



Holding a Student Technology Showcase at the State Capital

By Ric Wiltse, Executive Director, Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning

The Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) has presented a Student Technology Showcase at the Michigan capitol building in Lansing every year since 2001. The event was patterned after a similar event at the state capitol building in Springfield, Illinois, which was funded by AT&T.

AT&T approached our organization about holding a similar event in Michigan. We visited the event in Springfield and felt it aligned with our mission.

At our showcase, about 35 teams of K-12 students set up technology demonstrations in the Capitol building rotunda to show state legislators how they are using technology in the classroom to enhance learning. The event has a side benefit of encouraging continued legislative financial support of technology in schools.

School teams find enormous value in the planning as well as participation. Students come prepared to explain their technology demonstration to legislators, visitors and other students. In turn, they get to see and be inspired by other students' use of technology. For many, it is also their first visit to the state capitol.

The project has evolved as technology has evolved. Initially, students brought in clunky desktop computers and Palm Pilots. Today, they bring paper-thin computer screens, electronic tablets and iPhones. Who would have imagined in 2001 that kindergarteners today would be learning their ABCs by blogging on iPads?

We are periodically contacted about adapting this model at the state, city or regional level. If this is something that interests you, here are some things to consider.

Funding. Whether you use public or private funds, you will need to write a proposal with the amount of your request and how the funds will be used. The first year, MACUL received an \$80,000 grant, which included organizing a late afternoon reception for legislators. We also had double the number of school teams. Eventually, we reduced the size of the event and in turn, our grant request. Today, our \$30,000 grant covers MACUL's management fee, the cost of a professional photographer and publicist, and expenses such as a small rental fee for the capitol building space, rental fees for display tables and chairs, printed t-shirts for student participants, snacks on-site and luncheon coupons for the kids, parking fees, liability insurance and plaques for two honorees. We give awards to two legislators, a Democrat and Republican in the House and Senate who have been especially supportive of bills that support technology in the classroom. The legislators receive their awards at an opening ceremony attended by leadership at

the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan State Board of Education, and of course the students and teachers.

Planning. We use the part-time services of three MACUL board members and two secretaries, as well as the same publicist and professional photographer we've used since the beginning, so the economies of scale are enormous. Because the legislature must be in session, we cannot confirm a date until three months out, but that allows us ample time for the planning and preparation. We've learned that multiple attempts must be made by email and phone to help ensure legislators are aware of the event and that they take time from their busy legislative duties to visit the showcase teams from their district. Packets that contain planning information need to be updated and sent to teachers, and our website must be updated. We prepare a booklet for participating teams with a list of schools, the names of students, and a description of their project. Periodic conference calls keep us all on track. The day of the event, we work as a team to help with logistics, legislator identification and check-in, media interviews and troubleshooting.

Marketing and publicity. Because our funder considers branding of extreme importance, we go to great lengths to ensure the event is identified as the "AT&T/MACUL Student Technology Showcase." Both organization's logos are featured on the signage, external messaging, t-shirts for the students, the plaques to legislator honorees, the program booklet with its directory of teams, in the press kits and on press releases. Every legislator who visits exhibits has his or her photo taken with the student team by the photographer, which in turn are distributed by the publicist to local newspapers. Copyright-free photos are also posted on the MACUL website which can be downloaded for use by schools, legislators and others who are interested.

Post-event feedback. After the event, we send an evaluation form to teachers. Their input has helped us make refinements to improve the overall experience. We hold a post-event conference call with the planning team, and submit a written final report to the funder. Other post-event activities include thank-you notes to the legislators, school teams and volunteers. Finally, we wrap up the event by completing financial duties, including payment of invoices and preparing a financial summary.

Planning an event like this is extremely labor-intensive, but the results can be well worth it. Since launching the Student Technology Showcase 12 years ago, more state legislators, as well as the Michigan State Board of Education and the Michigan Department of Education are aware of our organization and of course, AT&T's sponsorship of it. The TV and newspaper coverage we receive in Lansing the day of the event, coupled with the post-event media coverage, has contributed to this awareness. Most importantly, our funder seems pleased with the results, and distributes a letter and photos from the event to hundreds of their own constituents.



Frequently Asked Questions – 2012 AT&T/MACUL Student Technology Showcase

Q: What is the goal of the Showcase?

A: The goal of the AT&T/MACUL Student Technology Showcase is to gather K-12 students at the Capitol today to demonstrate to Michigan legislators and the general public how students are learning with 21st century resources. The event also provides the opportunity to honor 2 legislators for their support of education technology. This year we are honoring Senator Mike Kowall and Representative Rudy Hobbs with our Excellence in Education award.

Q: What will the students be demonstrating?

A: Today's Showcase will include a variety of demonstrations by Michigan students, including blogs, podcasts, apps for education, learning involving mobile devices like iPads and tablets, animation, broadcast production, digital yearbooks, robotics, online learning, QR codes and much, much more.

Q: When did the Showcase begin?

A: The Showcase started 12 years ago and is modeled after a similar event that AT&T, then Ameritech, was doing in Illinois. Since then, thousands of students have participated in our event here in Michigan. We are grateful to AT&T Michigan and their President Jim Murray for their support of this event over the years.

Q: How many teams are participating this year?

A: Thirty-five student teams from all across Michigan are participating in this year's Showcase. That equates to about 200 students our legislators will be greeting at the Capitol today.

Q: Why the focus on education technology?

A: Our organization believes that a quality education today has to include a proficiency in effectively using 21st Century resources that will be required in the workforce of today and beyond.

Q: What are 21st Century skills?

A: These skills include critical thinking, creativity and innovation, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, flexibility & adaptability, self directed learning, social and cross cultural interaction and leadership.

Q: What is MACUL?

The Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) is a non-profit organization of over 12,000 members who use education technology in teaching, learning and leading in their schools and institutions of higher education. MACUL was started in 1975 and is based here in Lansing. There are 10 Special Interest Groups in MACUL that connect members with similar interests including elementary education, multimedia, special education, and others. Oh, and one important thing to know about MACUL is that membership is free! You can join at macul.org.

Q: Are students learning any differently today than they did a generation ago?

A: Most definitely! Today's students were born in to the digital age and use tools and resources that would be hard to comprehend a generation ago. The Internet has made so much possible, but also the tools that students have, including iPads, mobile phones, and other digital tools have all transformed how students learn and how teachers teach in the Information Age.

Q: Is the Showcase open to the public?

Yes, and there is no admission charge. Students will be demonstrating in the Capitol Building today from 9:30am until 3pm and we encourage the general public to visit with the students and I think you'll be amazed by all the technology and learning that is taking place.

Q: Any thing else you'd like to say about the Showcase?

A: I just want to thank AT&T Michigan for their continuing support of the Student Technology Showcase and all