

SCHOOL

Joseph Van Harken

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Story Sources

**Name:** Bala Konkoth

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Name:** Iva Smith

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Name:** Donna Balter

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Name:** John Ferro

**Phone:** [REDACTED]

**Name:** Michael, Amy, Alicia, Carol  
Fifth grade students

Joseph,

Congratulations! You got into a school and you even got into a classroom. That is the hardest part of this assignment, so take a bow for that.

I think you're on to a topic that is of vital importance. Schools need to see computers as an integral part of basic literacy. Yet tight budgets make it impossible to use computers in the classroom properly.

Unfortunately, the story is not focused enough to get the point across effectively. The top of the story provides a good way into the story, but once you start getting into the various issues, the reader has to bounce around from point to point too much.

Are you writing out a plan or outline before you write your stories? If you aren't I think that might help. By giving yourself a roadmap before you start, I think you may be able to stay focused better. If you are using an outline, then talk to me. Perhaps there are ways to use it more effectively.

Keep up the energetic reporting.

Carla

Dust hung ~~sedentary~~ in the air as sunlight streamed through a window in room 307 at ~~Public School 72 in East Harlem, an East Harlem elementary school.~~ A glare reflected off an unused computer monitor. Next to it, an old IBM ~~//, which seemingly hadn't stirred in years,///~~ [THIS IS YOUR GUESS. MAYBE THE COMPUTER WAS USED LAST WEEK. BUT YOUR DESCRIPTION OF DIRTY ERASERS BEING PILED ON IT TELLS THE READER THAT IT IS NOT BEING USED AS A COMPUTER. SO

HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY TO DESCRIBE. THAT WILL TELL THE STORY.] served as a resting pad for dirty chalkboard erasers.

Two years ago, District 4 was one of the city's leaders ~~a leader throughout the city~~ when it came to incorporating technology into its curriculum. But because of personal personnel changes and budget constraints, ~~///the effort has stalled and it~~ is now treading water. ~~/// [YOU'RE MIXING METHAPHORS HERE. STALL RELATES TO ENGINES AND TREADING WATER RELATES TO PEOPLE WHO ARE SWIMMING.]~~ And, with technological evolution still moving ahead rapidly ~~forging forward~~, the district may soon be left in the wake ~~drown~~. [DROWN IS OVERDOING IT. IT MAKES IT SOUND LIKE THE WHOLE DISTRICT WOULD COLLAPSE, NOT THAT THE TECHNOLOGY EFFORT WOULD.]

“I think we’ve just stepped into the doorway,” said Ms. [AP STYLE: DON'T USE HONORIFICS] Iva Smith, a 22-year veteran special education teacher at the school for 22 years. [RIGHT? IF SHE HAS BEEN A TEACHER FOR 22 YEARS THE READER WILL KNOW SHE'S A VETERAN. NO NEED FOR REDUNDANCY.] “It should be something everyone is using in their teaching. It shouldn't be just one computer in a classroom or just one computer teacher teaching a computer course.”

[YOU NEED A PARAGRAPH HERE INDICATING THE LEVEL OF USE OR NONUSE OF THE COMPUTERS IN CLASS. IT CAN BE SHORT AND TO THE POINT, BUT SAY HOW MANY TEACHERS ARE USING COMPUTERS.]

Last year, Smith said, computers were incorporated into various assignments with the help of the Harlem Center for Education. [EXPLAIN WHAT THE HARLEM CENTER FOR EDUCATION IS.]

Smith described ~~///a project-based approach of incorporating computers into everyday school learning.///~~ [THIS IS EDUCATIONAL JARGON. THE TYPE OF THING YOU MIGHT SEE IN A GRANT PROPOSAL. BUT THE TERM MEANS NOTHING TO THE READER.]

In a lesson on birds, Smith said, she ~~By teaming up with the Harlem Center for Education, Smith said last year she~~ took students to Central Park to study ~~where they studied~~ and take ~~took~~ pictures of birds. Then, they came back to the classroom and researched the birds on the Internet. They learned to type a report in a word processing program and how ~~to~~ make a web page using the pictures and text ~~mixing the pictures and text all together~~.

This year, however, the grant money that provided the school access to the computer center, ~~which allowed the relationship between the school and the education center~~, has run out ~~dry~~.

[I'M COMPLETELY WITH YOU ON THIS STORY TO THIS POINT. BUT FROM HERE ON THE FOCUS WOBBLER. FACTS ARE PRESENTED IN A SCATTERED

MANNER. WHAT IS NEEDED IN THE REST OF THE STORY IS THE SAME KIND OF LINEAR STRUCTURE THAT THE TOP OF THE STORY HAS.]

///Smith sat at a small round table with four fifth graders, Michael, Amy, Alicia, and Carol. They are part of her afternoon special education class. She drew sentence structure exercises on the back of their math problem handouts and asked them to fill in the details with their pencils.

“I like the internet,” Michael said without looking up from his worksheet. “I go there to play education games and to get help with my homework.”

Amy pointed at the computers collecting dust in the corner. “The internet isn’t hooked up yet,” she said./// [THIS IS CONFUSING. WHY ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT THE INTERNET IF THEY’RE DOING AN EXERCISE ABOUT SENTENCE STRUCTURE?]

///John Ferro, the former director of information technology for ~~Former~~ Manhattan School District 4, ~~Director of Information Technology John Ferro~~ said, “It’s one thing to have a four computers in a classroom, but if the teachers and students don’t know how to effectively integrate them into everyday curriculum, then they may as well not even be there.”

Ferro was referring to Project Smart, a program designed to put at least four computers in each classroom and train both teachers and students in a project-based curriculum how to use the technology to enhance everyday learning./// [THESE TWO PARAGRAPHS ARE CONFUSING BECAUSE FERRO TALKS ABOUT FOUR COMPUTERS IN THE CLASSROOM, WHICH LEAVES THE READER WONDERING WHO HAS FOUR COMPUTERS IN THEIR CLASSROOM. THEN YOU GO INTO PROJECT SMART, BUT THAT IS NOT THE PROGRAM YOU’RE WRITING ABOUT IN THE TOP OF YOUR STORY, RIGHT?]

///“I was learning right along with the students,” Smith said. “Computers were new for me, too.” Last year, she said ///someone/// [BE MORE SPECIFIC. WHO CAME IN? DESCRIBE WHO THIS PERSON IS BY THEIR JOB.] would come in once a week to help facilitate lessons. /// [THIS PARAGRAPH NEEDS TO MOVE UP TO WHERE YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT WHAT SMITH DID LAST YEAR.]

///“Technology is a tool,” Ferro said. “It’s not an end all. We’re not just talking about how to do word processing.” Rather, the goal is to make technology an inherent part of the day so the children and teachers are familiar with the processes. “Like how a teacher would put a tape into a video machine.”/// [SO IS HE SAYING THAT SMITH’S BIRD LESSON LAST YEAR WAS A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING?]

The benefit is making what children are learning in school relevant to the real world, Ferro said.

~~Amy said she wants to be a teacher when she grows up, Alicia a doctor, and Carol, a nurse, like her mother. [KITTEN]~~

“How to find information and present it to other people so it’s clear is what translates to the business world,” Ferro said. “~~¶~~Those are the skills children need.”

Before Ferro retired last year, the New York City Central Board of Education and the Office of Instructional Technology recognized District 4 as a leader because he and other teachers, who ~~also~~ have since retired, ~~///~~developed applications and partnerships with other districts, he said.~~/// [WHAT DOES HE MEAN BY APPLICATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS? GIVE EXAMPLES.]~~

Now, however, the ~~D~~district has slipped in the ~~ranking of schools that use computers.ranks.~~ ~~///~~The district did not replace Mr. Ferro with a dedicated position, rather they doubled up Ms. Donna Balter’s responsibilities.~~/// [THIS PROBABLY MEANS SOMETHING TO EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS BUT IT MEANS NOTHING TO THE READER.]~~ She also heads the math department.

“I’m not a techie,” Balter said. “But I know how to organize and manage.”

She said she has a lead technical administrator who has two subordinates. Together, they are responsible for the upkeep of all networks and computers in 24 schools.

~~///~~“If a computer goes down, that’s pretty much it for it,” Smith said. There’s a maintenance sign up list in the principal’s office, but she said no one uses it because the matters are never addressed anyway. “If a printer runs out of ink, we, the teachers replace the cartridge with our own money.”~~/// [THIS IS VERY COMPELLING. IT SHOULD BE MUCH HIGHER IN THE STORY. IT ILLUSTRATES THAT THE COMPUTERS ARE NOT AN INTEGRATED PART OF THE SCHOOL’S STRUCTURE.]~~

At this point, it’s difficult to go beyond a maintenance level, Balter said. “With the stock market and the budgets the way they are, and with losing the teachers who spearheaded projects in the past, we just have to get through this time.

Time is one thing that is on her side, Balter said.

“It’s a generation thing,” ~~she said.~~ “Once younger teachers come in who already have computer knowledge and familiarity with the machines, it will be more normal for them to use them in everyday learning activities,” ~~she said.~~ “Give it ten years.”

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#### STORY IDEAS:

DOT COM: A successful Harlem oriented website is on the verge of becoming another victim of the dot com bust or joining other failed businesses in the wrongfully forecasted Harlem renaissance. [www.harlem.org](http://www.harlem.org) is a youth run neighborhood news magazine that

has won world-wide acclaim. They have traveled to Europe and D.C. to accept awards, yet, the director says that he can't afford rent for the office next month. I would like to feature the magazine but find out why such a success can fall on such hard times.

SCHOOL BOARD: Since the new city-wide school board convened this week with noticeable differences, I would like to attend a District 4 school board meeting to see if the differences echo.

STUDY: While meeting with District Manager Javier Llano, he noted that he was the most educated district manager in the city. And, that before he would invoke and programs for change, he is working with Columbia University to complete a community assessment project. This would give him the correct perspective. This seems like a good, original approach. I would like to find out if this has been done before and the true merit it carried. Also, I would like to find out if he has done this in other places before, and the results there. I have polled some of the community members and they see it as a stalling tactic until Llano can get a better job someplace else in local government.