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West Hall High School enters '21st Century' Technology program goes to work in classroom

By ASHLEY COX
The Times

The science department at West Hall High School is a little more interactive this year.

West Hall is one of only 12 schools in Georgia and the only school in Hall County to participate in the 21st Century Classroom program, a collaborative effort of the schools, the Georgia Department of Education and Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement.

Physics teacher Tammy Lovelady and biology teacher Sandra Eidson received a state grant from the Georgia Department of Education in February 2005. Through the grant, the school received 26 laptops, two Promethean boards, two projectors and 12 sets of student-testing PASCO probes, which enable them to test things such as temperature, pH, force and motion.

The new curriculum engages students through the use of interactive computer experiments.

The primary tool in the 21st Century Classroom is the Promethean board, an interactive learning and teaching system that works like a desktop computer. With this board, teachers are able to download information and images from the Internet, save a year's worth of lesson plans, access other teachers' lesson plans and show DVDs.

"Our whole department has benefited from it and the kids love to use it," Lovelady said.

The teachers underwent training at Kennesaw State University to learn how to use the new technology and they also must participate in ongoing training.

Lovelady said she likes the curriculum because it allows her to facilitate learning instead of just teaching facts and having students repeat information back to her.

"The students can have an interactive online lesson and I can walk around and talk to them while they go at their own pace," she said. "It puts responsibility on the students and they actually have to think through the lesson."

Senior Aaron Cohen said many students are visual learners and that the curriculum has helped him remember physics formulas.



Tom Reed The Times

Marissa Sabbath, left, and Elizabeth Barclay work on a computer problem as part of the 21st Century Classroom Program at West Hall High School. Students and teachers credit the technology in use with improving the learning experience.

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"It's more interactive and makes the class exciting. I want to pay more attention to what we're learning," he said.

Another senior, Taylor Soucie, said the software is helpful because it explains concepts very well and enables her to understand better.

"It keeps me interacted in the lesson. I always have something to do," she said.

Jerry Lee, Lead Technician at West Hall's technology department, helps the teachers with any questions they may have about the curriculum. "I've enjoyed working with this software and watching teachers learn it. It's a satisfying thing to be able to use," he said.

Lovelady and Eidson have received a grant extension for the upcoming year.

Eidson said that a lot of work is involved in the beginning since everyone has to learn the new technology.

"It's been a long process to get here, but the students are so much more in tune with what they need to do. I know it will pay off later," she said.

Lovelady said she would love for every classroom in Hall County to be a 21st Century Classroom. "With all this new technology, it's a very exciting time to be a teacher."

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