

Sustainability Study – Data Report

The Project: In 2009, Digital Wish launched the *School Modernization Initiative*, a one-computer-per-child initiative in 28 schools, directly providing 79 teachers with curriculum and training, and 1,294 students in grades 4-6 with computers. After the first year of implementation, the schools hit a stage where they were comfortably absorbing the change and started asking questions about sustainability. The A. D. Henderson Foundation commissioned Digital Wish to study how schools are sustaining their technology initiatives, and develop free resources that would model best practices.



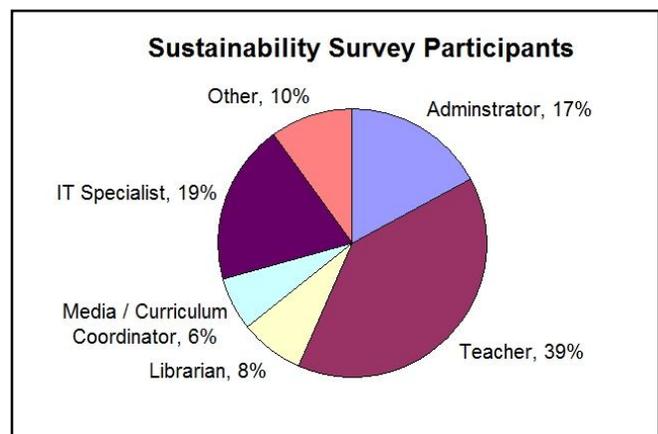
Participants:

- 242 Survey Respondents
- 27 Phone Interviews
- 28 School Site Implementations of 1:1 Computing Initiatives

We asked how they sustain their technology initiatives.

About the Survey: The survey data was collected through anonymous surveys conducted on www.surveymonkey.com. The data collected here shows anecdotal trends, self-reported by technology leaders who volunteered to participate in the project. Digital Wish does not conduct formal research, nor do they make any conclusive research-based claims.

If you would like to cite this study, please credit: © Digital Wish 2012



About Digital Wish: Digital Wish brings technology to American classrooms in order to prepare students to thrive in the global economy. At www.digitalwish.org, teachers make technology wishes, and donors make those wishes come true with contributions, bringing technology to needy classrooms in all 50 states. Since August 2009, Digital Wish has granted over 29,800 classroom technology wishes through its online network of over 60,000 teachers, and delivered over \$12 million in technology products to American classrooms directly impacting over 500,000 students. [Read our research.](#)

Executive Summary

We asked 269 educators how they sustain their technology programs. The *most successful schools* develop multiple sources of revenue, they trigger strong community engagement, and they prioritize daily support and training for teachers.

Sources of Funding: While 88% of respondents reported that technology budgets are one of their largest sources of funding. Many other viable sources of funding are going un-realized by the majority of respondents. For example:

- Nearly half (46%) have not used other budget line items for technology.
- 55% of respondents' schools have not applied for any grants.
- 43% reported they do not do any fundraising.
- 66% do not use student mentors who could support the technology program.
- Over 1/3 say they do not receive donations from outside organizations.

Untapped Opportunities: The most successful schools intentionally develop strong community ties, which in turn generates multiple sources of revenue. This lowers the risk that their technology initiative will lose funding with market shifts.

- Only 14% of schools report “re-budgeting” as a major source of technology funding, however it’s the *most viable and immediately available strategy*.
- Over half of schools are not applying for grants. Respondents shared that this is one of their most effective sources of funding, and over a quarter of schools who apply are raising over \$20,000 per year.
- Most schools do not make an immediate connection between raising community engagement and sustainability. By simply raising awareness, we open up immediate community support networks for many schools.
- Fundraising is frequently viewed as “something the PTA does.” However, successful schools integrate fundraising into every school event. One in five schools who fundraised actually raised over \$20,000 each year.

Support and Training: Schools inexperienced with adopting technology emphasize hardware purchases, while more advanced schools focus on the importance of training for sustainability.

- 51% (over half) received technology training just 1-4 times a year.
- The most successful schools integrate a peer-coaching model that provides ongoing and readily available support for their teachers *on a daily basis*.
- Student mentorship programs typically reduce support costs and increase availability of support for both students and teachers.

Looking Ahead: The data suggests that the majority of schools already have funding sources available that can be harnessed for technology programs. The 1:1 implementation experience revealed that schools can use community outreach as a trigger to generate a wider variety of these funding sources. The interviews showed that schools with multiple revenue streams are less vulnerable to budget cuts. The true path to sustainability actually comes when a cultural shift occurs and technology becomes an assumed part of the learning community with readily available support and training.

Project Overview

The Challenge: A clear path to sustainable funding for technology programs has not yet been forged. The sheer magnitude of change each school faces with technology adoption can be daunting and considerations for long-term programmatic sustainability often go unchecked. Schools will commonly raise enough money to fund their initial purchase of technology without a clear plan for future funding. There's a pending risk that all the work that went into implementing a modern learning environment could be lost when the equipment becomes obsolete, or when funding priorities shift.

Data from the Survey: 242 educators responded to the anonymous survey. The data collected provides an interesting snapshot of how participants are funding their programs. It revealed that some of the most effective strategies for sustainable funding are largely overlooked and untapped.

Data from the Interviews: Digital Wish identified 27 technology leaders from across the nation and conducted interviews to ask how they were sustaining their initiatives. Their responses were often surprising and we amassed an incredible library of creative funding ideas. As a trend, nearly all of the most sustainable programs were funded by multiple sources. Administrators running programs with just a single source of funding voiced “fear” that their initiatives were vulnerable to cancellation. Experienced administrators were adamant about the need for training as an integral part of every school day. Nearly all had supplemented convention workshop-based professional development with teacher peer-support systems and daily mentor programs.

Changing Culture

To truly achieve sustainability, schools need to change the mindset of the entire school community. Successful schools aren't just implementing a technology program, they are changing culture so that technology becomes an assumed part of every teaching day. It's no longer “optional.” As the new culture takes hold and the community engagement grows, the perceived need for modern schools becomes paramount until technology becomes a permanent “line item” in the budget.

Data from the Classroom: The implementation of 1:1 computing in 28 schools revealed that the key to developing multiple funding streams lies in strong community engagement, which is also typically the *most ignored* strand in every initiative. The schools with the most sustainable programs all took a blended approach to funding, harvesting a wide array of revenue opportunities from across their communities – each of which contributed a portion of their total financial need. The stronger PTAs would fundraise and some sought out foundational grants. The business community made the connection between a strong school technology program and preparing their own future workforce – and they made donations. The most engaged communities voted for higher budgets for school technology. However, the burden of community engagement rests entirely on the schools. If the schools don't trigger these community connections, they simply won't materialize.

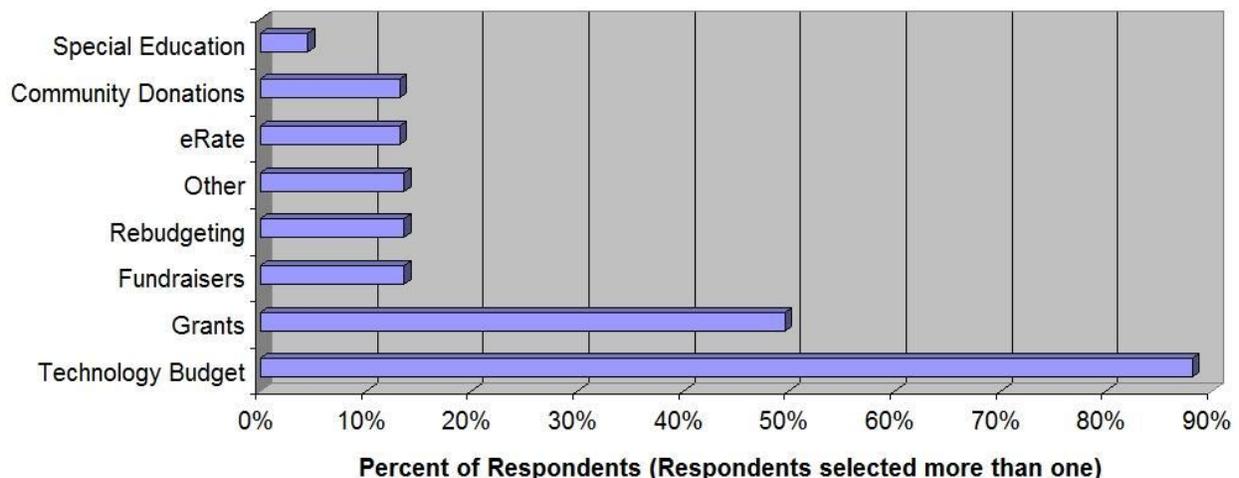
Funding Sources

Sources of Funding (Majority of Tech Funding)

**Responses add up to more than 100% because respondents could select more than one major source for technology funding.*

- 88% are using technology budgets for the majority of purchases. Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents rely mostly on their own district's technology budget. Another 14% are relying on state and federal technology budgets for the majority of their technology needs.
- 50% are using grants.
- 14% are using fundraising. 14% are using re-budgeting.
- 13% are using eRate. 13% are using community donations.
- 5% are using special education funds.
- **Quote:** "Technology funding should be in the curriculum and instruction budget because teachers are using technology to deliver curriculum. It shouldn't be a separate item. It's a need, not a want."

Largest Sources of Technology Funding



Outside Funding

- 35% say they do not receive donations from outside organizations.

School Boards

School board support was mixed.

- 38.8% of respondents reported their school boards raised the technology budget in the last few years.
- **Quote:** "The school board is decreasing the tech budget in 2012-13 by 30%!"

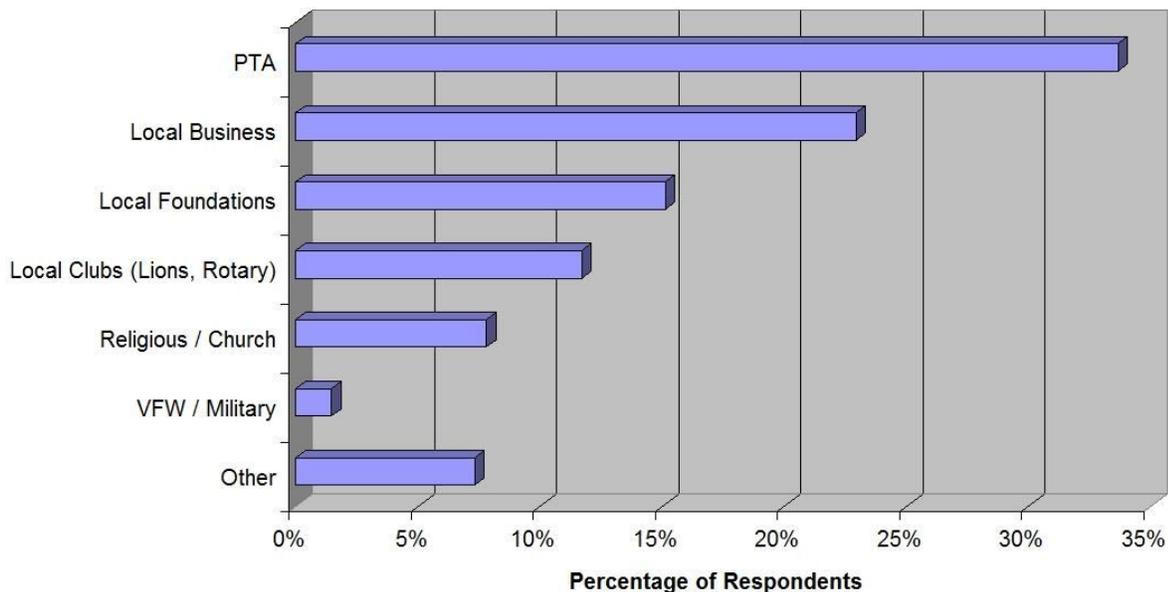
Donors

Most Common Donors

Of the respondents that reported having donors, this is the percentage of respondents that reported each source.

- VFW / Military 1%
- Religious / Church 8%
- Local Clubs (Lions, Rotary) 12%
- Other 15%
- Local Foundations 15%
- Local Business 23%
- PTA 34%

Most Common Benefactors



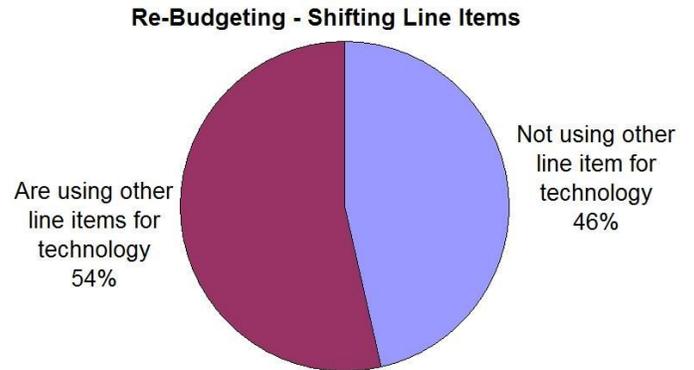
Donor Advice

- **Quote:** “Hit up the engineers in your town. They rarely are approached for donations and they love it when you can put their name on something they have donated. The lawyers in the community love to donate as well - I've also had great luck with the dentists because these groups are not typically approached for funding.”
- **Quote:** “Real estate agents and banks will donate because a good school raises the property value in the region.”
- **Quote:** “Sometimes you just have to ask and you shall receive. Asking the right person is the most challenging accomplishment.”
- **Quote:** “Contacts in the ‘right’ places really help. This is not something always attainable but we ask parents and companies for referrals.”

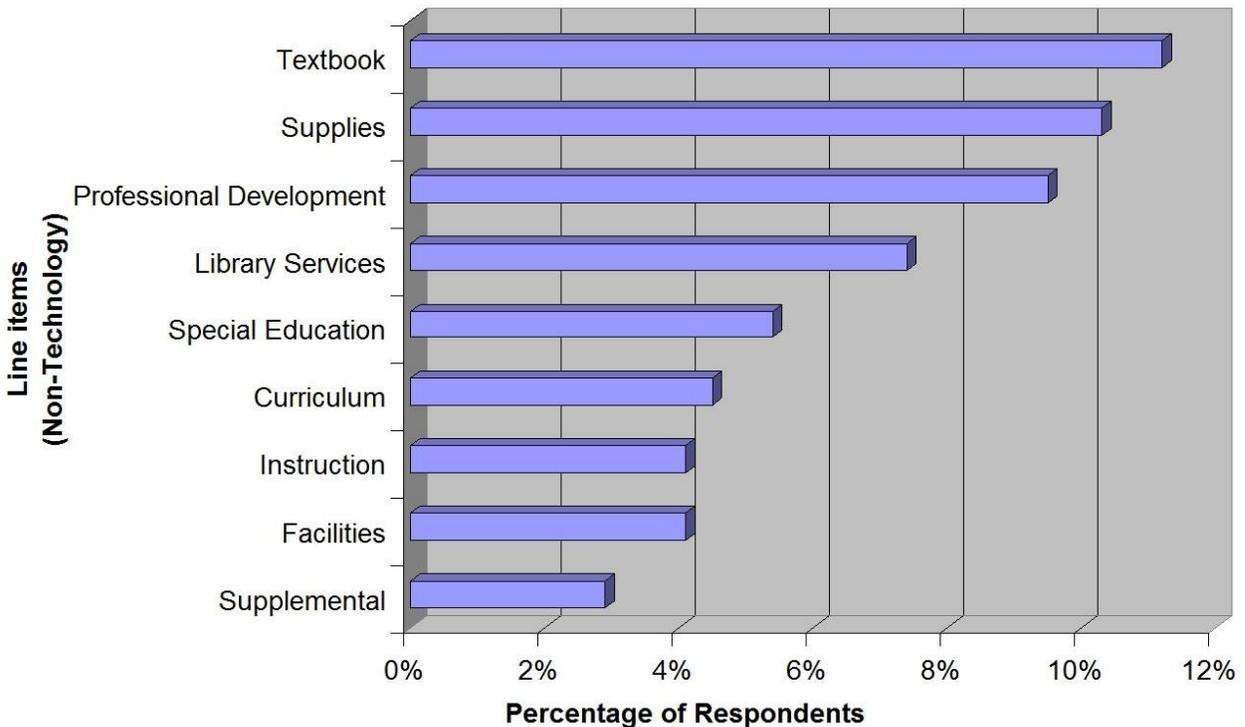
Re-Budgeting

Re-Budgeting:

- Nearly half (46%) stated that they have not used other lines in the budget for technology.
- Less than 1% reported using the “Copy” budget for technology.
- None reported using substitute teachers, Medicaid, or counseling for technology.
- **Quote:** “Re-Budgeting is a HUGE area that people need to know about.”



Re-Budgeting - Most Common (non-technology) Budget Line Items Used to Fund Technology Programs



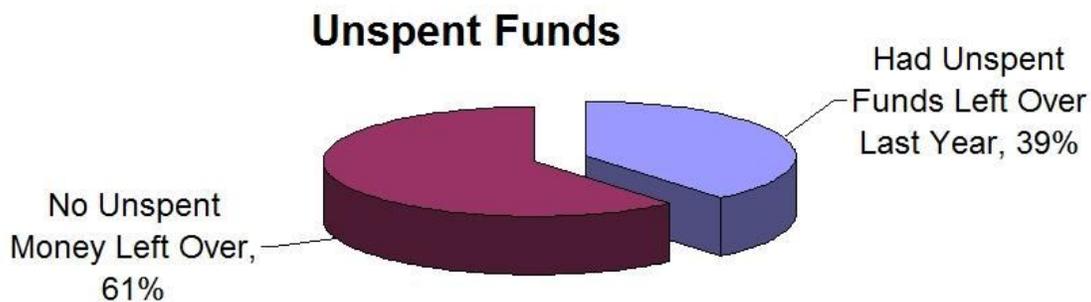
Re-Budgeting Quotes:

- **Quote:** “Fund tech line items in a consistent manner every year, even in windfall years, or you will never get the approved dollar amount back. Convince the board that this is not a one time expense, this is an ongoing expense.”

- **Quote:** “If it is technology to be used for curriculum, then we use curriculum funds to purchase it. Re-budgeting isn’t even necessary. We don’t have a separate “technology” budget line. This helps us focus on the purpose of the technology as a part of the job we do. Not something separate.”
- **Quote:** “The textbook category is outdated. It should be software instead of textbook.”
- **Quote:** “We have struggled with budgeting the funds where they are all under the control of the Director of Technology.”
- **Quote:** “Hardware and software shouldn't be listed in administrative overhead unless they are for administrators. Hardware and software used by students and teachers should be a direct cost for students.”

Unspent Funds

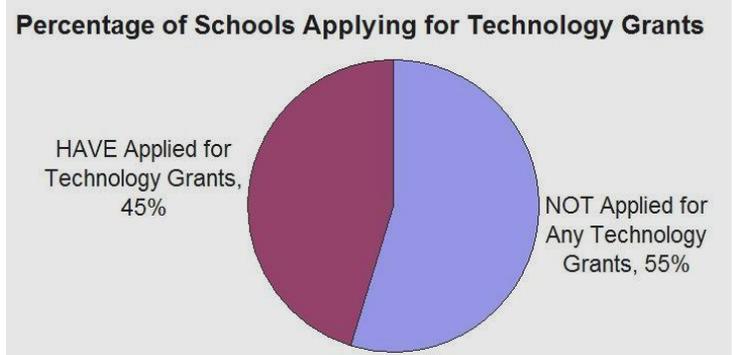
- Only 61% of schools spent down ALL their budget categories.



Grants

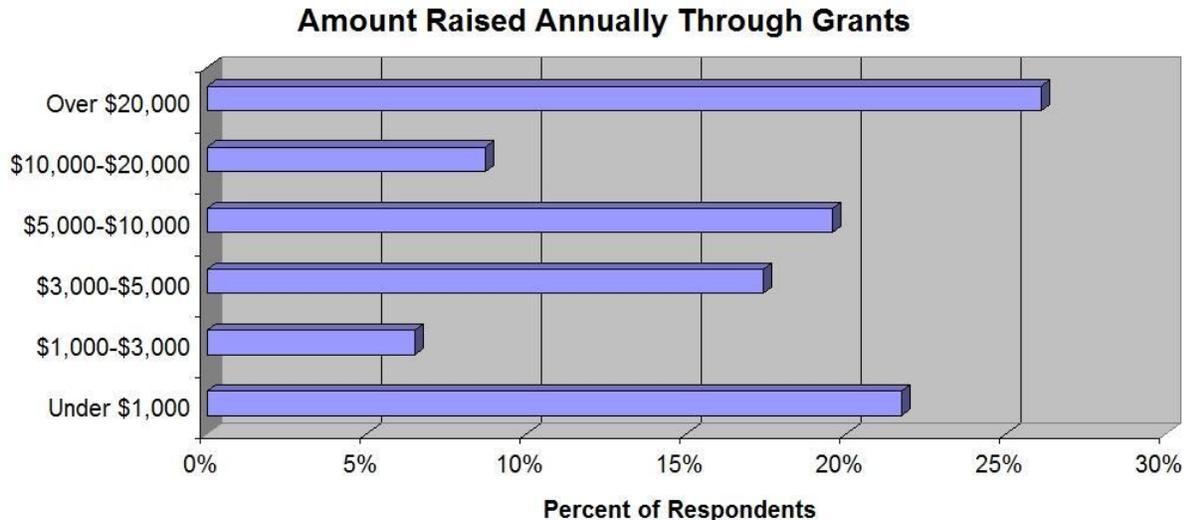
Applying for Grants

- 55% of respondents have NOT applied for any grants.
- For those who have applied, an IT person (11%) or professional grant writer (12%) has done the work.
- 56% said that they do not have anyone specific to write grants.



Amount Raised Through Grants

- For those who have applied, 35% raised \$10,000 or more each year through grants.
- For those who have applied, over one quarter (26%) raised \$20,000 or more.



Grant Quotes

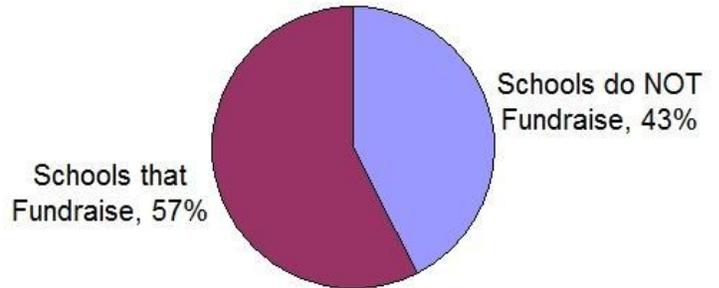
- **Quote:** “Grants are easy to get if you plan. Pick three major topics or areas that you want to address for about 2 years. Gather the research to support why you want to go that way and your schools data. It takes about 3 hours to write the first grant...and about 15 - 20 minutes there after.”
- **Quote:** “Foundation grants are an excellent return on time.”
- **Quote:** “Even the smaller grants (\$1000 or less) are well worth the effort! It's amazing what you can find and fund with just a little money!”
- **Quote:** “The T3 grant was very successful. It targeted math and science grades 5-8 and we were able to put a great deal of technology in classrooms to impact instruction. It was awarded a consortium with other districts, which could sometimes be complicated but we worked together and leveraged our district strengths.”
- **Quote:** “Too much time was needed in documenting the results of the grant. In the end, it was a lot of work for not a lot of money. I find this is a problem with many grants.”
- **Quote:** “The last couple of times it left us with a bad taste in our mouth. It appeared that the state had basically decided who was going to get the grants prior to the process being completed. Little did we know that we had less than a snowball's chance of getting one.”
- **Quote:** “We share a grant writer between the town and district to save cost.”

Fundraisers

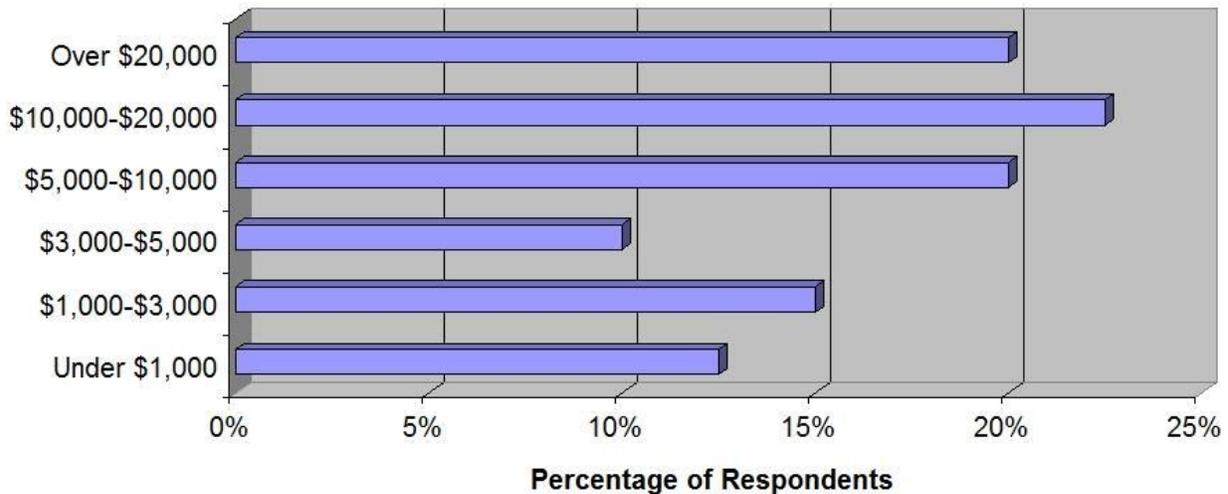
Fundraiser Data

- 43% said they do not do any fundraising.
- PTAs are reported as the most frequent source of fundraising initiatives.
- The majority of fundraisers were product sales (36%).
- Gift Basket Raffles (11%), Bake Sales (17%), and School Carnivals (17%).
- 43% of schools that fundraised reported raising over \$10,000 each year.
- 20% of schools that fundraised reported raising over \$20,000.

School Fundraising



Amount Raised Through Fundraisers

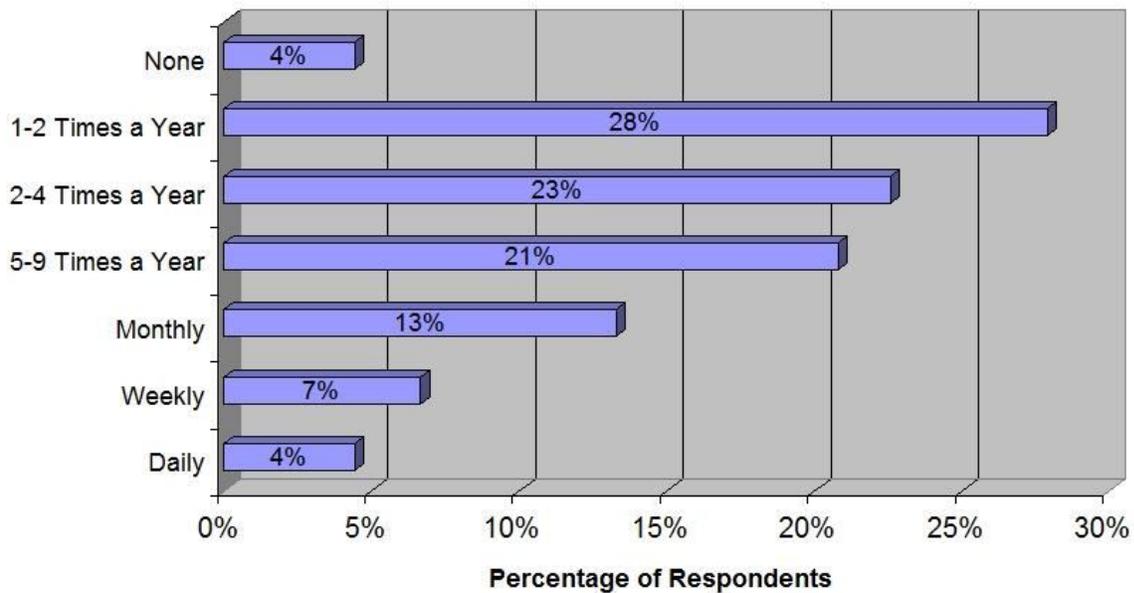


Professional Development

Professional Development

- 4% of respondents don't have any technology professional development.
- 51% (over half) only have technology training 1-4 times a year.

Frequency of Professional Development for Technology



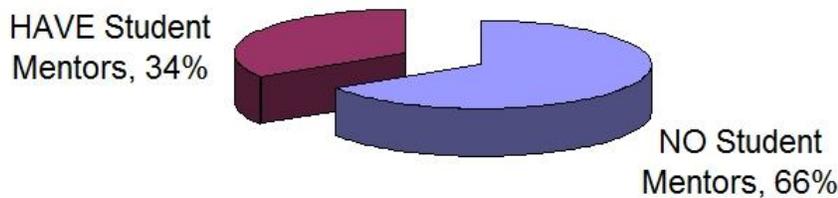
Teacher Stipends

- 76% do not give their teachers annual stipends to spend as they wish.

Student Mentors

- 66% do not use student mentors.

Schools With Student Mentor Programs



For More Information

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This report was authored by [Heather Chirtea and Eric Bird](#). Eric is a 15 year classroom teaching veteran, and currently the Program Manager of the [School Modernization Initiative](#), putting one-computer-per-child programs into 30 schools. Heather has co-authored five books on classroom technology, designed 60 hands-on technology seminars, and written over 5,000 standards-based test questions. She is the founder of [Digital Wish](#), a nonprofit bringing technology to K-12 classrooms.