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New Classroom Technology Expanding to Elm Street

By MEGAN ALMON

Atkinson Elementary School is surfing the educational wave of the future with their latest technological venture, Promethean ACTIVboards – interactive classroom screens that combine the whiteboard with what seem to be endless Internet and Power Point capabilities.

Principal Vince Bass calls ACTIVboards “the next wave in educational technology.” Now other local schools are in the process of attempting to catch it, particularly Elm Street Elementary, which will be receiving a few of the systems by August.

Newnan resident Bob Coggin, a member of the Board of Directors at Logical Choice Technology, saw the ACTIVboards for the first time in a demonstration earlier this year.

“I was blown away,” he said, claiming he immediately realized how instrumental these tools could be in teaching children.

Coggin and his wife, Millie, approached the Coweta Community Foundation willing to donate a sizable fund toward obtaining this technology for Coweta classrooms. Leah Sumner of the community foundation took the task as a challenge, Coggin said, and the organization served as a conduit to find a school willing to accept the technology and be trained to use it.

Coggin and Sumner met with Atkinson Elementary Principal Vince Bass, who was “blown away,” as Coggin had been, by the benefits the boards had to offer.

With the Coggins’ donation and a portion of federal Title 1 funds, Atkinson obtained four ACTIVclassroom kits, which include an ACTIVboard, an ACTIVotes program and an ACTIVslate.

“The technology is amazing,” said Carl Christensen, director of marketing at Logical Choice Technology. “Once teachers start with it, they’re hooked and don’t want to teach anywhere they don’t have [the technology].”

Christenson called the technology a “window to the world,” because it brings the world to students in action and sound, he said.

The ACTIVboards incorporate all philosophies of engagement – visual, auditory and tactile, and bring them into the classroom,” Bass said.

Using the boards, high-definition images are able to be placed on the screens. Combined with a surround-sound system, the boards captivate students and hold their attention. Students are able to



"write" over the images and videos with computerized pens, and by choosing the appropriate setting, can highlight words, circle items, drag images or parts of images, copy, paste and more.

Christensen said teachers can access anything on the internet and bring it into the classroom. For example, if a class is studying the Grand Canyon in a geography unit, the teacher can access "Google Earth," enter the "Grand Canyon," and the class is able to watch live video footage of what's going on in the canyon that very minute.

Using the ACTIVslates, special, computerized boards with similar capabilities, teachers can operate the ACTIVboard from anywhere in the classroom. The teacher can even hand the ACTIVslate to a student who might be shy about approaching the board, or let the students use the slate to keep them in their seats for a certain activity while using the board.

ACTIVotes is a program that is operated by individual, hand-held devices that each student has at his/her desk.

The teacher is able to hold anonymous question/answer sessions with the whole class. Each student is given an electronic "voter" with an assigned number. They are able to choose answers to multiple-choice questions and receive immediate results as to the validity of their answers according to their assigned number, but other students are not aware of who "got the wrong answer."

With the ACTIVotes technology, teachers are able to see class polls, and can immediately know if their lesson plans need tweaking to make room for review over certain subjects, or if their students have mastered a concept as a group. Moreover, the responses let the teacher know which students are struggling with what, and can immediately offer assistance.

"[ACTIVotes] allows the teacher to do something they've never done," Christenson said. "Generally, they teach a section, give a test and three days later the kids get the scores back."

By that time, Christenson continued, the class is on to the next subject. The new technology allows them to stop and again cover the part the kids need to work on before moving on.

Currently, Atkinson Elementary has ACTIVclassroom technology in four classrooms. Bass said his goal is to have the technology in every classroom. Following a community open house event at the school in October, during which teachers and students demonstrated a few of the benefits of the boards and how they're used, Bass began the securing of funds for more of the systems to be installed at Atkinson.

Elm Street School Counselor Carolyn Sears found out about the technology at a meeting of the Coweta school system's counselors. An Atkinson counselor told her that she was able to send her information for classroom lessons ahead of time to the teacher via email, and the lesson could be taught from the ACTIVboard. Elm Street Principal Julie Raschen became excited about the technology, Sears said, after visiting Atkinson to see how the boards work in a classroom environment.



“It’s the coming thing,” Sears said, “and we want to be on the cutting edge and have it before anyone else.”

Christenson said that, though still new, the technology is being used nationally as well as internationally. In fact, the biggest installation in the U.S. right now is in Forsyth County, Ga., which will receive 1,500 ACTIVclassrooms to place in every classroom in their school system.

An important thing to remember, Christenson said, is that the systems won’t work if the teachers won’t accept them. The technology excels in schools that are committed to going through the training to use it.

When the technology is installed, trainers teach the teachers how to use it. “The teachers have to get comfortable with it,” he said.

On the upside, Christenson said it generally only takes about two days before teachers can be incredibly effective with the technology.