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Students all around the county are using a new technology to experience the wave of the future

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DOUGLAS— "I love it. It was money well spent," says Shad Sirmans, a fifth grade teacher at Satilla Elementary "It keeps the students' attention, and if I was in a class that didn't have one I'd probably end up buying one."

Sirmans is referring to a piece of new technology that has been installed in all of Satilla's first through fifth grade classrooms: the Activ Board.

The Activ Board is a fully interactive, multimedia teaching tool that was first installed in a limited number of Coffee County classrooms last year, and it has the potential to replace a host of obsolete and cumbersome technologies that now clutter the county's classrooms.

Overhead projectors, televisions, DVD players, PowerPoint presentations, globes, even the classic blackboard will eventually all be replaced by the Activ Board technology.

"It helps us learn more, and it's easy to use," says Kaleb Smith, a student in Sirmans' class. The system looks just like a dry-erase marker board, but everything from lectures to movies can be projected on it, and all of these various media will be completely interactive.

A science teacher can present a film on the digestive system to her class, pause the film, and use a stylus to write over the paused image, helping to augment and explain what the students are seeing in the film. The same can be done for maps, internet sites and even practice problems.

"It's like the Wizard of Oz," says Satilla Assistant Principal Scott Gillis.

Satilla Principal Sue Harper agrees. "They go home and have all that technology at their fingertips, and we have to be able to compete," says Harper. "We have to fight for their attention, and these help us do that."

One of the most innovative features of the Activ Board system allows every student in a class to answer questions posted on the Board using small, remote control-like devices called "eggs," named for their shape. The board will record each student's answer and display the correct answer and the number of students that answered correctly, giving the teacher instant feedback on the progress of the lesson.

"We are one of the very few systems in South Georgia that has this kind of technology," says Lynn McMillan, Technology Director for the Coffee County Schools.

According to McMillan, most of the county's Activ Boards have been purchased with grant money, and the system is currently working on several more grants so that more Boards can be purchased. The Activ Boards have also been installed in all Ambrose classrooms, third through fifth grade classes at Nicholls, and each school in the system has at least one.



"Our ultimate goal, somewhere down the line, is to have one of these Activ Boards in each class in the system," says McMillan. "In Athens-Clarke County, for example, they aren't building new classrooms that don't have Activ Boards."

McMillan does acknowledge that the Activ Board has some limitations. "Well, it doesn't cut down on the number of computers we have to have in a classroom," says McMillan. "We still need those so that students can have resources for individual research. But almost all of the activities and technologies that involve the class as a whole can be handled through the Board."

McMillan points out that the Activ Board also allows the school system to establish a continuity in terms of lesson plans and their implementation.

"If we've got a teacher that has developed a really outstanding math curriculum, and he's used his Activ Board, we can then upload that lesson plan to all grade-level math teachers."

McMillan is referring to the Activ Board's presentation function, which works almost exactly like a PowerPoint presentation, but it can tie movies, internet sites and other media directly and seamlessly into the lesson. These presentations, called "flipbooks" can be shared among teachers throughout the county.

Most teachers who have the Activ Board technology agree that it's a great asset, and McMillan thinks that, for the price (around \$2,700 per installed unit), it's a bargain for schools that have to compete with the myriad electronic distractions that constantly bombard students.

"This keeps their attention," says McMillan. "We have kids staying in during recess to use the Activ Boards."

That's really saying something.