Technology in Action: Taking Education to a New Level

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Technology in Action
One-to-One:
Laptops for Learning
This year, middle school students are experiencing an evolution in learning through the one-to-one laptop program. Each student is assigned his/her laptop to use throughout the entire year. Students carry the laptops to their classes, where they use them about 60% of the time, and also take them home. “Half of all middle school homework is now electronic,” explained Principal Michael Papierski. Homework is facilitated because the laptops give students access at home to all of the software they use to create projects in school. Because all teachers and middle school students have e-mail addresses, students often e-mail assignments directly to their teachers for grading. Students can also get quick answers to assignment questions by e-mailing their teachers.

“We prepared for the laptop program for several years. The transition was seamless,” Principal Papierski stated. He also reports there have been no major issues to date; students are taking good care of their laptops at school and at home. The Principal looks forward to the day when all middle school homework can be submitted and graded electronically.

PowerSchool
Another new technology initiative is a powerful communications tool for students in grades four through eight, their teachers, and parents. PowerSchool® is a fully integrated, web-based student information system. Highlands’ teachers use PowerSchool to streamline daily tasks such as attendance, grading, creating report cards and initiating student and parent communication. Middle school teachers use PowerSchool to post their classroom assignments. Parents and their children have immediate access to daily grades, teachers’ direct comments and a host of other information. Privacy is maintained because students can only view their own personal information, such as grades and attendance; conversely, parents can only view their children’s information. Parents log on to PowerSchool through the district website using their own private code. An additional benefit: by reducing paperwork, PowerSchool promotes conservation.

The Paperless Classroom Initiative
Last fall, middle school science teacher Mike Zeman told his students that increased computer use could significantly reduce the amount of paper used in his classroom. When students asked just how much paper it would save, a new project was born. Technology use was stepped up to include e-mailing messages to parents whenever possible instead of sending notes on paper and an increased focus placed on computer class work and homework.

Technology Showcases
The district will soon hold the second annual Technology Showcases for parents and families. The Middle School Showcase will take place Wednesday, April 30, 7:00 PM and the Elementary Showcase Thursday, May 21, 6:30 PM in conjunction with the school’s Open House/ Ice Cream Social.

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Students are charting the amount of printer paper they are saving in class; by mid-February, the class had saved 5,832 sheets. “We learned that 12,000 sheets is equivalent to one small tree and we are well on our way to saving one tree by the end of the year,” Mr. Zeman explained.

The Paperless Classroom Initiative is quickly spreading. Middle school science teacher Dan Swick’s students had a nearly paperless unit on planets, with paper used just for the final test.

Mr. Swick is also enjoying the ease of using electronic communications. “Mass e-mails are a great way to remind parents and students about upcoming tests and quizzes. I usually e-mail parents a week before a test. Mass e-mails are also good for sending information to students about homework assignments, upcoming events such as field trips, and special school events like Astronomy Night,” Mr. Swick remarked. “One of the best things about being paperless is it is almost impossible for students to lose their work. The less paper they use, the fewer lost assignments there are!”

The Middle School Science Club is also embracing the Paperless Classroom and hopes to take the initiative school-wide.

The Diversity Project
Through the Diversity Project, seventh grade students in the Program for Advanced Learners (PAL) class explore topics about diversity, then use iMovie software to produce documentary movies. “This project helps students analyze issues of intolerance from multiple points of view, as well as critique their own behavior and attitudes,” stated PAL teacher Koren Racolta. The movies incorporate dramatizations, photos, interviews, music and more. Working in groups, students choose a topic of interest, research it, write scripts, create a storyboard and also submit a paper citing their research sources. Technology Department staff members help students review the iMovie program. Parent volunteers assist during filming days.

In addition to iMovie, students integrate other technology resources into their projects, including digital camcorders, microphones, digital music and GarageBand music software.

Students view the documentaries in the classroom and then present them to parents and community members at a student-designed assembly. Students chose “Light the Fire for Equality” for this year’s assembly theme. Choral Director Tammy O’Reilly added a special note to the evening by performing the song, “Go Light Your World.”

“This is the second year the Diversity Project has been taught. At its conclusion last year, students commented: “Technology made this project better because instead of just taking a test or quiz on the unit, we really got to get involved and act things out and share them with everyone. I will remember this project for much longer than I would if we did it a different way.”” —Taryn MacLean

“Ironically, diversity is the message that teaching technology may promote. Technology definitely made this project much more powerful. You can write about attacks of injustice, but with iMovie you can see the pictures and hear the sounds of injustice.” —Blake Shockley

“WeatherBug not only helps third grade students learn about the weather, but also provides lessons in math, social studies and geography.

“The number one way to improve student achievement is to increase student involvement. Technology is helping us meet that objective.” —Middle School Principal Michael Papierski

WeatherBug is linked to WGN TV weather broadcasts that report meteorological data from schools throughout the Chicago area.

Kim Fitzgerald’s third grade students use WeatherBug daily for a 20 minute cross-curriculum experience. In the morning, a student who is selected as the Meteorologist of the Day (MOD), gathers information from the WeatherBug website. Later that day, students know that it is time for the weather report when they hear the teacher play a song. Then, the MOD tells the class the outdoor temperature to one tenth of a degree. These third grade students round the number to the nearest whole number, enter the information on graphs and calendars, then convert the decimal to a mixed number. The MOD also reports other information, including the weather conditions of a selected city. “If time permits, I Google that city and we view photos and fun facts about it using my computer and the media cart to project the images onto the movie screen,” explained Mrs. Fitzgerald. “The WeatherBug website is also great for interactive lessons about thermometers, seasons, hurricanes, and lake effect snow. The class really enjoys this part of the
day. WeatherBug makes lessons extremely participatory, interactive, hands-on, engaging, and promotes open-ended discussions."

Elementary computer teacher Mary Mosak holds a microphone while a student records her own voice to computer.

**Comic Life**

Fifth grade social studies teachers Lisa Gamster, Diane Madden, and Amanda Schlegel are using Comic Life software to help their students learn about the American Revolution in a way that is creative, challenging and fun. Groups of students are each assigned a Revolutionary War topic such as taxes, the Declaration of Independence, the Battle of Lexington and Concord, women’s roles in the war, famous people and others.

After researching the topics, students use Comic Life to present their information in words and pictures. The challenge is to creatively and accurately tell the entire story in four to six comic-book-style boxes.

"The students really enjoyed this project and so did I," commented Diane Madden, "every child was totally engaged. The students represented historical events clearly and also included their own modern perspectives. Because Comic Life is easy to use it doesn't get in the way of kids concentrating on the information they're trying to convey."

Lisa Gamster added, "I believe that children learn more through multimedia. This project was an excellent example of students being successful learners and having fun at the same time."

**Starry Night**

Starry Night software helps bring the heavens down to earth in Dan Swick's middle school science class, where it has been used in a variety of ways for the past three years. Starry Night is an exceptional teaching tool that helps students understand the cosmos at their level. "You could literally teach astronomy all year and not cover all of Starry Night's great components," Mr. Swick stated. "The class uses it during their astronomy unit and to help prepare for the winter Astronomy Night." At Astronomy Night, students teach their parents how to use the program to help them find different planets and stars. Starry Night has helped students study the moon phases, learn about the solar system, find satellites, comets, asteroids, stars, galaxies and constellations. A recent project was the "Winter W" in which students learned to measure five specific stars in the winter sky. Starry Night software helped prepare them for the project. It is also used to help students prepare for "Star Party," where adults who are amateur astronomers teach students the finer points of using telescopes.

**GarageBand**

In October, all middle school band students began using GarageBand as a tool to hone their musical skills. Students record their home practice sessions with the software. Then, they listen to their recordings to assess and improve their skills. "GarageBand permits my students to evaluate their own performances and allows them to teach themselves more effectively. It also saves class time, by enhancing and simplifying practices at school," stated band teacher Melanie Hardesty. "I love it when students can discover their errors themselves. It is much more real to them than when I correct them."

"In the Elementary School we have continued to increase our use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning by integrating it into classroom instruction. We look forward to even greater opportunities to enhance student learning through the use of technology. We are fortunate to have access to the resources that will prepare our children for the future."

—Elementary Principal Vivian Powers-Richard

To hear some of the students’ original songs, visit the district website, www.district106.net. Click on the “middle school” tab; then, under the “Recent Articles” section, click on “8th Grade GarageBand Songs Posted.”

**On the Horizon**

Next fall, technology will once again be transformed when middle school technology lab classes are eliminated. Instead, teachers who are technology facilitators will come to the classroom to aid students with their classroom technology projects, working with and assisting the classroom teacher. The middle school students’ strong technology foundation will enable them to truly apply their technology skills to learning. “Classroom facilitators will aid students with technology, enabling teachers to be the content experts. The facilitators will also have technology suggestions for the classroom teachers,” explained Technology Director Eric Callis.

### Highlands is Among Top Illinois Schools

**State Recognizes Highlands for Academic Achievement**

The Illinois State Board of Education recently announced that both Highlands' schools are academically among the best in the state. Each school has received a 2008 Academic Excellence Award. Only 388 Illinois schools earned this honor, part of the Illinois School Honor Roll. The award criteria, based on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test results, includes 90% of students meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math for three consecutive years and making Adequate Yearly Progress for the past two years.

**District Earns Bright Red Apple**

SchoolSearch, a private company that provides relocating families with school information, recently recognized Highlands District 106 with a 2009 "Bright Red Apple" Award of Excellence. Only 81 Illinois school districts out of a total of 868 school districts were honored with this award, which is based on academic performance, pupil/student ratio, operating expenditure per pupil, educational level of teachers and average teacher salary. All Illinois school districts are considered. SchoolSearch obtains the statistics from each district’s Illinois State Report Card.

Highlands’ consistently high quality education has been recognized by both the Illinois State Board of Education and SchoolSearch many times in the past.
Packing, Traffic Improvements

Over the summer, the Highlands Elementary School parking lot will be replaced as it is at the end of its life cycle. To accommodate more parking and to alleviate congestion, the Board of Education is currently investigating the feasibility of leasing parking spaces from the Highlands Presbyterian Church and is also working on changing the traffic flow in and around the parking lot at drop off and pick up times. The latter is among the recommendations of a traffic study by KLOA, Inc, a traffic engineering company. “The goal is to accommodate more visitor parking, enhance safety and take parking off neighboring streets,” explained Dr. Arleen Armanetti, Superintendent. The work is scheduled for completion before students return to school in the fall.

Board Election

At the April 7 Consolidated Election, four LaGrange Highlands District 106 board members ran uncontested. Incumbents Dr. Irene Combs, Mr. Sean Conboy, Mr. John Corcoran and Mr. Tom Hinshaw will each serve a four-year term of office.

These board members will serve with current board members Mr. Phil Palmer, Mrs. Reta Strecker and Mrs. Amy Jo Wittenberg.

The seven complete the LaGrange Highlands District 106 Board of Education.

Parents: Get the latest Highlands news delivered to your computer! Visit www.district106.net for e-mail notifications of district news items and calendar events.