

Pulitzer Prize Winning

WASHINGTON DAILY NEWS

The Voice of the Pamlico

Elementary Schools Using High-Tech Equipment

By Hope Anderson
The Daily News (WA)
April 14, 2006

"I was born for this." (WA)

The 23 first- and second-graders sat on the floor in Teri Nickerson's classroom, transfixed during a science lesson earlier this week about the differences between solids and liquids.

Hands flew into the air, and there was an audible intake of breaths when Nickerson, a Columbia Valley Gardens Elementary teacher, asked for volunteers to come to the board.



Photo by Greg Ebersole

That's the hook: This isn't just any whiteboard.

The interactive board -- called a Promethean whiteboard -- is electronic, touch-sensitive and hooked up to a projector and laptop computer with Internet access.

When Nickerson chose a volunteer, the student pressed a pen against the interactive board, moving a picture of a boat into a column marked "solid." The next student moved a picture of a cup of water into the "liquid" column.

Kids love using it, Nickerson said.

"Anything I do using the technology piece, I see an enthusiasm that hasn't been there," said Nickerson, who is in her 21st year of teaching. This school year, Nickerson is one of 10 teachers in Southwest Washington participating in a project to bring more high-tech equipment into schools and develop a model for classroom technology that is effective -- and affordable.

Each of the 10 teachers, including three from Kelso and one from Woodland, is using \$8,400

worth of equipment.

"The question is not how can we put technology in the classroom. The real question is how can we not put technology in the classroom," said Debbie Tschirgi, the director of educational technology programs for the Education Service District 112, which is sponsoring the project. "That is the world that kids are growing up in. This high-tech digital world is not the same world that parents grew up in ... and it's only going to progress further."

The problem with rapidly advancing technology, though, is the cost, Tschirgi said. In the ESD's sustainable technology project, teachers are given one computer, along with other pieces of equipment that promote learning -- and don't need to be replaced every few years like a typical computer.

"(It) takes a different approach about thinking about technology in the classroom. So many schools think that a one-to-one ratio of student to computers in the classroom (is needed)," Tschirgi said. "But the question has to be asked, how sustainable is that? Unless the district has a technology bond or a huge grant, that's not a sustainable model."

The project has drawn inquiries from school districts across the country, Tschirgi said.

As part of the project, Nickerson's classroom also is equipped with a document camera, an advanced version of an overhead projector that doesn't require a transparency. Students also use handheld voting devices so each student can respond to questions while Nickerson is teaching. That allows her to measure mid-lesson whether her class understands the material.

"It gives you a lot more honest full-class feedback," Nickerson said. "The kids can't hide. If you do group answers, kids can hide."

In Kathy Kegler's Carrolls Elementary classroom in Kelso, the technology tools have helped her to use time more efficiently. She can call up notes she wrote on her Promethean whiteboard days or even weeks earlier for her second-grade class to review.

And she can get a quick read on students' understanding without waiting for the results of a pencil-and-paper quiz. "The kids, it's unbelievable to see their reactions," she said.

One student turned to her while working on the interactive board and said, "I was born for this," Kegler recalled earlier this week.

When she teaches addition and subtraction, students can actually see the process on the board, Kegler said, "you can see them disappearing, actually moving away."

"It's just a higher level of understanding."