulsion to keep it that way. A clean room is easier to maintain than a dirty room! Such is the case with a school, as well. A school *in order* has an

easier path to success than one in which chaos, suspicion, and “happenstance” represent the order of the day.

- An effective maintenance program will be supported by sound data collection. This means that, as data are collected and examined, those data become critical tools in *keeping* the school on track. Progress isn’t really progress unless it can be measured!

4. **GROWTH**

- During the “self-study” that occurs during the *organization* and *maintenance* phases, you will plot plans that help ensure growth into the future.

- As you compile plans for the future, be sure to consider adding them to your technology plan² so you can track your progress as you implement these improvements.

- Growth is sufficiently essential to the health and welfare of a school community that someone in the district should be designated to be in charge of nurturing and perpetuating that growth. The person who accepts this responsibility must be aggressive in *encouraging* without engaging in unnecessary *pressing*.

- A growth plan, as a component of an accountability program, demonstrates to auditors or constituents that the school is really serious about improvement.

5. **CREDIBILITY**

In order for a report on accountability to be worthwhile, it must have credibility. So, how would you go about ensuring credibility? Simple!

- First, you cannot *truly* examine your own school and then develop a fully meaningful critique. This *must* be done by someone else, preferably a “disinterested third party.” Most external funding sources take the correct, appropriate path with regard to evaluation—self-reported data are viewed with the understanding of bias that comes when a person or entity attempts to evaluate self. While the evaluation has some merit, it cannot be taken too seriously without objective input from one who has no direct connection with that

² All schools in the United States are required to have a written technology plan on file, to have had that technology plan approved by an appropriate state agency (such as State Department of Education, or its designee), and to engage in annual updates of the technology plan. Existence of an approved plan is required in order for schools to qualify for e-Rate discounts, as well as other federal education funds.

entity. Hence, NCTP recommends that you hire an outside consultant or evaluator who can provide the kinds of services you need.

- Assure that you gain a clear and mutual understanding with your auditor/consultant of the type report that will be produced as a result of the audit.

- Check with your district central office, and then your state department of education, to ensure that what the auditor produces is in alignment with what they need from you in order to satisfy that portion of the accountability expectations.

- Assure that your auditor/consultant will join you in presenting an oral, summative report to the school board, teaching faculty, and community, as well, if you desire such.

When you master these five guidelines, you will certainly find the whole notion of *technology accountability* to be just another of the natural processes that occur in a forward-thinking school. NCTP will be delighted to help you and your peers through any portion of the accountability, planning, or audit projects you undertake.

For assistance, contact Dr. Larry S. Anderson, Founder/Director
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