

Backwash Elementary
Learning Disabilities Resource Room

Computer Loan-Own Project

- Steve Wood -- LD teacher
- -- Instructional Assistant



The title above is a bit much. Here's what's going on.

In August, I got a fantastic deal on some (12) older Macintosh LC III computers, complete with keyboard, mouse, and speakers. While there currently aren't enough computers for all the children in the LD resource room, it would be a shame not to use the units at hand. But...how to decide who gets one!!!

The computers appear to be most useful for our language arts students in spelling practice and for writing (typing) assignments. The units will be "loaned" to our current full-time and part-time language arts students, beginning with the sixth graders and working our way down through fourth grade. If we are able to acquire more good, inexpensive units, we'll go on down through the grades for full-time and part time language arts students before beginning with students in other areas we teach.

The two immediate areas where these units can help will be in spelling and in writing. Each computer will include the spelling files for that child's spelling tests for the entire school year. These computers have old, but working floppy drives, so students can write assignments on the computer, save the file to disk, and bring the disk to school for further work and/or printing.

These computers will be a loan to the student, with actual ownership of the computer and/or software remaining with Mr. Wood and/or Backwash Elementary School for the 2000-2001 school year. This allows us to use school site license software on the computers. If we had to pay separately for the programs involved, this program simply wouldn't happen!

At the conclusion of the 2000-2001 school year, the computers will become the property of the student. Cost to you: Zip!

Well, that's not quite true. You'll need a good sturdy table in a clean dry place for the computer. The computer and monitor will require two 3-prong receptacles as well, with the speakers using a third. (A power strip often is the easiest answer.)

That's the plan. I haven't had an attorney look at this as yet, but think it is legal. I also really haven't figured out what we'll do if a unit breaks and can't be repaired. While I can do some Macintosh repairs, that's not what I need to be doing during school hours and my evening time is precious. But...I think it's better to just dive in and get started and we'll work out the details as we go along.

Page one was the good news.

The bad news is that these are 1992-1994 computers and could fail at any time.

They are slow--25 MHz in computer terms. That limits what programs can be run on the computer. But, 25 MHz is plenty fast enough for typing.

They are limited in RAM -- various units have from 8 to 20 MB RAM. What that means is that you have enough memory (RAM) to turn on the computer and run one program at a time.

The hard drives on these computers are 160 MB in size. There's very little room for storing files on the hard drive.

These computers do not have a built-in CD-ROM drive. That's not too big a deal, as most computer programs on CD require a newer computer than this one anyway.

While there is a modem port on these computers, no modem will be provided and the necessary software is not installed. The LC III is really not suitable for internet access.

Upgrading these computers -- buying better, faster, or more components -- would almost certainly cost more than buying a brand new low-cost computer! If you want a better computer for your child, it would be better to save for a new unit instead of trying to improve one of these computers.

So...I decided to just put these units out to our students. We'll use the units as long as they last. When they fail, and all computers eventually fail, there almost certainly won't be a free replacement from school.

In practice, the computers will be brought to school one at a time. They will receive a final mechanical and software check. The receiving child will be able to use the computer in the classroom for a few days under supervision to help them build their computer skills. Then...I'll bring the computer to your home to set it up.

You'll need to have a table ready in a clean, dry space close to a good electrical outlet. If a three-prong adaptor will be needed, please be sure to get it. You may wish to purchase a power strip to make things easier.