

The Free Lance-Star

Let's get digital

Digital classrooms up and running at Winding Creek Elementary in Stafford County

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THE CHALKBOARD of the 21st century is enabling fifth-graders at Stafford County's Winding Creek Elementary to answer questions with the click of a button.

Using egg-shaped remotes, 23 boys and girls in Penny Izquierdo's classroom took a practice multiple-choice test on Wednesday.

A question appeared on a flat, 78-inch screen: "Which region has hills worn by erosion and lakes carved by glaciers?"

The students pointed their devices at the interactive whiteboard, or Activboard, and pushed one of six lettered buttons.

The results of the test appeared on the board less than a minute later. Ninety percent chose the correct answer: D. Canadian Shield.

"The Activboard makes it easier and funner to learn, and I'd love to have one of these in my room to do homework," said 11-year-old Zachary Sanders.

But there's a catch. It costs \$4,200 to buy and install the technology in one room.

Teachers at Winding Creek invited fellow educators, reporters and parents to check out this classroom gone digital Wednesday.

It's one of two in the school paid for by student-run bake sales and the parent-teacher organization. The school also has a portable unit that teachers can share.

Six of Stafford's 29 schools have purchased these whiteboards, said Lori Chaney, a technology resource teacher at Winding Creek.

Each room boasts a laptop computer to broadcast onto the Activboard. Armed with an electromagnetic pen, students can write, erase and drag text on the screen.

"How many feel that this captures your attention rather than Miss I talking and writing on the board?" Hampton Oaks Elementary teacher Rebecca Caldwell asked Izquierdo's class.

Everyone raised their hand.

At one point, the board pictured a map of the United States divided into eight regions. The names of each region appeared above the blank map.



Winding Creek student Meghan Philpot uses a digital tablet to control the 'active board.'



Students use electronic voting machines to respond to questions during a geography lesson in their fifth-grade class.



Fifth-grade teacher Penny Izquierdo works with student Katie Canonico on an 'active board,' an interactive teaching tool. Winding Creek Elementary School is one of the first locally to use these new digital tools in the classroom.

During the exercise, students walked up to the board, tapped a word with the special pen and dragged it down to the corresponding region.

Even though they knew the answers, some spent several minutes trying to get the pen to work.

"It's all right," Izquierdo told a girl who had trouble with the technology. "You know Miss I gets frustrated, too, because we're all learning."

Some of the practice tests allow teachers to almost instantly identify struggling students, as well as subject matter that the majority may not understand.

After the multiple-choice test, Izquierdo saved an Excel spreadsheet that separated each of her students' answers.

At the end of the hour-long presentation, the students launched into testimonials about the Logical Choice Technologies product.

"This Activboard has made learning more exciting with all the colors and stuff," 11-year-old Katie Canonico said.

"And I didn't pay her to say that," Izquierdo added with a laugh.

These days, Chaney is meeting monthly with 22 educators to discuss these digital classrooms.

"Ultimately, I want one in every room," she said.

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What's in a digital classroom?

Whiteboard: With an electromagnetic grid underneath its 78-inch screen, this unit is the main component.

Activslate: Essentially a smaller version of the Activboard. Wireless technology allows teachers to operate the Activboard anywhere in the classroom.

Activotes: Students can use these remotelike devices to answer test questions on the Activboard.

Activtablet: Cordless device that allows teachers to create lessons for the Activboard when they're home.