

Keep the Wish List Short



BY GARY S. STAGER

Giving parents a laundry list of supplies to buy is lousy public relations and exacerbates economic hardships.

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO STOCK a private kindergarten for a home-schooling client. Off I went to a local outpost of a large teacher supply store chain with a blank check. I bought craft kits, puppets, math manipulatives, balls, logic games, buckets of counters, giant rolls of handwriting and drawing paper, glitter, plus every conceivable form of paint, brush, crayon, sponge or marker I could find. I went nuts and filled two cars full of stuff, sure to make this the best kindergarten on earth.

I spent \$750! Immediately I wondered, "How can all this gluttony cost so little while schools frequently claim no funds for supplies?"

I realize that health insurance premiums, heating oil and gasoline costs have risen in an unprecedented fashion, but schools need supplies.

Here are a few suggestions:

Cut it out

Only require the purchase of the items kids absolutely need. Many school supply lists are filled with gratuitous items like 17 kinds of notebooks.

Consume more

It sometimes makes sense to buy cheaper consumable texts that students write in instead of hardbound textbooks, thereby saving paper and dollars.

Consume less

I'll spare you the worksheet lecture. You know better.

Volume, volume, volume

It's inefficient for each student to buy one glue stick when you could have bought in bulk.

Spend smarter

You don't need to buy \$50 copies of a Perma-Bound book, available for \$4 in a well-made trade paperback. Use primary sources like books and online media rather than buying another expensive textbook series.

Clip coupons

Google *Staples* and *coupon* almost any day of the year and find a generous discount for materials ordered online or phone. Place multiple orders if necessary to maximize coupon use.

Trust teachers

Give each teacher a discretionary budget for purchasing classroom materials. Teachers will buy only what they need, when they need it, and can chase sales.

Spend wisely

Don't buy the math books with required manipulatives if you can't afford both. Find an alternative or wait until you can afford all of the necessary parts.

Recycle

Collect nonperishable supplies and use them again next year. Use that notebook again until it's full.

Gary Stager is senior editor of DA and editor of The Pulse: Education's Place for Debate (www.DistrictAdministration.com/pulse).