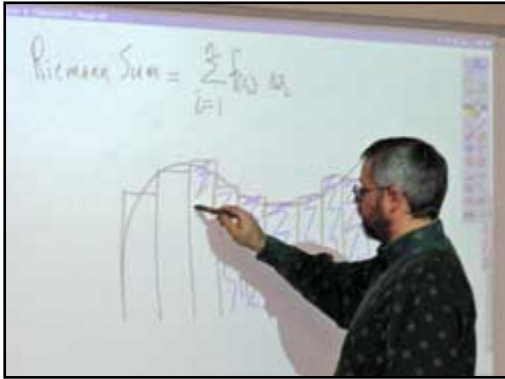


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# LARGO LEADER

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## Teaching 'rithmetic Without Chalk Or Even A Blackboard



Jeff Barber, a math teacher at Indian Rocks Christian School, uses a computer-equipped whiteboard made by Promethean Inc. to teach his students. The students can access Barber's saved notes from home via an Internet connection.

January 19, 2006  
By DAVE SHELTON

LARGO – Students, amid swirls of chalk dust, clapping those erasers clean just outside of the classroom are gone from Indian Rocks Christian School on Ulmerton Road.

Even those dry erase boards that feature bright colors and no chalk dust have been replaced in three classrooms.

High school mathematics students are using the latest technology to learn algebra and calculus. An interactive computer screen is on the wall opposite the unused blackboards.

Jeff Barber stands at the screen. Explaining how to calculate the area of several irregular polygons, he writes a formula like the math geek on the CBS show "Numbers." While explaining the logic, he taps the screen with a wireless stylus and drags the formula into a larger string of calculations.

The screen is bright and clear, easily read from the classroom's farthest reaches.

"The best part," Barber explained, "is that I can save everything on the board before I erase it. When you erase a blackboard, it's gone. With this equipment, I can simply recall everything."

This is especially helpful, he added, for absent students and those at home reviewing his lecture. They can reach the school's computer server over the Internet and see all of his blackboard notes from home hours or days later.

Similar computer generated "blackboards" are also in the school's computer laboratory and library, Barber said.

The difference is that the system in Barber's classroom was free. Barber won the \$4,000-worth of equipment through a grant sponsored by Promethean Inc. and a Chicago organization that provides assistance to schools struggling to apply modern technology to black students.

Barber shrugs when asked about his essay – one of 80 written by teachers across the U.S. – to win the "ACTIVboard" equipment that is common in the United Kingdom, but slow to spread in the U.S., according to a spokeswoman for Jen Antonio-Lim.

Barber said he simply described how he would use the equipment to teach his math classes. He noted that the system appeals to today's technology-minded students, many captivated by electronic gaming.

The software allows Barber to link his computer to book publishers' Web sites to help him develop textbook-based lesson plans and graphics that match each chapter of the text. By going on the Internet, he can also download graphics and text that he can build into the on-screen displays.

Not yet fitting into Barber's lesson plans is hidden under a book-covered desk. It's a locked metallic case. After Barber finds the key in his desk, he opens it to reveal a pile of plastic devices that look like TV remote controls.

Barber said that these could be issued to each student. Students could then log-in and take a multiple-choice test. Each question could contain up to six answers.

Barber could then record test scores on his desktop computer using software provided with the ACTIVboard system.

The teacher could also assess students' answers in reports compiled by the computer to show areas of the curriculum where many of the students haven't done well.

It all works like the audience voting on television's "America's Funniest Home Videos."

Also unused, so far, is a wireless slate which Barber could hand to students in their desks. As they write on the slate, their images appear on the screen, saving shy students from making that walk to the front of the class that older folks can remember from their school days.

Barber said he has found difficulties in sizing and locating what is drawn on the remote slate to the screen on the wall.

Still, his students are impressed with his equipment. A dozen students carefully watching Barber's formulas spread across the screen nodded in agreement.

"It's pretty neat," said one.

"More interesting."

"It's cool."

"Makes it easier to review" – others piped in.

"The kids really like the technology," he said. "It gets them more interested in mathematics and focuses them on the lessons."