

Tues, Dec 8, 2009

Spend tech dollars wisely

Patricia Schroeder, a former congresswoman from Denver and president of the American Publisher's Association for 12 years, told School Matters in a recent interview how best to preserve money in a time of shrinking budgets. Her advice: Be wary of technology.

Schroeder cited microfiche, CD-ROMs and e-readers that never get used as big wastes of money. When School Matters went to the Web catalog page where the Palo Alto Unified School District libraries CD-ROM catalog is listed, it found that none of the 54 CD-ROM titles in the catalog at JLS were checked out.

"Kids need textbooks more than they need screen time," Schroeder said. "Studies have shown that learning from a screen is not as good as learning from a physical book."



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She acknowledged that the distractions from content and constant interruptions inevitable when using a screen connected to the Internet are a big factor in detracting from learning.

PTAs in Palo Alto pay for a lot of technology. Gunn and Palo Alto high school PTAs raised the money to buy digital projectors for all their classrooms. Gunn PTSA purchased the software for its language lab to go from cassettes to the digital age. Librarians and teachers routinely ask their PTAs for everything from sophisticated "sound equalization" systems in elementary school classrooms so teachers can be heard to digital voice recorders so students in high school English classes can learn how to interview and transcribe. How do they decide what technology to buy?

Schroeder advised: "If they buy this tech, two questions have to be answered. A, do they know how to use it, and B, can they find someone to service it?"

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