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Your guide to getting the most out of e-Rate funding—with the least amount of pain.



Teens' online privacy at risk

Common Sense Media wants teens to have to 'opt in' before information from their personal profile is shared online

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

Amid growing concern about how much information students are revealing about themselves in their personal profiles on social networking web sites and other online services, the national child advocacy group

Common Sense Media is asking adults, parents, and teens to help make a stand for online privacy by demanding that companies provide an "opt-in" feature for sharing the information of all children under the age of 18.

Common Sense Media's national cam-

paign, called "Do Not Track Kids," began from what the group considered to be startling statistics about online privacy.

According to the Wall Street Journal, 50 of the most popular U.S. web sites are placing intrusive tracking technology on visitors' computers—in some cases, more than 100 tracking tools at a time. Fifty sites popular with U.S. teens and children placed more

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This 'Superman' doesn't fly



ASSOCIATED PRESS

In a scene from the documentary *Waiting for 'Superman,'* education reformer Geoffrey Canada works with students in his Harlem Children's Zone program. Although Canada has seen huge success, the film itself offers a very shallow look at the problems plaguing U.S. schools, writes Editor Dennis Pierce (see page 4).

Virtual schools fight for dollars

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

Two proposed virtual schools in Georgia got the OK to open this fall, but with very limited funding. Their plans are now on hold while they appeal the state's decision, which supporters of online instruction say was based on politics and not a careful analysis of the costs necessary to operate a high-quality

virtual school. What's more, virtual-school advocates say Georgia is not alone in funding virtual schools at a level that is dramatically lower than what traditional schools receive per pupil.

The two Georgia virtual schools, Kaplan Academy of Georgia and Provost Academy Georgia, were approved in June by the Georgia Charter Schools Commission (GCSC), which also decides how much funding each school should receive.

In Georgia, every public school in the state gets funding from two pots—Quality Basic Education (QBE) state funding and local funding from local revenue. Although approved charter and virtual schools still get QBE funding, it's up to the GCSC to determine local per-pupil funding for these schools—and the commission chose not to

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Virginia using iPads for learning

Some students given iPads as social studies 'textbooks'

Meris Stansbury
Associate Editor

In a huge step forward for K-12 education's move toward an all-digital curriculum, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in collaboration with education publisher Pearson, is implementing a pilot program that puts fourth, seventh, and ninth grade social studies curriculum on an iPad.

Supporters say this revolutionary program will test whether students can better acquire knowledge of a subject if instruction caters to different learning styles.

The idea for Pearson to provide an entire social studies curriculum via the iPad was part of the VDOE's "Beyond Textbooks" initiative, which is designed to "explore the potential of wireless technology and digital textbooks to enhance teaching and learning."

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Grants aim to boost college readiness

From staff and wire reports

Aiming to improve college readiness and completion with the help of technology tools, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has teamed up with higher-education technology advocacy group EDUCAUSE to give away \$20 million through a new grant program called Next Generation Learning Challenges.

The foundation invites proposals from schools, colleges, and innovators from outside the education arena, and it will fund proposals every six to 12 months. Grant awards will range in size from \$250,000 to \$750,000. The first round of proposals for this collaborative, multi-year initiative are due Nov. 19, and winners are expected to be announced by the end of March.

"American education has been the best in the world, but we're falling below our own high standards of excellence for high school and college attainment," said Microsoft

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— Jennifer Nastu

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This 'Superman' doesn't fly

Filmmaker Davis Guggenheim gives us a shallow oversimplification of the problems plaguing U.S. public education. Here's what we should be talking about instead

Dennis Pierce, Editor
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As a strong supporter of American public education, I don't know what's more depressing: that the film *Waiting for 'Superman'* is so bad, or that so many critics have heaped such high praise upon it. But—given our propensity for solutions to complex problems that can fit neatly on a bumper sticker, in a pull quote, or in a seven-second sound bite—I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

I realize that saying you support public education these days is like saying you support Mel Gibson, or you like the French. But it's about time someone stood on a rooftop and shouted through the cacophony of ill-informed opinions that no other nation in the world tries to do so much—prepare *all* children for college or the workforce, regardless of their background, circumstances, or special needs—in the face of so many challenges. Yes, we can do better—we *must* do better—but given the daunting nature of these challenges, it's a wonder our schools are doing as well as they are.

If you're a teacher, you know these challenges all too well: Children coming to school malnourished, or not ready to learn ... Kids who have learning disabilities or who don't even speak English ... Classrooms packed with 30 or more students, yet lacking the fundamental resources necessary to give each child the individual attention they deserve ... Cell phones, TV, and video games that divert students' focus from the lessons at hand ... Parents who don't make their children do homework, or who excuse their poor behavior ... Overloaded schedules that leave far too little time to plan engaging lessons, collaborate with colleagues, or advance one's own learning ... the list goes on.

It's too bad filmmaker Davis Guggenheim fails to grasp any of these challenges.

Remarkably, in a documentary spanning nearly two hours, Guggenheim doesn't interview a single classroom teacher about what's wrong with American public education. The only appearance in the film of someone representing a teacher's perspective is Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, and let's be honest: She's on screen merely to act as a foil, not to offer any wisdom.

(In a textbook example of the propaganda technique known as "stacking the deck," each time Weingarten gets screen time in the film, Guggenheim cuts her off after she makes a single statement, without allowing any follow-up explanation that would add necessary context to her remarks. The result, if you've seen the film in a public theater, is exactly the kind of audible gasp from the audience that Guggenheim is aiming for.)

Other than that, the so-called "experts" interviewed in the film are all education outsiders—*Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter, Microsoft's Bill Gates—and controversial school reformers like Geoffrey Canada and Michelle Rhee. What emerges from these interviews is a reinforcing of tired, old stereotypes about how unions are blocking much-needed reforms ... but very little new insight.

We are told, for instance, that once teachers get tenure, they are virtually impossible to fire—and if we just got rid of the bottom 6 percent of teachers, we'd be doing as well as Finland in international comparisons.

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Fire the worst teachers, and watch our students' test scores magically rise. But where are those new teachers going to come from? Will they be given the same training, mentoring, resources, and support as the teachers they're replacing—which, in most cases, is not nearly enough? And if so, why would we expect a different result?

By presenting unions as "a menace and an impediment to reform" (a direct quote from the film), Guggenheim creates the kind of two-dimensional vil-

lain that you'd expect to find in a comic book featuring the hero mentioned in his film title. And he focuses on this caricature at the expense of other, very legitimate problems in public education.

The trouble with the "fire the bad teachers" mindset is that it assumes teachers work in a vacuum, and that they're solely responsible for their students' outcomes. In reality, students are in school for only 25 percent of their day, so their development depends on many factors outside a teacher's control. And teachers, in turn, are largely dependent on the support structures they get from school and district administrators.

Are there some poor teachers who don't put forth much effort? Yes, just as in any other field—and these individuals have no place in a classroom. But the vast majority of teachers—even those whose students' test scores might suggest they are "ineffective"—are trying hard, and they want to be successful. They have an incredibly difficult job, and they need more support to be effective. Firing these individuals and hiring new teachers in their place is no guarantee of success—and it ignores the underlying problems that led to mediocrity in the first place.

If *Superman's* contributors thought highly enough of teachers to listen to their concerns, they'd learn that teachers are crying out for more support. In fact, teachers would rather have this support than higher salaries.

In one of the largest-ever national surveys of public school teachers, commissioned by Scholastic Inc. and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and released in March, fewer than half of the teachers surveyed (45 percent) said higher salaries are absolutely essential for retaining good teachers. More teachers said it's essential to have supportive leadership (68 percent), time to collaborate (54 percent), and high-quality curriculum (49 percent).

This is why merit pay won't work: It assumes teachers would just try harder for the promise of more money. But most teachers already are trying as hard as they can. What they need instead is more help—such as training on ways to better identify their students' individual needs and tailor their instruction accordingly, time to plan collaborative projects that would stimulate their students' interest and lead to higher-order thinking skills, and the technology tools that would allow them to adopt these techniques. Not surprisingly, a new study from Vanderbilt University, which found that merit pay had no impact on student test scores, appears to support this notion (see story, page 17).

Yet, merit pay is one of several trendy school reforms that *Superman* embraces uncritically. The AFT and other unions have legitimate concerns about many of these reforms, as we've written about before. But nowhere in the film do viewers learn what those concerns are—and so the dialogue that *Superman* purports to want to start about improving U.S. education can't even get off the ground.

The film alludes to several charter schools as models for reform, such as the Harlem Children's Zone schools that Canada leads in New York City. And in a haunting final sequence, we see the very public anguish of several families as their children are denied placement in these various schools through an arbitrary lottery process. But what is it about these schools that makes them successful? That's what the film really should have focused on—and it would have been far more instructive if it had.

The key to these schools' success cannot be summed up as freedom from the constraints of union rules, as Guggenheim would have us believe. For if that were the case, then charter schools would be outperforming traditional public schools across the board. In truth, charter schools do no better, on average, than regular public schools do. There are some exemplary charters, just



We don't need reformers with superhero aspirations; we need a collective commitment to doing the hard work necessary to bolster U.S. public education.

as there are exemplary public schools—and there are many bad ones, too.

If the film had looked more closely, it would have discovered that the elements that make some charter schools a success are the same factors that lead to success in traditional public schools: strong leadership; a vision for ensuring that all students can succeed, and a plan for addressing each child's unique learning needs; a challenging and engaging curriculum that is relevant to students' lives and interests; and committed teachers who have the training and the tools they need to realize this vision.

New York City's School of One, for instance, is a charter school whose success relies on giving each child an individual learning plan in math (see story, page 18). And the schools we profile in our Special Report on blended learning (page 21)—a mix of traditional schools and charters—are using a combination of face-to-face and online instruction to personalize the curriculum for students, while also giving them the in-person support to help them thrive.

If we want to have an honest conversation about the problems facing U.S. education, we need to move beyond the bland banalities found in *Waiting for 'Superman.'* At eSchool News Online, we've created a platform for doing just that: www.eschoolnews.com/reform. This brand-new section of our web site contains the latest news, research, and opinions on school reform—as well as a national forum for encouraging a deeper discussion—to help school and community leaders explore real, effective strategies for moving education forward in the 21st century.

The challenges facing public education today require responsible, thoughtful, multifaceted solutions that involve all stakeholders working in concert—not shallow responses or agenda-driven reformers with superhero aspirations. We don't need a Superman; what we need is a collective commitment to doing the hard work necessary to bolster public education as the foundation of a strong democracy. Anything less would be a disservice to our nation and its children.

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Online update

Online resource centers help you meet your toughest ed-tech challenges

Nancy David, Online Director

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eSchool News Online has the answers. Go to www.eSchoolNews.com/Resources/Educator-Resource-Center to find answers to your most pressing ed-tech challenges around these topics and more.

The editors of *eSchool News* have assembled a variety of resource centers on the hottest topics in education technology. The microsites described here are just a few of the Educator Resource Centers (ERCs) available at **eSN Online**—collections of news stories, special reports, best practices, and other information aimed at helping you sort out the complex challenges your schools face every day. To access these and other ERCs, visit www.eSchoolNews.com/Resources/Educator-Resource-Center and start solving your most difficult challenges today!

Interactive Learning in the Connected Classroom

With support from Texas Instruments, we've assembled these stories from our archives to give you powerful examples of how technology can engage students, improve retention, and make learning more interactive.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/07/15/interactive-learning-in-the-connected-classroom/>

New Options in One-to-One Computing

Just a few years ago, school leaders looking to give every student a computing device had a fairly simple choice to make: Mac or Windows laptops? But that's no longer true today, as an explosion in mobile learning devices has given educators several new options. Not to worry: With support from CDW-G, we've assembled this collection of stories to help you understand all the options available for your schools.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/08/28/new-options-in-one-to-one-computing/>

Professional Development for Data-Driven Improvement

School systems are making significant progress in using student achievement data to drive continuous improvement. But a recent federal report suggests that educators are still looking for examples of how best to connect data to instruction, underscoring the need for more professional development focused on best practices in data-driven improvement. With the support of CompassLearning, we've put together this collection of stories that address this important topic.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/09/06/professional-development-for-data-driven-improvement/>

Empowering Education with Video

Communication has changed, and students and educators are increasingly using video technologies in all aspects of education. With support from JDL Horizons, we've assembled this collection of stories and other resources to help you understand the many ways that video can empower your teachers and students.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/08/26/empowering-education-with-video/>

Project-Based Learning in the Classroom

With employers looking for graduates who can communicate effectively, think critically, and solve problems in collaboration with other team members, more and more schools are looking to project-based learning as a way to better prepare students for these demands. What's more, project-based learning encourages a deeper level of thinking by involving students in answering questions for themselves, making connections, and using analytical skills. With the support of the Alan Sitomer BookJam, published by Recorded Books K-12, we've assembled this collection of stories to help you understand how your colleagues in other schools are implementing project-based learning effectively in their classrooms.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/08/28/project-based-learning-in-the-classroom/>

15 Essentials for Effective School Technology Management

A solid IT staff is the backbone to any well-integrated, effective school technology program. Aside from technical skills, school IT leaders must be familiar with issues such as Web 2.0 tools, filtering, and acceptable-use policies to keep up with district needs. With the support of Lightspeed Systems, we've assembled this collection of stories from our archives—as well as an invaluable school IT management guide from Lightspeed—to help you and your IT staff become as effective as possible.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2010/09/29/15-essentials-for-effective-school-technology-management/>

ASBO conference helps schools save money

From staff reports

New technologies that can help schools save money and improve efficiency were on display during the Association for School Business Officials' annual conference in Orlando Sept. 24-26.

Among the many products featured during the conference were systems designed to keep better track of the hours worked by school bus drivers, recover the costs associated with opening schools for community use, and even dry students' hands more efficiently than by using paper towels or traditional warm-air blowers.

Missoula, Mont.-based Education Logistics Inc. (EDULOG) said its eDPS electronic driver payroll system saved the Clayton County, Ga., school system an estimated \$1 million in driver payroll expenses last year.

eDPS is a mobile smart-phone application that bus drivers use to record when their shift begins and ends. The software exists on a phone that stays on the bus at all times, and information from the application is sent to EDULOG's servers, where it is uploaded to the district's payroll system automatically.

Bus drivers use the phone's keypad to enter their ID numbers, "and the system ... take[s] care of the rest," said John Lyles, Clayton County's transportation director, in a press release. "That way, ... there can be no fudging of the time, and there's no need to collect, store, and transcribe paper cards. That in itself saves time and money, and EDULOG's electronic system keeps accurate records down to the minute."

That can be important, Lyles noted: With more than 500 drivers being paid an average of \$19 per hour, an extra 15 minutes per driver can really add up if the drivers are estimating their time worked each day.

Plus, having an automated system helps the district keep track of which drivers might be approaching 40 hours worked in a given week—allowing officials to assign other drivers to keep from having to pay overtime wages.

EDULOG isn't the only company that offers this capability; Indianapolis-based Synovia Corp. offers three different types of products for automating bus driver payroll.

The most basic system from Synovia is a simple key fob that drivers must insert into a device on the bus that tracks their hours; as long as their fob is inserted, the drivers are considered on the clock. The company's middle-range solution allows drivers to scroll through a menu to designate a specific job code for the task they are performing—so if a district pays different rates for different kinds of driving jobs, the system can recognize these differences and report the correct payment accordingly.

The top-of-the-line system from Synovia is a mobile terminal that also lets drivers send and receive automated messages to a dispatcher. The terminal includes an emergency button that will summon emergency-response personnel if pressed.

Cary, N.C.-based SchoolDude is best known for its online software that helps school district IT managers with help-

desk support and inventory management, but the company also offers a program that can help schools recover the costs associated with opening their buildings to the community after normal hours.

SchoolDude's FSDirect is a facility scheduling software program for managing usage requests, tracking event schedules, and accounting for expenses related to facility use.

According to SchoolDude's research, about 97 percent of schools say they're losing money on community use of facilities. Additional expenses for lighting, heat, custodial service, and building wear and tear can be a major drain on already overstretched budgets—but schools that invoice for after-hours use of their facilities are recovering costs equivalent to \$17.91 per student, per year, using FSDirect, the company says.

The costs incurred when students and faculty wash and dry their hands throughout the day might not rank high on the list of what keeps most school business officials awake at night, but Chicago-based Dyson Inc. believes it can save schools handfuls of money.

The Dyson Airblade is the fastest, most hygienic hand dryer available, the company says. It uses sheets of air traveling at more than 400 miles per hour to scrape water from a user's hands like a windshield wiper, completely drying a pair of hands in 12 seconds.

The \$1,199 device uses up to 80 percent less energy than warm-air hand dryers and can dry 22 pairs of hands for the price of a single paper towel, Dyson claims. Assuming a cost of one cent for every sheet of paper towel, the Airblade—which comes with a five-year warranty—reportedly will pay for itself within a year if used 200 times a day.

A program called Destiny Textbook Manager, from Follett Software Co., is helping several districts save money by keeping better track of their textbooks.

The program includes handheld barcode scanners for tracking instructional materials by building, teacher, and student. This raises accountability, giving students an incentive to take better care of their books, Follett says. It also reduces the likelihood of unnecessary textbook purchases by district officials.

Using Destiny Textbook Manager, Florida's Escambia County School District has saved more than \$200,000 over the last two years by improving textbook accountability and reducing over-ordering across the district, Follett says. And California's Pomona Unified Schools District reportedly has cut its textbook losses by 25 percent and reduced duplicate orders by 70 percent since implementing the system.

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House Democrats punt on net neutrality

From staff and wire reports

In the latest development in the fight over “net neutrality” regulations, House Democrats have shelved a last-ditch effort to broker a compromise between phone, cable, and internet companies on rules that would prohibit broadband providers from blocking or degrading online traffic flowing over their networks.

House Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., abandoned the effort Sept. 29 in the face of Republican opposition to his proposed net-neutrality rules. Those rules were intended to prevent broadband providers from be-

coming online gatekeepers by playing favorites with traffic.

The battle over net neutrality has pitted public-interest groups and internet companies such as Google Inc. and Skype against the nation’s big phone and cable companies, including AT&T Inc., Verizon Communications Inc., and Comcast Corp.

Public-interest groups and internet companies say regulations are needed to prevent phone and cable operators from slowing or blocking internet phone calls, online video, and other web services that compete with their core businesses. They also want rules to ensure that broadband companies cannot favor their own online traffic or the

traffic of business partners that can pay for priority access.

Many ed-tech officials also support net-neutrality rules to ensure that smaller institutions without massive technology budgets are on a level playing field with their larger counterparts in being able to deliver online content to students.

But the phone and cable companies insist they need flexibility to manage network traffic so that high-bandwidth applications don’t hog capacity and slow down their systems. They say this is particularly true for wireless networks, which have more bandwidth constraints than wired systems. The communications companies also argue that after spend-

ing billions to upgrade their networks for broadband, they need to be able to earn a healthy return by offering premium services. Burdensome net-neutrality rules, they say, would discourage future investments.

Waxman’s proposal, the product of weeks of negotiations, attempted to carve out a middle ground by prohibiting internet traffic discrimination over wireline networks while giving broadband providers more leeway when it comes to managing traffic on wireless networks. The plan would have allowed the Federal Communications Commission to impose fines of up to \$2 million for violations, but it would not have given the FCC the authority to make new rules for broadband providers.

If that sounds familiar, it should: It bears a strong resemblance to a compromise plan on net neutrality released by Google and Verizon in August, to great dismay from public-interest groups.

Net neutrality was the Obama administration’s top campaign pledge to the technology industry and a major priority of the current FCC chairman, Julius Genachowski, a key architect of Obama’s technology platform. But frustration is growing—particularly among public-interest groups—as the debate has dragged on over the past year without resolution either at the FCC or in Congress.

Waxman’s proposal, in part, fell victim to today’s political climate, with Republicans hoping to rack up gains in the upcoming midterm elections apparently unwilling to help Democrats make progress on such a contentious issue. With an anti-government, anti-regulation sentiment sweeping the nation, Republicans also were reluctant to support a proposal that opponents equate to regulating the internet.

The FCC has been trying to craft a new framework for regulating broadband since a federal appeals court in April threw out its current approach, which treats broadband as a lightly regulated “information service.” The agency had argued that this approach gave it ample jurisdiction to mandate net neutrality.

But the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia rejected that argument. It ruled that the agency had overstepped its authority when it ordered Comcast to stop blocking subscribers from using an online file-sharing service called BitTorrent to swap movies and other big files.

With Congress making no progress to resolve this issue, several public-interest groups on Sept. 29 called on Genachowski to move ahead with his proposal to reclassify broadband as a telecom service.

“The FCC must act now to protect consumers by reinstating its authority over broadband,” Gigi Sohn, president of the public interest group Public Knowledge, said in a statement. “We expect the FCC to do so to carry out one of the fundamental promises of the Obama administration.”

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Schools still conflicted over Web 2.0 tools

Some districts have strong technology use policies, while others hesitate to implement these tools

From staff and wire reports

Many school systems have discovered that Web 2.0 tools such as blogging, social networking, and collaborative authoring software can help create participatory learning environments—but the gap between schools that have embraced these tools and those that have not is still large.

A new monograph from the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) profiles six school districts—Birdville Independent School District in Texas, New Canaan Public Schools in Connecticut, Michigan's Westwood Cyber High School, Georgia's Forsyth County Schools, Barrington 220 in Illinois, and White Oak Independent School District in Texas—and examines how those districts are using Web 2.0 tools to align school policies and practices with global education goals.

"Web 2.0 as a Force for School Transformation: A Tale of Six Districts" contains profiles of each district, an overview of some of the Web 2.0 tools that each uses, and a librarian's perspective on the role that school media centers play in adopting Web 2.0 strategies. The profiles also address filtering policies as they relate to Web 2.0 content.

Web 2.0 tools can transform learning by helping students connect with classrooms across the country or around the globe, CoSN says. They can enhance collaboration, help educators and students discover new research methods, stimulate creative thinking and problem solving, and link teachers with valuable professional development opportunities. CoSN hopes these six profiles inspire other districts to investigate Web 2.0's

potential as an education technology tool.

"We do have some school districts that are really moving forward and that have managed to dispel some of the fears and the bad information [about Web 2.0 tools]," said James Bosco, principal investigator for the CoSN project. "They're here to stay. Yes, there are problems, there are issues that come with social networking, but it's really critical not to have a 'rule it out' mentality."

Bosco said each district included in the monograph demonstrated a commitment to bringing Web 2.0 integration to scale throughout the district and not simply allowing teachers to use Web 2.0 tools, but developing a district culture around them.

The extent to which Web 2.0 tools can affect district and classroom practice depends on how district leaders implement the tools, Bosco said.

"That's probably the toughest issue, because it's one thing to say, 'We'll use Web 2.0 and new digital media so long as it conforms to what we have been doing in the past,'" he said. "It's another thing to recognize that the real message is that we have to think differently about learning, and about the roles of teachers and students—that's the big challenge."

Developing a mindset in which teachers are willing to cede some control and let students explore their own learning is essential if Web 2.0 tools are to make a difference in the classroom, he explained.

The six districts represent the changing face of education, Bosco said, which gradually is starting to position students more successfully for life in a global workforce.

"Five years from now, there will still be districts looking like they're in the

1950s," he said. "It won't be a smooth progression, but I really do believe we're seeing something start here, and that gives cause for optimism. At least in some places, kids will be receiving the kind of education and schooling they really need—and that is in tune with the world in which they live."

New research released Sept. 9 suggests that the six districts profiled in the CoSN monograph are part of what is still a small minority in U.S. education.

The survey, which took an extended look at school principals' use of social networking, found the majority of responding principals said they believe social networking sites can provide value in education. But, despite what they viewed as the promise of social networking, most of the principals reported that students aren't allowed to access social networks at school—although respondents acknowledged that students can bypass these restrictions with their mobile phones.

The report, "School Principals and Social Networking in Education: Practices, Policies, and Realities in 2010," combines results from an online survey of 1,200 educators, including principals, librarians, and teachers, and an in-depth online discussion with 12 school principals who have used social networking professionally.


Of the 12 principals who participated in the in-depth online discussion, several thought use of social networking and online collaboration tools would help make school more relevant to students—that is, these tools would help "reach students where they're at."

Survey respondents also said they believe social networking tools provide a way

for educators to share information and resources with an extended community of their peers, create professional learning communities, and improve school-wide communications with students and staff. About half of those who responded rated social networking as "very valuable" in these pursuits.

Yet none of the 12 principals in the discussion group had school or district social networking policies in place that were deemed adequate, suggesting the need for conversations and collaboration to establish policies that can facilitate appropriate use of social networking in schools for educational purposes.

Principals in the discussion group mentioned a variety of barriers to the integration of social networking into classroom instruction, including legal concerns, concerns about inappropriate use and the need for proper monitoring, and lack of time (to set up the system and for professional development and practice).

The research was conducted by edWeb.net, Interactive Educational Systems Design Inc., MMS Education, and MCH Strategic Data. 

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Facebook 'Groups' could help with collaboration ... if educators allow it

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

A new Facebook feature unveiled Oct. 6 gives users more control over which information is shared with certain groups of people, and it also offers an easy platform for online collaboration on group projects—leading some K-12 educators to wonder if the social networking site might be a viable collaboration tool for students.

The Facebook "Groups" application lets users determine specific content to share with members of a defined group, as well as chat or work together on documents within a group. The feature could be a useful communication and collaboration tool for students outside the classroom—but concerns about online safety might keep many teachers from embracing the tool for such use.

"More collaboration and sharing of resources is a tremendously valuable development for schools," said James Bosco, principal investigator for the Consortium for School Networking's project on Web 2.0 use in education. "I think what's happening is that the schools are beginning to unblock these resources. The recognition is that with the applications being used more widely in society, it becomes more and more problematic not allowing their use in schools."

Facebook Groups is an update of Facebook's "list" feature, which allowed

users to limit who could see different content on profile pages. However, only 5 percent of Facebook's 500 million users took advantage of this feature, according to the web site.

Nancy Willard, executive director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, said while the updates do improve online safety for Facebook's younger users, it is still not an appropriate tool for the classroom.

"From a safety perspective, I think this is really helpful, because it will allow young people to set up groups based on degrees of trust," said Willard. "[But] there are other Web 2.0 platforms that I think are far more geared for effective educational use."

Free and subscription-based tools, such as Google Apps for Education and ePals, already exist to facilitate student and teacher communication and collaboration online.

Facebook Groups is geared toward helping users more simply sort their Facebook friendships into different clusters, to make people more comfortable posting items they only want a limited number of people to see. If used correctly, that could enhance the online safety of Facebook's younger users—to an extent.

"It will be important to help students understand the difference between smaller more trustworthy groups of friends and larger groups of people," said Willard. "But

it is also imperative that young people understand that even if something is just shared with a couple of friends, [it] can be sent further," she continued, citing the recent case of a Duke University student who ranked her romantic experiences as a private joke for friends, only to discover that the ranking list went viral when it was passed on to other Facebook users.

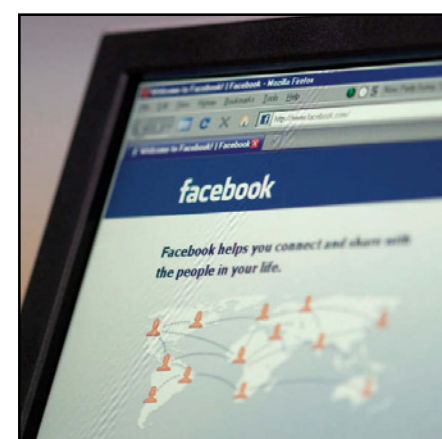
CoSN's Bosco said he fears that if students are not instructed how to properly handle Facebook and sites like it in an educational setting, it could lead to their misuse.

"Many schools are saying this is part of the reality of kids' and adults' lives, and so we probably have to get our heads out of the sand and recognize that we have to work with kids in order to teach them how to use [these sites] responsibly," Bosco said.

Willard disagreed.


"What we're going to have, if schools start using Facebook for educational activities, is advertisers are going to pick up on that and pick up the eyeballs and eWallets of these kids in schools. I think they need time away from that, and I really want to preserve education time for education and not advertising," she said.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said he believes 80 percent of the web site's users will be affected by the Groups feature, either by creating groups or being sort-



Facebook aims to ease privacy fears.

ed into them. Facebook Groups also allows for members to plan events together or edit documents posted within a group.

Some critics of Facebook Groups say it doesn't allow users to accept or deny group memberships. Users therefore must manually "leave" a group they are in if they don't want to receive the group's messages or have it listed on their profile. 

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Pa. district settles webcam spying lawsuits for \$610K

Settlement calls for \$175,000 to be placed in a trust for the lead student plaintiff

From staff and wire reports

A Philadelphia-area school district agreed Oct. 11 to pay \$610,000 to settle two lawsuits over secret photos taken on school-issued laptops.

The Lower Merion School District admitted it captured thousands of webcam photographs and screen shots from student laptops in a misguided effort to locate missing computers.

Harriton High School student Blake

Robbins, then 15, charged in an explosive civil-rights lawsuit filed in February that the district used its remote tracking technology to spy on him inside his home. Later evidence unearthed in the case showed that he was photographed 400 times during a two-week period, sometimes as he slept in his bedroom, according to his lawyer, Mark Haltzman.

The settlement calls for \$175,000 to be placed in a trust for Robbins and \$10,000 for a second student who filed

suit, Jalil Hassan. Haltzman will get \$425,000 for his work on the case.

The FBI investigated whether the district broke any wiretap laws, but prosecutors declined to bring any charges, saying they could not prove any criminal wrongdoing.

"Although we would have valued the opportunity to finally share an important, untold story in the courtroom, we recognize that in this case, a lengthy, costly trial would benefit no one," school board

President David Ebby said in a statement. "It would have been an unfair distraction for our students and staff, and it would have cost taxpayers additional dollars that are better devoted to education."

The district's insurer has agreed to pay \$1.2 million toward legal and settlement costs. The carrier, Graphic Arts Mutual Insurance Co., had questioned in a lawsuit of its own whether the costs associated with the webcam suit would be covered under the district's policy.

Neither Haltzman nor the Robbins family returned calls for comment, according to the Associated Press. Hassan has since graduated from Lower Merion High School, and a phone number for him could not immediately be determined.

The district issues Apple laptop computers to all 2,300 students at its two high schools.

The district's review found that its technology staff captured at least 56,000 images through the remote tracking program, which was sometimes left on inadvertently for months after missing laptops were located.

Robbins said he had never reported his computer missing, and he did not know why the program was activated on his laptop. District officials said he had damaged or destroyed two other school laptops and failed to pay the required \$55 insurance fee on the one he had. He was therefore not authorized to bring it home, a technology official said in court papers.

According to his lawsuit, Robbins learned of the remote activation of his laptop's webcam when a Harriton vice principal cited a laptop photo in telling him that the school thought he was engaging in improper behavior. Robbins told reporters the school had mistaken candy he was seen eating for drugs.

The Lower Merion School Board in August adopted a new set of policies to govern the use and tracking of student laptops. The new policies explain when, how, and for what reasons school officials can access or monitor the laptops. They also require students and their parents to acknowledge the policies and consent in writing to any tracking, or give them an option not to participate in the laptop program.

The policies, recommended by a task force of students, parents, administrators, and community members, met one of the provisions of a federal court injunction signed in May by U.S. District Judge Jan E. DuBois. Besides banning any unauthorized webcam monitoring, the judge ordered the district to enact expansive, transparent policies before the start of the 2010-11 school year. **eSN**

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Summit: U.S. needs more computer science teachers

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Fewer than 65 percent of K-12 schools in the United States offer an introductory-level computer science course, much less rigorous training, according to a recent study conducted by the Association for Computing Machinery and the Computer Science Teachers Association—and an Oct. 6 summit aimed to draw attention to the need for more computer science teachers.

James Shelton, the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement,

spoke of how computer science education was never explicitly included as a part of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education Coalition, which works to support STEM education programs for teachers and students.

"We want a well-rounded curriculum for students. That means reading and writing ... but it also means the other things that add into making a student well-rounded," Shelton said.

"The nation has embraced much more the importance of STEM education, but computer science [education] is very of-

ten missing from that conversation," said Robert Schnabel, dean of the School of Informatics at Indiana University. "Computer science has by far the largest demand for jobs in any period that you see out of the STEM sphere."

One reason for the lag in computer science education is the lack of properly trained educators.

"There are too few computer science teachers, and they are in too few schools," said Lucy Sanders, CEO of the National Center for Women and Information Technology, during a panel discussion.

Norm Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin, said the failing in computer science education is causing the U.S. to lose footing in today's global economy.

"We rank 21st in math and 25th in science out of 30 nations," Augustine said. "The major challenges we face can be centered in two areas: One is underinvestment in basic research to create new knowledge ... and secondly [is] properly trained people."

Only 10 states require a thorough computer science course as a requirement for high school graduation, according to "Running on Empty: The Failure to Teach K-12 Computer Science in the Digital Age," which was released at the summit.

"If it doesn't count, the students won't take it," said Schnabel. "If the students don't take it, the schools will offer it less."

The lack of K-12 computer science education has a direct impact on U.S. technology-based companies, as representatives from Google and Microsoft pointed out. Government projections show that in the next 10 years, more than 1.5 million high-paying jobs in the technology sector will be created in the U.S. alone.


"Frankly, being able to recruit an adequate talent of people remains a challenge," said Dan Reed, corporate vice president of technology policy and strategy at Microsoft. "We would hire more people if we could find more people."

Summit attendees hope the Computer Science Education Act, introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in July, will help bring the focus to computer science education in public schools. The legislation includes plans to fund grants to develop state computer science standards and curriculum, form training programs for computer science teachers, and review the current state of computer science education.

Shelton said it's important for the states to take notice. "That is where the standards will be set. That is where the course requirements will be set. That is where they'll make decisions about whether to spend the resources to recruit teachers with those kinds of credentials ... [who] actually could help with this kind of curriculum," he said.

Schnabel, however, said there are still two important roles that the federal government can play.

"One is to make sure that every time there is a STEM piece of legislation, that it is clear that computer science is part of that legislation. The second is to encourage the states, and where possible fund the states, to both plan and implement programs that will lead to computer science education being much more fully involved," he said.

The summit was convened by Computing in the Core, whose goal is to promote the need for strong K-12 computer science programs. Its first major planned event is Computer Science Education Week, which will take place Dec. 5-11. 



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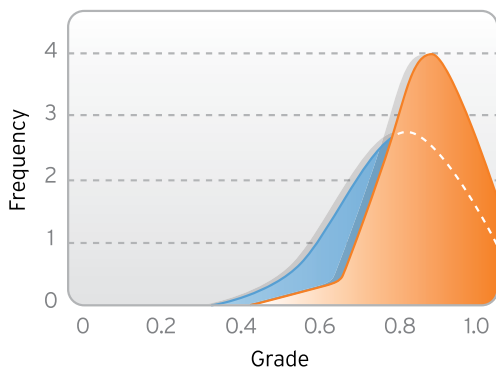


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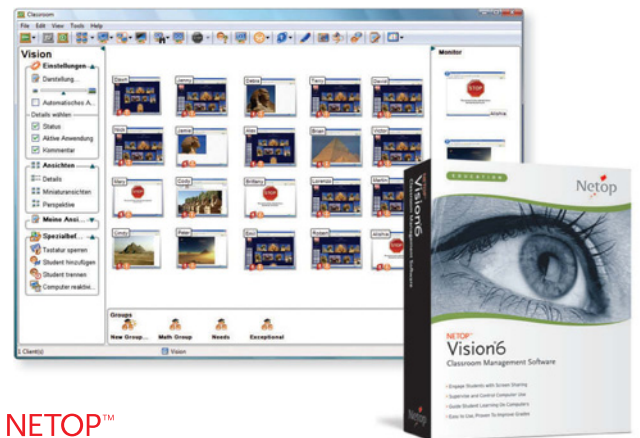


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Technology access law helps those with special needs

New legislation will give Americans with disabilities better access to critical technologies

From staff and wire reports

Americans with disabilities and those with related special education needs will be able to use smart phones, the internet, and other technologies that are staples of life and work more easily under a technology access bill signed into law Oct. 8.

Such a step has been a priority of advocates for the millions of Americans with disabilities such as blindness or loss of hearing.

In the East Room of the White House,

where he was flanked on stage by lawmakers and Stevie Wonder, President Barack Obama portrayed the occasion as another step in guaranteeing equal technology access, opportunity, and respect for all Americans.

He recalled celebrating this year's 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, banning workplace discrimination against qualified people with disabilities and requiring improved access to public places and transportation for those

with disabilities and special education needs.

"We've come a long way but even today, after all the progress that we've made, too many Americans with disabilities are still measured by what folks think they can't do, instead of what we know they can do," Obama said.

The new law "will make it easier for people who are deaf, blind, or live with a visual impairment to do what many of us take for granted," he said, from navigating a TV or DVD menu to sending an

eMail message on a smart phone.

"It sets new standards so that Americans with disabilities can take advantage of the technology our economy depends on, and that's especially important in today's economy when every worker needs the necessary skills to compete for the jobs of the future," Obama said of the technology access law.

In one corner of the East Room, sign language interpreters translated Obama's remarks as he spoke. Across the room, his words scrolled on a large video monitor with help from a stenographer who transcribed them.

Under the law, the quality of life will improve for 25 million people who are blind or have difficulty seeing, along with the estimated 36 million people who are deaf or hard of hearing, advocacy groups say.

"It's very exciting that the legislation has passed, and it has the potential to really make a difference in the lives with students with special needs," said Tracy Gray, director of the National Center for Technology Innovation. "It will mandate that technology tools are accessible to all individuals, and it will open the door to access for individuals who have heretofore been excluded from videos and other emerging technologies. It really keeps them actively engaged."

Nondisabled people stand to benefit, too. They might find the devices and screens easier to use.

The technology access law sets federal guidelines that require the telecommunications industry to:

- Make getting to the internet easier by improving the user interfaces on smart phones.
- Provide audible descriptions of on-screen action to help the blind more fully enjoy television.
- Add captions to online TV programming to help the deaf.
- Make the equipment used for internet telephone calls compatible with hearing aids.
- Add a button or other switch to television remote controls for simpler access to closed captioning on television.

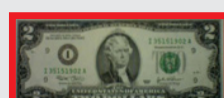
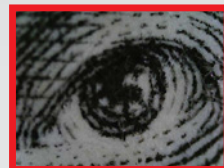
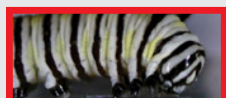
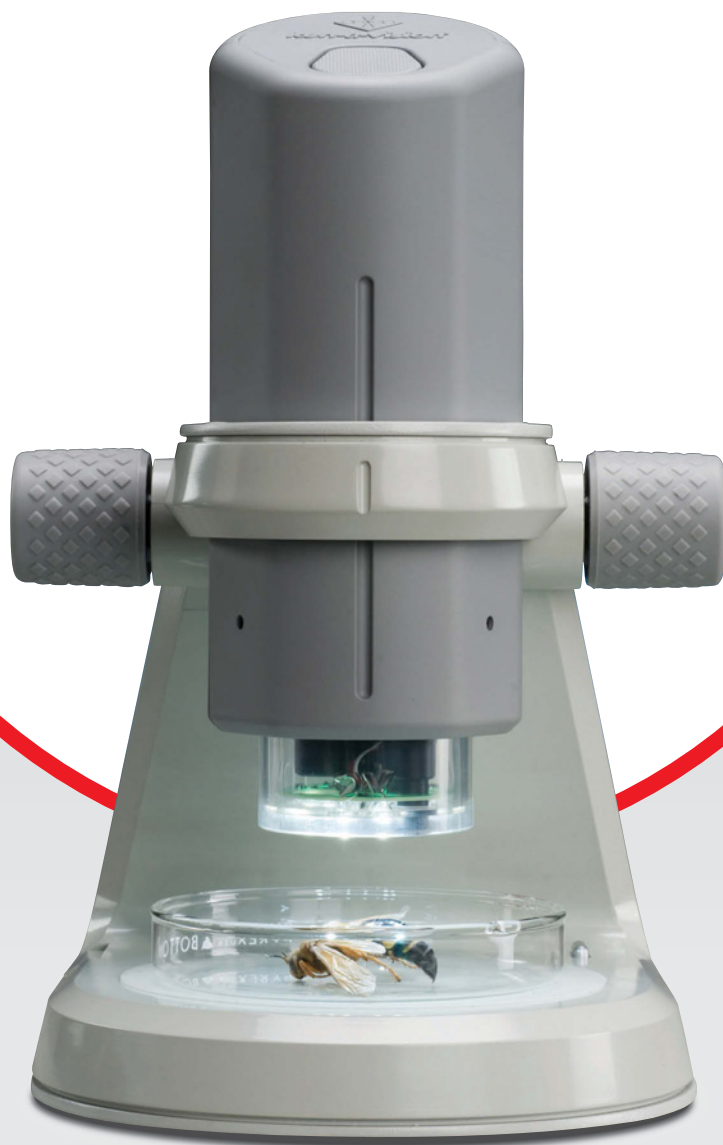
Paul Schroeder, a vice president at the American Foundation for the Blind, said many blind or deaf people have had to spend hundreds of dollars on costly accessories or software to make their cell phones and other devices easier to use.

"We hope that companies will start working immediately on making solutions available and affordable for people with disabilities," he said.

Blind since childhood, Schroeder described the bill as "life changing."

"As a person who is blind, it will bring some of the new technologies that are changing the workplace, education and leisure into my hands," he said. **eSN**

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Study: Teacher bonuses failed to raise test scores

Results raise new questions about the effectiveness of 'merit pay' as a school-reform strategy

From staff and wire reports

Offering big bonuses to teachers failed to raise students' test scores in a three-year study released Sept. 21 that calls into question the Obama administration's push for merit pay to improve education.

The study, conducted in the metropolitan Nashville school system by Vanderbilt University's National Center on Performance Incentives, was described by the researchers as the nation's first scientifically rigorous look at the effects of merit pay for teachers.

It found that students whose teachers were offered bonuses of up to \$15,000 a year for improved test scores registered the same gains on standardized exams as those whose teachers were given no such incentives.

"I think most people agree today that the current way in which we compensate teachers is broken," said Matthew Springer, executive director of the Vanderbilt center and lead researcher on the study. "But we don't know what the better way is yet."

The study comes as the Obama administration is encouraging school systems to link teacher pay and tenure to how students perform on tests and other measures of achievement. A few days after the study's release, the administration announced \$442 million in grants to create merit pay systems in districts across the nation.

The researchers looked at fifth- through eighth-grade math teachers from 2007 to 2009. A group of about 300 teachers started out in the study; half were eligible for the bonuses, the other half were not.

The bonuses were given out based on improvements in scores on Tennessee's standardized exam, which is used by the state as part of the federal No Child Left Behind requirements.

Springer was quick to point out that his study looked only at individual bonuses, not extra pay doled out to teams of teachers or an entire school. He said more research is needed before policy makers reach any definitive conclusions.

The federal Education Department called the study too narrowly focused.

"It only looked at the narrow question of whether more pay motivates teachers to try harder," said spokeswoman Sandra Abrevaya. "What we are trying to do is change the culture of teaching by giving all educators the feedback they need to get better while rewarding and incentivizing the best to teach in high-need schools [and] hard-to-staff subjects."

The American Federation of Teachers praised the study and argued that teachers need other resources, including better training and more supportive administrators. "Merit pay is not the panacea that some would like it to be. There are no quick fixes in education," said union president Randi Weingarten.

Teachers unions have historically opposed merit pay, arguing that test scores are not an accurate measure of student achievement, that financial rewards could pit teachers against each other, and that administrators could use bonuses to reward favorites and punish others.

Jennifer Conboy, a high school social studies teacher in Miami, called merit pay a "baseless fad."

"Merit pay is an excuse to resist the attempt of teachers to get fair pay in the first place," the 37-year-old Conboy said. "On a personal level, merit pay would do nothing

to me. I took this job because I think education is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and if I cared about democracy—which I do—then I had a responsibility to do whatever I could to strengthen education."

Only a few schools and districts across the country have merit pay, and in some states the idea is effectively illegal. The Obama administration hoped to encourage more states to pass merit pay laws with its \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" grant competition.

Only about half of the 300 teachers originally in the Nashville study were left at the end of the three years because some retired,

moved to other schools, or stopped teaching math. About 40 teachers got bonuses each year. Overall, the researchers said, test scores rose modestly for both groups of students during the three-year study, suggesting that the financial incentives made no difference.

"It's not enough to say, 'I'll pay you more if you do better.' You've got to help people know how to do better," said Amy Wilkins, vice president of the Education Trust, a Washington, D.C., think tank. "Absolutely we should reward them once they do better, but to think merit pay alone will get them there is insane." **ESN**

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'School of One' boosts individual learning

Each middle school math student receives an individual learning plan and personalized instruction

Jenna Zwang
Assistant Editor

Although an innovative school model in New York City called the School of One has just started its first full year of implementation, it already has garnered national attention for its middle school math program, which is being hailed as a pioneer for a new method of education based on each student's individual learning experience.

In traditional classrooms, teachers lead students through the curriculum at the same

pace, and every student is expected to learn the same material at the same time. The School of One focuses on learning progression, but students might begin the same lesson at different points. State test results and other assessments identify which skills a student needs to develop, and those skills make up a student's "playlist," or individual learning plan.

School of One students receive a daily schedule based on their own academic strengths or needs. The schedules are tai-

lored to each student's ability and to the way that student learns best.

School of One CEO Joel Rose, a former teacher, said the inflexibility of traditional course curriculum concerned him and prompted him to imagine what learning might be like if it were tailored more to students in an individual learning experience.

"In a traditional classroom, we know that when a teacher may be teaching, not every student is ready to learn," said Rose.

Math instruction is of a particular con-

cern at a time when math skills are essential for success in college and the workforce. Instead of a one-room lecture-style math classroom, students in the School of One's math program enter an open space with several different learning stations that let students learn with a teacher, with software, via online tutors, through group collaboration, or by working independently.

Rose said this form of learning lets students "choose their modality," and not every student is at the same achievement level upon entering the classroom.

"We're operating on a middle school level," said Rose. "We have some students [who] have gaps in third and fourth grade skills and some students [who] are ready for ninth grade."

To accommodate this spread of skills, the School of One administers daily assessments to determine what kind of math lesson a student needs next.

"We have data about each student. We know precisely what skills they've mastered, what they haven't mastered, and what they should be ready to learn," said Rose.

These data are matched by computer to a lesson bank with more than 5,000 middle school math lesson plans from 50 different content providers.

"Our algorithm looks at those two data sets ... and creates a unique schedule for each student and each teacher every day that effectively matches the student with the lesson that is most likely to be successful for them," Rose said.

The result is a television display at the front of the room that resembles an airport departures and arrivals schedule. Each student's name is displayed, along with his or her station schedules for the day.

"We have some students [who] love working with technology and some [who] don't; some [who] love working in groups and some [who] don't," said Rose.

Teachers do have the ability to override a student's individual learning schedule based on their professional judgment, but they are able to start off with a strong set of recommendations. This computer process allows for each student to be matched with the way he or she learns best.

So far, the algorithm is working. A study conducted by the New York City Department of Education concluded that School of One participants achieved more than nine times the math skill growth than their peers in a third of the time.

The School of One currently operates only in New York City, but Rose hopes this year will generate the information needed to continue expanding the program.

"This will be our first full year of implementation, so we want to rigorously evaluate the results and continue to learn what makes this model successful," said Rose. "If the data continue to show promising results, we'd like to expand School of One into additional schools both inside and outside New York City."

This expansion seems more likely now that the School of One has secured an Investing in Innovation Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which will allow school leaders to further develop the system's infrastructure. While it is currently



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Survey: Children like eBooks; parents, not so much

A majority of children say they might read more if they had access to electronic readers

From staff and wire reports

Children and teens are ready to try eBooks, with some thinking that a bigger selection of electronic texts would make reading for fun even more fun, according to a new study. But most parents aren't planning to join the digital revolution.

The 2010 Kids and Family Reading Report, released Sept. 29 and commissioned by Scholastic Inc., offers a mixed portrait of eBooks and families. Around 60 percent of those ages 9 to 17 say they're interested in reading on an electronic device such as the Kindle or the iPad. Around one out of three from the same age group say they'd read more "for fun" if more books were available on a digital reader.

Among the books that can't be downloaded: the "Harry Potter" series, pub-

"I'm not surprised to know that. I think we're still at the beginning of eBooks," said Scholastic Book Club president Judy Newman, adding that the expense of digital devices was a likely problem for potential eBook fans.

The 2010 report shows, as other studies have, a decline in reading for fun as children grow older. More than half read for fun between ages 6 and 8, but the percentage drops to around 25 percent by ages 15 through 17 and just 20 percent for boys in that age group. Newman sees technology as both a problem and possible solution.

"We know that around age 8 [children] start to lose interest in reading," Newman says. "Obviously, digital media [are] competing for kids' attention. It's very important that we as publishers make sure we're engaging kids in reading for fun. There's an opportunity to use technology to engage kids. ... We can have great content presented in a digital way."

The Kids and Family report was compiled by the Harrison Group, a marketing and research consulting firm. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2010, with 1,045 children and 1,045 parents inter-

viewed. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points. **eSN**

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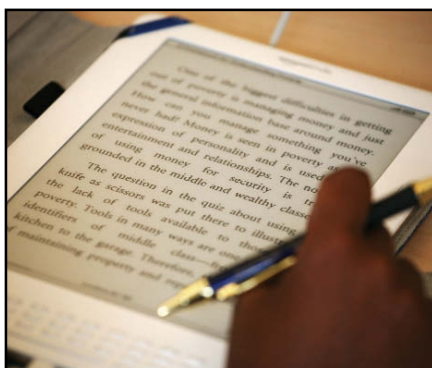
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Can eBooks spark interest in reading?

lished in the U.S. by Scholastic. J.K. Rowling has said she prefers her work to be read on paper.

The eBook market has grown rapidly since 2007 and the launch of Amazon.com's Kindle device, from less than 1 percent of overall sales to between 5 to 10 percent, publishers say. But the new report is also the latest to show substantial resistance. Just 6 percent of parents surveyed have an electronic reading device, while 76 percent say they have no plans to buy one. Sixteen percent plan to have one within the following year.

In a recent Harris Poll of adults, 80 percent said they were not likely to get an eReader.

School of One...

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focused on middle school math, Rose isn't limiting the future.

"We really want to make sure we get math right first, but our view is for every subject, live teacher-led instruction 100 percent of the time for 100 percent of the kids may not be the right answer, and figuring out the right way to integrate other modalities into other subjects is something we think will hold a lot of promise in lots of subjects," Rose said. **eSN**

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Grants...

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Chairman Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. "We're living in a tremendous age of innovation. We should harness new technologies and innovation to help all students get the education they need to succeed."

Next Generation Learning Challenges seeks proposals that address four specific challenges:

- Increasing the use of blended learning models, which combine face-to-face instruction with online learning activities;
- Deepening students' learning and engagement through the use of interactive applications, such as digital games,

interactive video, immersive simulations, and social media;

- Supporting the availability of high-quality open courseware, particularly for high-enrollment introductory classes such as math, science, and English, which often have low rates of student success; and
- Helping institutions, instructors, and students benefit from learning analytics, which can monitor student progress in real time and customize the delivery of proven supports and interventions.

Other organizations collaborating on the effort include the League for Innovation in the Community College, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Boosting the nation's college completion rate is critical for both a strong economy and the financial security of American families, the Gates Foundation said. Careers requiring postsecondary education or training will make up 63 percent of all job openings by 2018. However, while access to higher education has improved, the rate of college completion has not. By age 30, fewer than half of all Americans have earned a college degree—and for low-income or minority students, the situation is even bleaker.

Next Generation Learning Challenges will evaluate the effectiveness of technology in learning to help educators understand the approaches that best help students succeed and why, EDUCAUSE said. The program also will create op-

portunities for innovators, educators, and developers to exchange ideas and collaboratively push the evolving field forward.

The Gates Foundation grants mark the latest effort by a technology industry executive to influence school reform. In September, Mark Zuckerberg, the 26-year-old wunderkind behind Facebook, announced a \$100 million gift to help turn around the Newark, N.J., schools, where three out of five third-graders can't read and write at their grade level and barely half the students who begin high school manage to graduate.

Zuckerberg said he would donate \$100 million worth of Facebook stock to the Newark schools over the next five years through his new "Startup: Education" foundation.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said he would give Mayor Cory Booker a major role in overseeing any changes in the district, which the state took over in 1995



Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg

because of persistently low test scores and wasteful spending. Booker pledged to raise an additional \$150 million for the effort.

"What's the alternative? Is it to continue what we're doing now, with nearly a 50-percent dropout rate?" Christie said. "I'm much more willing to take risks and take chances when it comes to this."

The three so far have been short on specifics, saying that a key first step of the process would be getting community input on changes that need to be made.

Recounting how his grandmother had been a teacher and his parents had worked hard to give himself and his three sisters a good education, Zuckerberg said he hoped to do the same, not just for thousands of Newark students, but to help create a new model for successful public education that could be replicated nationwide. He dismissed questions about the timing of his donation, which coincides with the release of a movie about Facebook that portrays him in a less than flattering light.

"This [donation] is something that's going to play out for years," he said. **eSN**

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Blended learning on the rise

Combining the best elements of face-to-face and online instruction, these six schools have adopted various blended learning models successfully.

Here's how

It's a typical weekday, and Leah Rogers is greeting students as they arrive at school. She hasn't seen any of these kids in a while, because they haven't set foot in the building for a week ... but that's by design.

Rogers is acting head of the Chicago Virtual Charter School (CVCS), an innovative school that is a cross between a traditional school and a virtual one: Students work online from home four days a week and come to school for the fifth.

In a typical school environment, all students in a classroom have to learn the same thing at same time.

But at CVCS, students can work on material at their own pace, and educators can tailor their instruction to each student individually to fill the gaps in that child's knowledge.

"In a traditional setting, students are at the mercy of the teacher, who decides how fast they're learning [and] how much time they have to spend on the subject," Rogers said. "We give those who 'get it' faster the ability to move on."

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Blended learning...

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Although students are working from home most of the time, they appreciate the chance to come to school one day a week to see classmates and their teachers face to face. The occasional face time is like an anchor that keeps them from drifting too far off their course of studies, supporters say.

CVCS is one of a growing number of schools that have adopted a blend of face-to-face and online instruction, an approach that appears to be paying off: Despite serving many poor and minority students, the school made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2008 and 2009 and has posted considerable gains in both reading and math, becoming one of 147 public schools in Illinois to win an Academic Improvement Award.

Best of both worlds

For many school reformers, blended learning is an exciting instructional model because it combines the best elements of both face-to-face and online instruction.

As technology advances and new digital tools become available to educators and students, a steady migration toward online learning has begun to take place. Many students who struggle in a traditional learning environment now have the opportunity to attend a “virtual” school, where they can learn at their own pace: Advanced students are not held back by the slower pace of their peers, while students with disabilities have more time to understand the material before moving on. Parents in rural communities who home-school their children because of the time and distance it takes to travel to the nearest brick-and-mortar school can have the support of a strong

online curriculum. And students who have dropped out of school have the chance to resume their education, finish high school, and get a diploma via distance learning. Meanwhile, multimedia options give online learning an edge often not found in traditional learning environments.

But despite the potential benefits that virtual learning offers, traditional, face-to-face learning has significant strengths of its own. Students can interact in person with a teacher who can answer questions and help motivate them. Teachers can evaluate students more individually, taking into account personal elements in a way that even the best computer program cannot replicate. (They can more easily tell if a student is moody, or anxious, or depressed, for instance—and they can intervene as appropriate.) Traditional schools offer more opportunities for peer interaction and the chance to develop deeper personal relationships. Brick-and-mortar schools also offer a physical place where students can learn, which gives working parents the ability to leave the house for their jobs and know that their children are in a safe environment.

Because both the traditional and online models have their own unique benefits, a number of schools have found that a blended, or hybrid, approach works well.

“I believe the blended model is the future of education,” says Darren Reed, vice president of hybrid schools and programs for the online-education company K12 Inc. “With a traditional school, you label kids with the terms ‘above grade level,’ ‘on grade level,’ and ‘below grade level.’ But that can be misleading. A kid can know a certain skill within a subject really well, and not know another skill within that same subject at all. With a hybrid model, we can tailor their learning, using technology and face-to-face learning, in a way that we might not be able to in a pure traditional model.”

That’s not to say that traditional brick-and-mortar

schools and online-only schools cannot be successful, Reed adds—but “hybrid models capture the best of both worlds.”

K12 is the nation’s largest provider of online curriculum and full-service education programs for students in kindergarten through high school. In July, K12 acquired KC Distance Learning, a Portland, Ore., company that—through its Aventa Learning brand—also offers online curriculum and virtual-school solutions for K-12 districts.

There are a variety of ways to blend virtual and face-to-face instruction—from entirely online schools that offer occasional in-person interaction, to programs in which brick-and-mortar schools incorporate virtual learning to supplement their existing offerings—and such hybrid models can be created to meet any number of requirements.

K12 has identified at least five different approaches to blended learning being used by its school district customers; here’s how these schools have adopted blended learning successfully to meet their own particular needs.

Learning lab model

The learning lab model is for school districts that want to supplement their existing, traditional offerings with additional classes or remedial learning opportunities. Students go to school as usual, but part of their time is spent in a computer lab, learning online with an on-site facilitator available to help them as needed.

The learning lab model works well for schools that might not have the budget or the teachers or the classroom space to teach certain subjects. For example, a rural school district might not be able to afford an advanced physics teacher, but by creating a learning lab setting, with

Blended learning, page 24



Because both traditional and online instruction have their own unique benefits, many schools are finding that a blended approach works well.



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Blended learning...

continued from page 22

computers and a teacher or mentor available to answer questions, the district can offer online physics classes to students who want to take advanced or AP courses.

The learning lab model also could be used to teach additional foreign languages, beyond the Spanish and French typically taught in schools today, or to help students who are behind in certain classes catch up and excel.

Another use of the learning lab model might be for rural school districts to attract or cater to home-schooled children. Often, these rural areas are less wired than other areas of the country, and students might not have high-speed internet access at home. In the East Valley School District in Spokane, Wash., for example, home-schooled students can come in to a learning lab to get the technology piece of their education.

"A blended model works really well to reach students in very remote areas, or in non-traditional communities," says John Glenwinkel, superintendent of the East Valley School District. He mentions the local Hutterites, a community mostly made up of farmers who tend to not engage in the public school system. "We've been able to work with those communities to provide some very unique learning opportunities that we wouldn't be able to do if we didn't have access to online learning," he says.

The district's learning labs are available within traditional school buildings, as well as in rented spaces off campus. "I like to rent space in strip malls," says Barbara Cruse, principal of the Washington Academy of Arts and Technology. "Right now, there are often empty stores in strip malls, the rent is cheap, and they're often wired the right way."

Dropout recovery programs

These programs give students who have dropped out of school the opportunity to complete their course work and get the credits they need to earn a diploma.

If students have been out of school for a few years—perhaps they got pregnant and dropped out to have a baby, had to stay home to take care of younger siblings, or were held back too many times and got frustrated—they might want to complete their education but would feel uncomfortable returning to school with students who are younger than them. At the same time, some parents of high school students might not want their children attending school with someone who's 19 or 20. A dropout recovery program like the one in Chicago gives these students the chance to make up their missing credits and graduate.

In Chicago, between 18,000 and 20,000 students drop out of school every semester, and a program from the Youth Connection Charter School (YCCS) offers a blended option to help those students complete the credits they need. The YCCS has 22 campuses in Chicago, and the newest of those, which opened last year, is the YCCS Virtual High School powered by K12.

The YCCS Virtual High School's campus is located at the Malcolm X Community College. Students who have dropped out of Chicago's public schools can sign up for the virtual school and attend classes online at the college. Students spend 60 percent of their time on campus and 40 percent at home. The classes run in three-hour blocks, from 9 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day. One hour per day is direct instruction from a teacher, while the other two hours see the students using the K12 curriculum online; two teachers for each class of 24 students help facilitate during the online portions of a student's in-class learning.

Two additional hours per day are then completed at home. This schedule makes school flexible for the students, many of whom have jobs or other responsibilities they're trying to juggle—yet it meets Chicago school law by having students attend three hours per day at a physical school location.

At the Malcolm X campus, YCCS Virtual High School has core teachers in English, math, science, and history,

while K12 teachers teach via the online resources offered by the company.

YCCS Virtual High also partners with a variety of organizations within the community. "We set up paid internships for students who want to work. These are done through referrals by teachers who say, 'Hey, I have this stellar student...'" says Early King, head of school. "These jobs are usually pertaining to something they want to do career-wise, so if they're interested in architecture, we set them up with an architecture firm."

Because many of the school's students have had traumatic experiences, the school offers a social services piece

to students. It also offers free childcare. "That's huge. One reason students often can't go to school is they can't afford a babysitter," says King. The school also offers free medical and dental services and free bus passes to get the students to the school.

"We have everything covered," he says. "We say, 'As long as you do your part, we'll do our part and see this through together.' We took away all the barriers [students] claimed they had and made it easier for them."

Part of the school's attraction is that the students feel

Blended learning, page 26



Blended learning can help raise achievement

With interest in blended learning models on the rise, there is evidence to suggest a blended approach might help boost student achievement.

An analysis of existing online-learning research by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) last year revealed that students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction. What's more, those who experienced a mix of online and face-to-face instruction performed best of all.

Most of the studies examined by researchers dealt with college-level courses, and ED officials cautioned against generalizing the report's findings to the K-12 level. Still, the report could help educators as they seek to create effective learning environments for all students.

The detailed meta-analysis was part of a broader study of practices in online learning conducted by SRI International for ED's Policy and Program Studies Service. The goal of the study was to "provide policy makers, administrators, and educators with research-based guidance about how to implement online learning for K-12 education and teacher preparation," says the report.

The meta-analysis found that the effectiveness of online and blended-learning approaches spanned several different types of content and learners.

Susan Patrick, president and CEO of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, said the advantage of online or blended learning over face-to-face instruction alone "is the combination of rich student-teacher-peer communication and interactions that are both asynchronous and synchronous, better utilizing the precious resource of time during, and outside, the school day to maximize learning—and personalize it in a way never before possible."

According to Patrick, the factors that make blended models better than most face-to-face models are the factors that also define good teaching: "Increased interactions between students and teachers, increased depth of rigor and exploration into content, customized learning to meet the students exactly where they are in learning the lessons, better use of data to inform instruction, and providing additional student support to help personalize instruction by the teacher."

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Blended learning...

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as if they're in college rather than in high school, because of its location at the community college. In fact, many of the students say they are in college, and many find a desire to go on to the community college after receiving their high school diplomas. But it's the sense of community that is the most important part of the program, King says: "Students love the safe environment. It's like a home away from home. You can feel the community the minute you walk in the classroom. Everyone has a stake in what's going on."

This community feeling is enhanced by school groups such as the weightlifting club and events like the Student of the Week ceremony. "Our people connect with the students," explains King. "It's what keeps them coming back for more every day."

One YCCS student, for example, became homeless

rate of 88 percent after the first semester, compared with a 59-percent retention rate at the traditional public schools.

"The whole premise, when partnering with other college kids, is it helps them think they're college students... and sure enough, that's what they go on to do," King says.

Adjudicated youth programs

A program of this type meets the needs of school-age children who have been incarcerated because they have broken the law.

"I did not think it was fair that [those kids] could not earn a high school diploma," says Rebecca Janowitz, director of reentry policy for the Sheriff of Cook County, Ill.

Janowitz runs a program, called the Sheriff's Virtual High School, that gives students in the custody of the Sheriff of Cook County the ability to earn a high school diploma that comes from the last high school they attended, not from the Cook County Jail. "There's nothing to say the circumstances under which it was obtained, so no one ever has to know you had trouble when you were

with an ankle bracelet while they await trial. For these children, attending school is a condition of their bond. In addition to online instruction in a computer lab, these students come to the jail on a daily basis for drug treatment, counseling, and/or cognitive therapy. Computer labs are rented at outside facilities, and one mentor is on site for every 12 students, to monitor the students and help them with their studies as they pursue the K12 curriculum.

Janowitz also has started a second program for the kids within the detention facilities. There are now computer labs within the facilities; the number of mentors needed to monitor the students fluctuates depending on the security rating of the facility.

Flexibility was the key to creating a program that works. "Kids come in with a great range of experience. Our students are all over the place. Some were in high-performance institutions and tested at a high range. Some haven't been in school for a very long time," Janowitz explains. She also needed an affordable solution. The K12 curriculum offered the flexibility that was needed, she says.

But Janowitz emphasizes the importance of the drug counseling that goes hand-in-hand with the educational component. "Offering these services without a drug treatment component is a waste of time," she says. "If you aren't willing to deal with the role that drugs play in people's lives, and that the drug trade plays in poor communities, you're hiding your head in the sand. There's an enormous potential to put kids on the path to lead to really good employment, but they have to change the way they behave—and we have to change what we offer them."

The fact that students are learning on computers is another key element in the program. Many arrive from poor backgrounds, with little experience on a computer, and it's essential for them to learn computer skills, no matter what type of job they plan to pursue. "There's no job you can get today that you don't have to work with a computer," Janowitz says. "Even the guys who put things on shelves have to work on a computer."

Motivation can be a challenge with these students, some of whom say it was easier to learn when a teacher was telling them what to do. Additionally, they often come from traumatic backgrounds, having faced violence, sporadic school attendance, the death of family members, parents who have been incarcerated, and a variety of other challenges. But simply by beginning to take responsibility for their own education, many students begin to get a taste for learning.

"A lot of these kids have failed a lot of things before they came to us, so learning that they can pass a class is very motivating," says Janowitz. For day-release students, officials announce the fact that a student has passed a class at the daily morning meeting. "Everyone in there, from 70 to 17, whoops and stomps for these kids. All the old guys tell the young kids they're very lucky to have this opportunity, that nobody helped them out when they were young," she says.

With a high school diploma from an actual high school, the child has a better chance of not returning to jail. And jail becomes less a disruption in the child's life and more a factor that is helping them get back on track. This, says Janowitz, is important not just to the child but to the community as well.

"If we don't provide the kids the opportunity to take difficult high school classes, we're short-changing ourselves," she says. "It's way better for them, but it's also way better for us. If you help people finish high school, you're contributing to the health of the community."

Flex school model

With a flex school model, students are truly experiencing a full blend of face-to-face and online instruction at a traditional school facility. The online component isn't just a supplement to traditional classes, but an integral part of the school's curriculum for every student.

The San Francisco Flex Academy, a charter school



For many school reformers, blended learning is an exciting instructional model because it combines the best elements of both face-to-face and online instruction.

during her high school years after her mother lost her job. The student was forced to help care for her younger sisters and brothers. She also ended up going from one school to another in Chicago. And even though she persevered, she was informed during her senior year that she did not have enough math and science credits to graduate.

At that point, she felt like giving up, but when she heard about the YCCS virtual program, she decided to give high school one final try. This past summer, the student graduated—with honors. She applied and was accepted at Trinity Christian College, with a partial scholarship.

"I was shocked. ... Now I know I can do anything. I can go to college and make my dreams come true," she says.

This student is just one of many of the school's success stories. In fact, in the first year of the program, 94 percent of the students who were eligible to graduate earned their high school diplomas. And 12 of the 61 students who graduated went on to attend Malcolm X Community College. The school also had a retention

young," she explains.

Though some jails and prisons offer GED programs, studies have shown that 75 percent of all students with a GED who start at a community college don't finish. With an actual diploma, the chances of finishing a college degree program are much better. "We have a bunch of kids who are in custody of the sheriff who did not have access to high school. So I looked for ways we could offer that," Janowitz says.

A little less than a year ago, Janowitz started the Sheriff's Virtual High School program at the Cook County Jail, a pre-trial detention facility in Chicago. The jail contains more than 2,000 people between the ages of 17 and 21 on any given day, and it releases about 15,000 people a year within that same age range. Janowitz's program involves computer labs within the jail's facilities where the students, under supervision, can complete the credits they need for a Chicago high school diploma.

The first program she started was not for kids in general detention, but for those on "day reporting"—that is, kids who are either out on probation or who are sent home

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housed in the old Press Club quarters a block from San Francisco's Union Square, is one such school. The idea behind the school is that, while the state of California allows for students to attend virtual schools full time, such a school requires a great deal of commitment from the parent, or "learning coach." And if both parents work, a virtual school becomes a non-option.

With the San Francisco Flex Academy, students get the flexibility of a virtual learning experience combined with the convenience of a brick-and-mortar facility. Students come to school on site, where they have learning carrels at which they can work. Learning coaches are on hand to help the students, and the number of these learning coaches varies based on the size of enrollment.

Students take English, math, science, and history with certified teachers on site, while their electives are taken online with virtual teachers. The curriculum is tailored individually for each student, and students learn at their own pace—and even much of the coursework for the core classes is done online.

Students at the San Francisco Flex Academy love the fact that they are on site with other children. But the most important element of the school is the fact that it is based on individualized learning.

"With the traditional classroom, a teacher asks a question and one kid gives an answer, and then the teacher moves on, or the teacher doesn't assess whether all the kids understand or not. And kids can get left behind," says K12's Reed. "This way, nobody gets left behind. And if a kid is working on something that's at a lower level than the others, nobody has to know." Likewise, advanced students can work more quickly, not having to slow themselves to the pace of the other students in the their grade.

Full-time model

The Chicago Virtual Charter School is an example of a full-time model; students are enrolled full-time in the virtual school, but one day a week they attend school for two-and-a-quarter hours in a physical building—the charter school rents space in the Merritt School of Music—for face time with teachers.

During this one-day-a-week face time, students learn with certified teachers. At the K-8 level, the teachers who work with the students online are the same who work with them at the school. For high school, there is one English teacher and one math teacher, and the rest of the teachers are online-only through the K12 program. That's so the school can offer a larger variety of classes. Last year, for example, the school offered 38 different classes to high school students.

But it's not just the students and the teachers who work together online and face-to-face: Parents play a big role as well. "We put a large emphasis on the commitment parents are making when they choose to attend our school," says Rodgers. "Unlike a traditional school, where if you don't have a parent as involved it's the teacher's responsibility to pick up the pieces, we require three people in order to make this work: the student, the teacher, and the parent."

With that in mind, parents undergo an "on-boarding" process when they sign their child up for the school. The process is an orientation that helps them understand what it means to be a learning coach. Then, throughout the year, parents can take part in workshops at the school, or they can access K12 Speaker Series sessions on how to be a successful partner to the teacher and the student.

CVCS is ideal for students who aren't getting their needs met at a more traditional institution, Rodgers says.

"Students here weren't learning in a traditional approach. They needed an approach that can support their needs, and we can give them a curriculum that is supportive to help that child succeed," she says. "That means allowing them to move at their own pace. We do have parameters: They need one year's growth each year. But if



The face time for students in blended programs is like an anchor that keeps them from going adrift.

someone comes to us two years below grade level, we can create an individual path that will move them forward."

Something in between

Another example of a blended learning model is the Hoosier Academies of Indiana, which offers a variation of the CVCS approach.

The Hoosier Academies feature 50 percent of school time as face-to-face instruction, with the rest of the student's time spent at home, working online. Hoosier Academies has two K-8 facilities, one in Muncie and one in Indianapolis, and a high school in Indianapolis. Students attend school two days a week, and they're supported at home by a parent or other responsible adult who acts as a learning coach. Teachers use the K12 curriculum, while the core subjects of English, social studies, science, and math are taught by teachers on site. In the high school, a computer lab gives students access to electives.

"The uniqueness of our hybrid can be seen by the uniqueness of our settings," says Lynn Black, head of schools for the Hoosier Academy. "The Muncie center is in the back half of a school we lease space from, the

Indianapolis school is in an office park, and the high school is in a one-time General Electric plant turned into office space."

The students who choose to attend the Hoosier Academies represent a broad mix of experiences—from special-education students and those who are on the autism spectrum, to brighter students who feel held back in a traditional school setting. "A two-day setting means it's not an overload; it's the right amount of school for some of those students," Black says. "A significant percentage also come from a home-schooling background, and this is a compromise to a five-day week." This model works well when there are parents who want to be actively engaged in what their children are learning, she adds, because parents act as the facilitator at home.

The school also gives Indiana students a choice in their education. "There are 92 counties in the state of Indiana, and last year, we had students coming from 44 of those counties," Black says. "And we had students from 104 of the state's 300 public school districts." **eSN**

Jennifer Nastu is a freelance writer in Colorado who writes frequently about technology and education.

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Security checkpoint

By Elizabeth Englander and Kristin Schank

Reducing bullying and cyber bullying

Ten easy tips for educators can help prevent bullying in schools and online

In Massachusetts, as in many states, teachers this year have new responsibilities to respond to, report, and address bullying and cyber bullying. At the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC), we've developed 10 tips to help faculty cope with what can seem an overwhelming task.

1. Keep "responding" and "reporting" separate in your mind.

What behaviors do you have to report for possible formal discipline? Also, how should you respond when you see inappropriate behaviors? Always respond by making it clear that you are disturbed by what you saw.

Should you respond to a behavior that you might not normally report (such as laughter at a child's expense)? The answer is yes. Remember that even if it's not a "reportable" behavior—respond to it. Ignoring even mild bullying behaviors is essentially the same as endorsing them.

2. Focus on the small stuff.

It's useful to understand the difference between "gateway" behaviors and blatant bullying. Gateway behaviors, like laughing along with a bully, facilitate or reinforce bullying—they make disrespect seem normal or even rewarded. The difficulty is that there are usually no solid rules against gateway behaviors, so adults often ignore them. But research shows us how toxic they can be. In 2009 and 2010, MARC researchers found that it was the gateway behaviors that dominated victim reports.

Focusing on the small stuff means understanding that we need to educate kids about the impact of even small behaviors and react when we see them happening. Explain that even small behaviors really affect others. Tell the child that you don't want to see behavior that might be interpreted as rude, and instruct the child to stop. Make it a classroom rule. Then, repeated instances become insolence towards you—which is a possible matter for school discipline.

3. The cyber stuff: Approach and coach.

Although kids are comfortable with technology, they aren't necessarily knowledgeable about it—don't confuse the two. We all need to talk with kids about technology; don't worry about how much you know or don't know about the topic. Ask kids to tell you (or show you) what they're up to online. And make sure they understand that, even online, they should watch what they say and be civil to others. Don't hesitate to make that message loud and clear.

4. The "rumor mill" is still the leader in social problems.

Online and offline, rumors today fly at an incredible rate. In our research, bullies tell us that spreading rumors online is the by far the most common thing they do to others. So if we do anything to stop bullying, let's be sure to focus on the rumors.

5. Talk to kids about how to handle things when they get mad at each other.

Kids today often vent electronically when they're mad, instead of trying to resolve the problem. Faced with the choice between a difficult face-to-face conversation, versus the ease of venting online, they might often conclude that it makes more sense to go electronic. The problem is that by doing so, they usually escalate the con-

flict instead of resolving it. In bygone days, kids didn't need to be coached on the benefits of talking face to face when they're upset—but today they often do. In our research, girls particularly showed a tendency to do this.

6. Don't neglect elementary students.

Both bullying and cyber bullying start young. Although we tend to neglect these topics until middle school, the fact is that the seeds of bullying are sown at a young age. And that includes cyber bullying: In a study conducted in 2008, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting found that 72 percent of all first graders used the internet at least once a week during the summer. Anecdotally, at MARC we have seen cases of cyber bullying involving second graders.

The good news is that young elementary students are very willing and able to internalize rules about behavior. Thus, it's important to teach them that being a good person on the computer is just as important as being a good person on the playground. MARC offers a curriculum on bullying and cyber bullying for grades K-5; you can request a copy on our web site.

7. To get the kids to report, you must connect with them emotionally on some level.

We're not saying you should be best friends with your students; only that your students need to know that you care about them and their welfare. Kids today are still reporting bullying to adults at very low levels. Boys particularly, in our research, are not reporting to educators. Why is this? More than 80 percent of the boys and girls in our research revealed that when they did report, no action was taken as a result. They took a big risk in "telling," but as far as they knew, nothing was done.

Of course, confidentiality laws prohibit educators from telling a person specifics about any action taken against another student. But these laws don't prohibit you from telling a student, "We're not ignoring your report. We are working on it," and that's exactly what reporters need to hear.

8. Girls might need particular attention, socially.

In our research, male cyber bullies tended to attack strangers, acquaintances, or kids who were friends long ago. Girls, on the other hand, tended to attack their friends or those with whom they were recently friends. This is a finding of particular concern, because it means that girls are attacking the very foundations of their social support.

Adolescence is a time when kids are learning how to form the long-term friendships they will depend upon as adults. So be aware of the girls you teach: They might need your help in learning to appreciate and protect their social infrastructure—not attack it.

9. Take a moment to reinforce patient, kind, and friendly behaviors.

We all know that the carrot works better than the stick. When you notice a child being particularly good-hearted—especially in a potentially difficult situation, like when helping a classmate understand something, or sticking up for another child—be sure to let them know that you personally appreciate and admire their behavior. Better yet, use a classroom recognition sys-

tem for the students who behave so well.

10. Enlist the kids in your efforts.

Although adults can be key players, it's the kids themselves who are the ultimate arbiters of their group's social behavior. Ask your students what kinds of bullying problems they notice, and what rules they believe should address those problems. Then sit back and watch them enforce their own rules with enthusiasm!

MARC is an academic center at Bridgewater State University whose web



Elizabeth Englander



Kristin Schank

site (www.MARCcenter.org) offers many free anti-bullying downloads, games, tips, and curricula for all schools, and parent downloads that are available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. **CSN**

Elizabeth Englander, Ph.D., is director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) at Bridgewater State University. Kristin Schank is a graduate assistant at MARC.



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Recertified laptops help boost participation in English classes for this rural Indiana district

Metropolitan School District of Wabash County stretches its ed-tech budget with help from CDI

Cara Erenben, Contributing Editor

In an effort to boost students' test scores, a rural Indiana school district has deployed laptop computers in its English classrooms, and district officials say the machines are helping students write longer essays and contribute more frequently to class discussions. To get the most out of their investment, district officials bought recertified computers instead of new machines, allowing them to stretch their ed-tech dollars even further in these tough economic times.

Funded by a state education department grant, the Metropolitan School District (MSD) of Wabash County, Ind., essentially created a one-to-one learning environment in its high school English classrooms. Since last year, each high school has had five mobile computer labs dedicated to English instruction. And so far, district officials are pleased with the results.

"In the state of Indiana, and I think across the nation, English test scores are a little lower than math test scores, so we [wanted] to concentrate on English," said Barry Conrad, technology director for the district.

Great value

The district chose refurbished laptops for the initiative because of their low cost.

Each mobile lab was purchased from CDI, Computer Dealers Inc., one of the largest computer resellers in North America, at a significant cost savings over brand-new machines. In fact, Wabash County has a long history of buying recertified computers from CDI; over the past decade, the district has purchased approximately 2,000 machines from the company.

"When we get machines from CDI, we get a three-year warranty on the machines. They've been totally gone over before they are released, and we are getting them for approximately a third ... of what you would pay for them elsewhere if you bought brand new," Conrad said.

And much of what the district has purchased is new equipment, Conrad said, because in addition to reselling off-lease equipment, CDI also sells open-box or end-of-the-line equipment.

"The machines we are putting in right now are pretty much still new machines," Conrad said. "The price is a third of what you normally pay. So we are very, very pleased with our relationship with CDI."

The quality and reliability of CDI's recertified computers is another reason Wabash County buys from the company. Often, the machines still come with a manufacturer's warranty still in place, plus CDI offers a three-year warranty that is hassle-free, Conrad said.

"We have the normal warranty issues, even when we bought brand new years ago. You'd get one out of box and it wouldn't even turn on," he said. "We don't have any more warranty issues this way as when we bought brand new."

Even though CDI can source all types of computer equipment, including printers, monitors, and servers, Wabash County still buys its servers brand new. "The only thing I still buy brand new is my servers," Conrad said. "Psychologically, I think that's the backbone of my network, and I want to make sure."

But for outfitting classrooms and administrative offices with computers, buying recertified computers is a smart choice, Conrad said. "I would have no qualms at all about ever recommending somebody to go the refurb route, especially with CDI," he said.



Students in Wabash County, Ind., are writing more as a result of the district's laptop initiative.

MSD of Wabash County serves 2,400 students at seven school locations: four K-6 schools, two high schools (serving grades 7-12), and one special high school for students in the judicial system.

The district, which covers 300 square miles, has a combination of direct line-of-sight microwave and fiber connections for internet and phone service. "Because we are so spread out, financially it would be cost prohibitive to have somebody try to do fiber between all of our buildings," Conrad said.

Each elementary and high school classroom is outfitted with a few desktops, an electronic interactive whiteboard, and mounted ceiling projectors. The high schools also have four computer labs and one floating mobile lab, in addition to the dedicated mobile labs in each English classroom.

English laptop initiative

The district chose refurbished laptops and students use the laptops in the classroom daily in conjunction with Moodle, a free, open-source, web-based course management system.

"The classroom labs are used mostly for activities on Moodle, but [they're] used also for research and word processing," said Erin Sapusek, English teacher at MSD of Wabash County. Within Moodle, students have the ability to hold group discussion, take quizzes and tests, and turn in documents electronically.

So far, the teachers report many benefits from adding laptops to the English curriculum. For instance, using Moodle on the laptops has resulted in greater classroom participation.

"Students tend to write more, both in frequency and in length. Students who might not normally contribute to class discussion verbally often participate very actively on the computer," Sapusek said.

She added that she is able to give students more timely feedback on their writing assignments, because grading is easier. Plus, managing the needs of students receiving special-education services is easier and more confidential.

"It generates interest in a way that regular textbooks can't," she said of the initiative.

Mary Hiner, English teacher at MSD of Wabash Coun-

ty, also has noticed an increase in class participation.

"I have found that my students truly enjoy the online forums," Hiner said. "All students participate in class discussion when completed in this format. When we have oral discussions, many students never participate. I appreciate the fact [that] it allows all students to feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts and opinions."

Using laptops for English instruction lets students take ownership of their own learning, Hiner added.

"Many of the class activities are now completed at the individual student's pace," she said. Students also can choose which activities to complete first.

Having access to Moodle has allowed the students and their parents to keep current with classroom activities, even if they are absent. Everything that needs to be made up can be found on Moodle, which is easier for the students and teachers.

"The computers have become a tool that allows students to become invested in their own education. They love the ability to work on the computers on a regular basis. They are products of a technological age, and they yearn for the ability to use this technology in the classroom," Hiner said. "It has become an opportunity for them to become the teacher at times as well. They have shown me tricks [and] shortcuts ... that have allowed me to become a better informed teacher and a more efficient computer operator."

She added: "My students live in a fast-paced society, where information is just a couple clicks away. They desire the ability to utilize the computers as a way to complete work quickly, neatly, and efficiently. It has been a blessing in my classroom, and a gift I believe they truly appreciate."

LINKS:

Metropolitan School District of Wabash County

<http://www.msdbc.k12.in.us>

CDI

<http://www.cdicomputers.com>

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- Science Explorer II
- Tool Factory Logo
- World of Sport Examined
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- B/D Letter Olympics
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- Tool Factory Phonics 1
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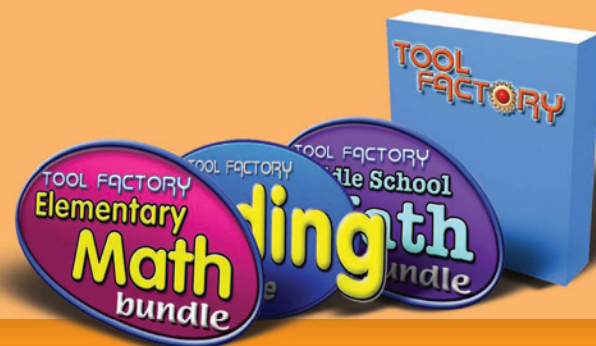
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Privacy...

continued from page 1

than 4,000 “cookies,” “beacons,” and other tracking technologies on their sites, the Journal reported—and that’s 30 percent more than were found on similar sites aimed at adults.

“Tracking technology scans in real time what people are doing on a web page, then instantly assesses their location, income, shopping interests, and even medical conditions,” said Common Sense Media. “Individuals’ profiles are then bought and sold on stock-market-like exchanges that have sprung up in the past 18 months.”

The worst part, says the organization, is that children over the age of 13 have no say on whether or not their personal information is collected.

In a survey of more than 2,000 adults and more than 400 teens in August, conducted by Zogby International on behalf of Common Sense Media, 75 percent of parents said they would rate the job that social networks are doing for children’s online privacy as poor.

“Anytime personal information is taken without consent is worrisome,” said Alan Simpson, vice president of policy for Common Sense Media. “It really has become the wild, wild West out there.”

According to the poll, a majority of teens (56 percent) don’t believe their personal in-

formation is secure and private online, or they’re not sure if it is. Seventy-nine percent of teens also revealed that they think their friends share too much personal information online.

“The poll results present a clear divide between the industry’s view of [online] privacy and the opinion of parents and kids,” said James Steyer, CEO and founder of Common Sense Media. “American families are deeply worried about how their personal information is being used by [tracking] technology and online companies, yet the companies appear to be keeping their hands deep in the sand.”

Time to take action

Currently, companies are prohibited from collecting personal information from children younger than 13, but 67 percent of parents polled said they would feel most comfortable if this age were raised to 18.

Eighty-five percent of teens in the poll said that search engines and social networking services should obtain permission before using the information in a personal profile to market products.

“Adults are more apt to understand how things work: You get something for free, and in return you give up some privacy,” said Simpson. “But are children [and] teens capable of making those kinds of choices? Do they really understand the magnitude of these decisions? This is what’s at the crux of the argument.”

Going one step further, the poll also showed that parents (88 percent) and adults in general (85 percent) would support a law that required online search engines and social networking services to get permission before they use personal profiles to market products, regardless of age.

Besides an opt-in age requirement, Common Sense Media also is advocating for clearer and simpler online privacy statements, because 85 percent of teens and 91 percent of parents say they would take more time to read terms and conditions for web sites if they were shorter and written more clearly.

Also, parents, kids, and schools need more education about protecting online privacy, and schools should be more involved in teaching teens about the topic, the group says.

“Parents are looking to schools because they’re looking for help,” explained Simpson. “As technology becomes more prevalent in schools, it’s important to understand not only the benefits of this implementation, but have schools educate about the need for privacy protection as well.”

As part of its “Do Not Track Kids” campaign, Common Sense Media recently announced a new web site aimed at helping parents protect their kids’ online privacy: <http://www.common sense media.org/privacy>.

The site provides tips on how to protect online privacy, how companies use tracking technology to obtain and share information from personal profiles, how not to

leave an online information trail, and more. The site was created with help from experts in online privacy.

“We are all responsible for addressing this enormous challenge,” said Steyer. “The industry has to listen to what parents are saying, parents and kids have to educate themselves, schools should teach all students and their parents about privacy protection, and finally, policy makers have to update privacy policies for the 21st century.”

“Everyone is in new territory here with online privacy, as using online tools becomes more prevalent,” said Simpson, “so we’re also looking for help from educators in our mission.”

When asked whether kids could simply not use social networks or certain search engines, Simpson responded: “You can’t wish this technology away. Kids will use it no matter what, and we have to accept that.”

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In the wake of tragedy, a call for change

Experts say the suicide of a Rutgers freshman might bring more awareness of the need for students to respect others’ privacy online

From staff and wire reports

Students don’t just need to learn how to safeguard their own privacy online; they also need to learn how to respect the privacy of others on the web, as two recent events on college campuses demonstrate.

In one of the incidents, a Duke University student who graduated in May wrote a “thesis” about her sexual exploits with 13 other students, apparently as a private joke, and sent it to some of her friends, who passed it on to other friends—and the document soon went viral. In the other incident, a Rutgers University freshman jumped to his death off the George Washington Bridge a day after authorities say two classmates surreptitiously recorded him having sex with a man in his dorm room and broadcast it over the internet.

“There should never be a school from this day forward that says, ‘We didn’t know this could happen, we didn’t know this was an issue on our campus,’” said Jonathan Kassa, executive director of Security on Campus, a Pennsylvania-based nonprofit that lobbies for better security in higher education. “That excuse is over.”

Rutgers freshman Tyler Clementi committed suicide after his private sex acts were made publicly available in an online broadcast set up by two students—Dharun Ravi and Molly Wei, both 18—who were later charged with invasion of privacy. Rutgers officials noted that university policy includes a rule against recording someone on the campus “where there is an expectation of privacy with respect to nudity and/or sexual activity.”

Clementi’s suicide came during the

same week that Rutgers launched a program called Project Civility, designed by campus officials to encourage students to consider how they treat people. Greg Trevor, a university spokesman, said the campus tragedy “indicates just why this is such an important topic” and why Project Civility was needed at Rutgers and throughout higher education.

“You can’t go anywhere on this campus without talking to people who don’t feel affected by the tragedy,” Trevor said, adding that the posting of the Clementi video has been widely admonished by the campus community. “The kind of behavior that has been alleged is not tolerated by the vast, vast majority of the people here.”

Ravi first alerted his Twitter followers to the webcast of his roommate having sex Sept. 19, when he wrote that his “roommate asked for the room till midnight” and he later caught Clementi “making out with a dude.” On Sept. 22, Ravi tweeted: “Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes it’s happening again.”

Ravi’s Twitter account has since been deleted, but the tweets were cached and are available on various web sites.

Internet privacy experts said colleges and universities should pay close attention to the invasion of privacy that apparently led to Clementi’s suicide and cultivate more respect for online privacy in their student orientation programs and other educational forums.

Paul Stephens, director of policy and advocacy at Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, a national consumer group, said that although posting a video of a student’s private sex acts online seems like an obvious



Rutgers students honor the memory of Tyler Clementi after his suicide.

violation of privacy, the Rutgers case shows that some students need the most basic online conduct lessons.

“This tragedy proves that some students, in fact, do not have the basic discretion to know what is appropriate,” Stephens said. “It makes a compelling argument for institutes of higher education to provide information for what is and what is not appropriate [behavior] online.”

The evidence left on Ravi’s Twitter page, Stephens said, also should provide a lesson to students who see social media as a private conversation between them and their friends.

“Even one tweet or one Facebook post leaves a digital footprint forever,” he said. “There are many consequences to what you do online ... and we have a generation that grew up with this technology and to a large extent, they have not considered what the consequences down the road could be for what they say right now.”

Kassa said that although Clementi’s sui-

cide proved horrifying for many in higher education, the privacy violation could motivate college decision makers to create stringent privacy policies that are reinforced with persistent marketing campaigns.

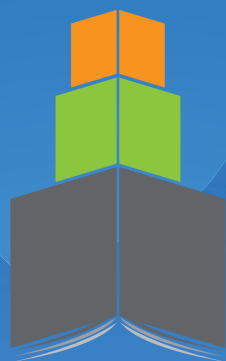
“It’s sad that it takes such a tragic event to garner such attention, but we all owe it to him and his family and others who experience this invasion of privacy to make a stand and learn something from it,” he said.

Meanwhile, more than 66,000 Facebook users had joined the group, “In Honor of Tyler Clementi,” as of Oct. 1. Many railed against the unsolicited video posting that set off the deadly chain of events.

“This went beyond bullying,” a woman posted on the Clementi Facebook page. “This was a pure invasion of Tyler’s privacy.”

Another Facebook user wrote, “I wish your privacy had been respected. ... I can only hope for justice and that your death will bring more awareness for the other kids out there struggling.”

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DIANE RAVITCH, *research professor of education, New York University, and senior fellow, Brookings Institution*

The Death and Life of the Great American School System

Diane Ravitch returns to AASA in 2011 by popular demand to elaborate on the themes of her best-selling book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. The former assistant secretary of education once led the federal effort to promote the creation of state and national standards. She will share her changed perspective.

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iPads...

continued from page 1

The initiative is supported by a grant from the governor's Productivity Investment Fund, along with products and services donated by textbook publishers and software developers.

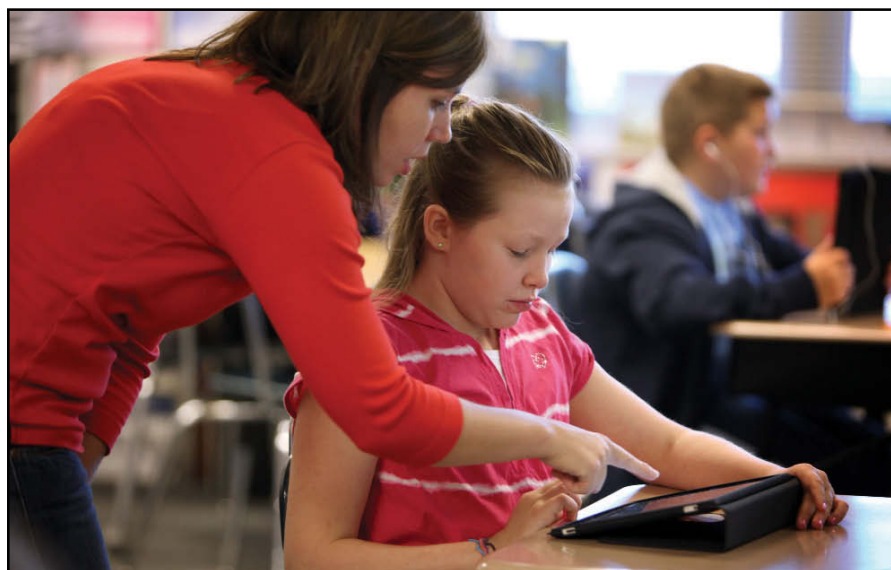
The VDOE says it analyzed state assessment data to identify areas within the elementary, middle, and high school history curriculum that suggest a need for additional instructional resources. School divisions were chosen to take part in the program based on their ability to provide the necessary infrastructure and support, as well as their existing relationships with participating textbook publishers.

Beyond Textbooks includes a research component to measure the impact of the initiative on classroom instruction. Researchers from Radford University will interview teachers, administrators, and students in the participating schools about how the use of digital textbooks affects teaching and learning.

"The experiences of students and teachers will be evaluated, and the knowledge gained will help policy makers, educators, and our private-sector partners better understand the potential instructional uses of interactive digital media and wireless technology," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia Wright. "We will learn what works in the classroom and build on that as our schools move beyond traditional textbooks."

Fourth-grade students at Rich Acres and Sanville elementary schools in Henry County and Drew Model School in Arlington County will use iPads to learn and interact with Jamestown-related content adapted from *Our Virginia: Past and Present*, published by Five Ponds Press. Digital content from selected chapters of the textbook was developed by Victory Productions using newly developed software donated by Adobe.

Students at the three schools also will create multimedia projects on their iPads using content from the digital library of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation on a platform from software developer MashON.



Some schools are turning to iPads in place of textbooks this year. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Middle school students at Achievable Dream Middle School and Achievable Dream High School in Newport News and Pulaski Middle School in Pulaski County will use what Pearson says is the nation's first fully integrated digital social studies curriculum. The content, apps, and assessments are based on Pearson's *America: History of Our Nation, 1865 to Present* and were developed specifically for the iPad.

Ninth-grade students at Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Achievable Dream and Menchville high schools in Newport News, and Pulaski County High School also will leave their history textbooks in their lockers as they log on to a similar program that Pearson has created based on its *World History: Volume I* textbook.

Advanced Placement (AP) biology students enrolled in Virtual Virginia, VDOE's online learning program, also are participating in Beyond Textbooks. One group will use iPads with an interactive version of the AP biology textbook developed by Inkling, a Silicon Valley software developer, in cooperation with McGraw-Hill Education. The remaining students will rely on traditional textbooks and web-based resources.

The 230 iPads that will be used by Virginia students were purchased through a \$120,000 grant from the governor's

Productivity Investment Fund. Pearson, Five Ponds Press, Victory Productions, Adobe, MashON, McGraw-Hill, and Inkling are providing their digital content, platforms, and applications at no cost to VDOE and the participating schools.

Wave of the future?

According to Peter Cohen, CEO of Pearson K-12, VDOE's venture into digital curriculum is a move that many other districts across the U.S. are attempting.

"We've reached the tipping point, and the only question now is how rapidly the conversion will happen," Cohen said.

Pearson, which has created more than 100 mobile apps for education, says its line of products has had a technological component to them for the last five years. Currently, any one of Pearson's programs can be used without textbooks.

Pearson's iPad apps include three components: interactive learning games that introduce concepts to students through puzzles and fast-action challenges; eText on an iPad, where students access the social studies curriculum and create their own individualized texts; and personalized assessment and remediation for students to review and self-test.

Cohen said he believes the apps will be

successful, because the technology allows students to learn how they want to.

"With the iPad, ... students can learn visually, they can learn through audio, they can touch, or it can be an easier way to have notecards. It manages different learning styles and provides for a complex learning environment that supports retention and critical thinking," he said.

Cohen said the program also can help teachers with their time management. Pearson conducted an initial study of its online math program, and findings showed that teachers have twice as much time to work with students on a personal basis when using the math program that syncs with interactive whiteboards and smart devices.

"What we need to remember as a developer is that you can have great curriculum and great technology, but the teacher will also be the key instrument in student success. If [teachers] can use our digital curriculum and have more time to help students, then we know it's a good product," he said.

He acknowledged there isn't much research available on student outcomes from using digital curriculum, but he said Radford University's study of the iPad pilot will help. He also said he believes the state potentially could save money by moving to an all-digital curriculum.

"The jury's still out on the cost savings that going digital versus all paper provides, considering maintenance, support, replacements, and infrastructure—but I do know that our country spends billions on remediation for students, and if this digital curriculum allows for students to succeed the first time through, then that will undoubtedly provide cost savings," he said.

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Dollars...

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grant any local funding to either school.

According to the Georgia Families for Public Virtual Education (GFPVE), that decision never should have happened, legally: In 2008, Georgia passed a law requiring the GCSC to provide fair and equitable funding for online public charter schools.

"The typical student in Georgia received over \$8,000, yet virtual charter schools receive around \$3,200—among the lowest of any state," said GFPVE.

"We have complete discretion on the funding level," countered Mark Peevy, executive director of the GCSC. "This is not illegal." He added: "Virtual education is on what we call the bleeding edge in Georgia, and it's always tough to decide how we should fund virtual education. We're at the starting point of that discussion."

When GFPVE asked to see the documents showing how the GCSC reached its decision on local virtual-school funding, the commission's response raised even more questions.

"It is unclear how the commission concluded that a quality, full-time virtual char-

ter school can operate at or less than \$3,300 per student—and what, if any, research or analysis was done to arrive at that low amount," said Susan Patrick, president of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL). "...Upon a public information request, a single spreadsheet that appeared to be based on no data—just guesses—showed a lack of research and data by the decision makers, and bad policy was set for inequitable funding."

Georgia isn't alone

One of the major challenges to analyzing virtual school funding is that not a lot of research is available that compares how much states fund brick-and-mortar schools with how much they spend on virtual schools. Such comparisons are hard, because each state can choose to fund virtual schools based on different models of school funding.

However, according to a 2006 report from Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates (APA), the national average spent per pupil on brick-and-mortar schools is \$7,727—a far cry from Georgia's \$3,200, and still much more than iNACOL's estimated national average of per-pupil spending for online schools: \$6,500.

Some states are closer to understanding what it takes to fund virtual schools than others. According to one analysis, Pennsylvania has paid up to \$8,100 per student, and Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin provide between \$5,000 and \$7,500 per pupil. South Carolina is on the low end, at about \$3,300 per pupil.

"Virtual schools require significant professional development budgets, as teachers need to attain a new set of strategies and pedagogical skills for the online learning environment," said Patrick. "And while there may be some savings in the costs of space and transportation, this is offset by much higher technology expenses—from hardware, software, and infrastructure costs, such as course development and refresh, to licensing fees for the learning management system, data systems, technical support, [and] providing students with computers and/or internet access."

If online instruction still carries a stigma among state leaders in Georgia or elsewhere, Patrick said, it's not reflected in the fast growth of online learners across the United States.

"More than 40 percent of high school

students want to take an online course. There are currently more than 200,000 students enrolled in full-time public virtual schools in 25 states, and the numbers are rising as the demand from parents and students grows every year," she said.

She added: "The problem is not whether online [instruction] works—we know that it does. The problem is that the Georgia Charter School Commission made a decision without looking at the data that show actual costs, and they made incorrect assumptions."

Amid criticism from supporters of online instruction, the GCSC has agreed to revisit its funding strategy for virtual schools. GFPVE has not yet decided whether to file a lawsuit against the commission.

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To develop Seedplay® projects -- students use online planning, budgeting, and social-networking tools to attract fans, micro-funders, and advisors from their extended communities. They'll develop a network of support for their projects, but will also build valuable personal networks that will sustain them in the years to come.

An idea is a seed. If knowledgeably nurtured -- it will grow and transform. Seedplay is the mechanism to nurture the seeds of ideas. Through it, your students will learn to transform their own ideas and dreams -- to benefit their school, their community, and themselves.



Organizing for Success

Seedplay provides the means necessary to envision, plan, seek funding, and complete an individual or team student project.

Students will enroll in Seedplay's online component where they will find the instructions and tools needed to generate ideas, organize their thinking, and advance their projects. Seedplay projects may be proposed by individuals or by collaborating teams. Faculty will provide appropriate oversight by filling advisory roles throughout the process.

To advance their projects, students will progress online through a series of organizational stages. Each opens with a descriptive video that establishes the goals for that stage, and provides information necessary for successful completion. The steps represent an incremental learning process, and as such, lend themselves to organizational thought for completing projects in almost any subject.

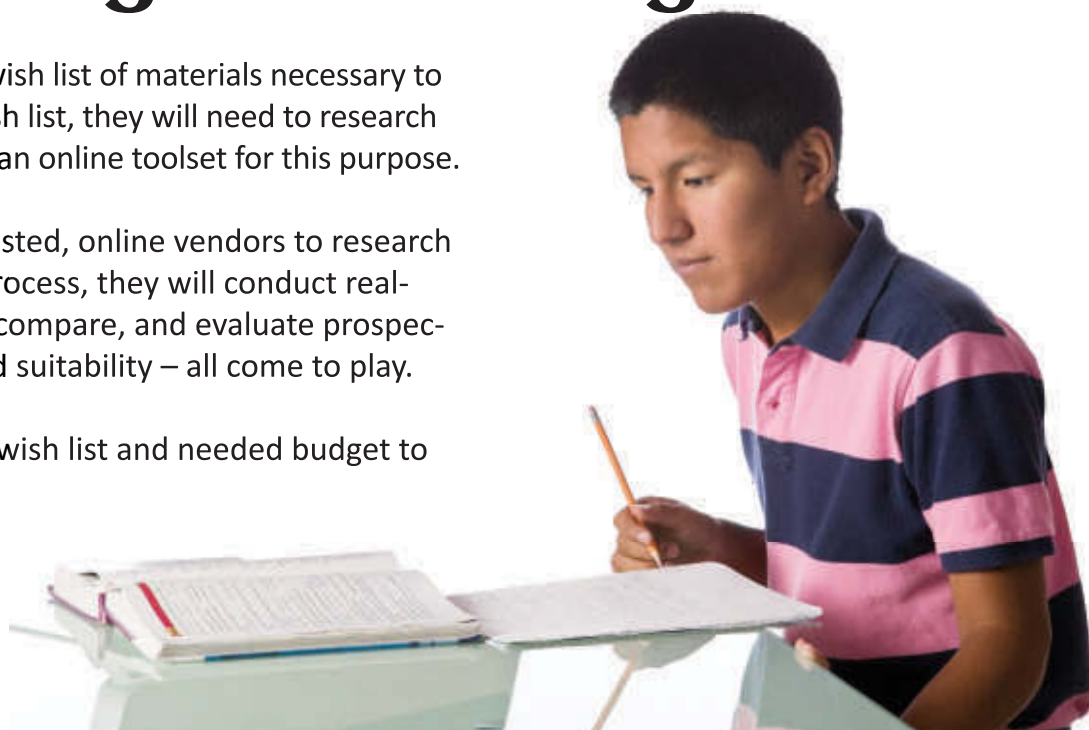


Student Planning and Budgets

As students prepare their projects, they must create a wish list of materials necessary to promote and launch that project. To support such a wish list, they will need to research and create a corresponding budget. Seedplay provides an online toolset for this purpose.

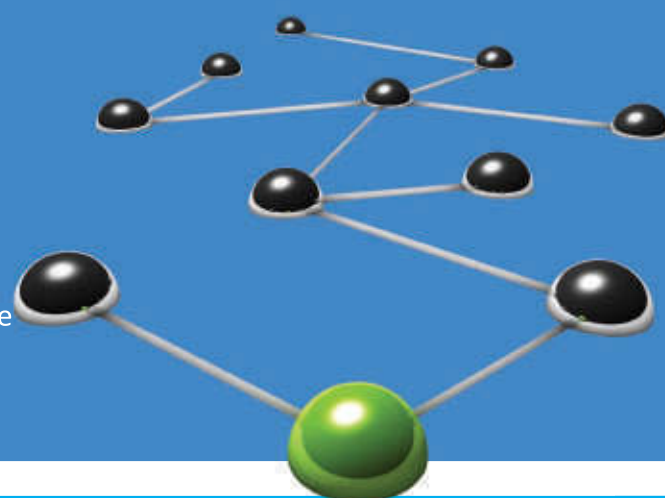
Next, students will access Seedplay's pre-arranged, trusted, online vendors to research the price and availability of each item. Through this process, they will conduct real-world higher order thinking activities as they analyze, compare, and evaluate prospective purchases. Price, quality, quantity, availability, and suitability – all come to play.

When choices are made, students add their materials wish list and needed budget to their project page. They'll then use Seedplay's social networking component to attract advisors and donors. Advisors, fans, friends, family all can offer guidance and insights about this list. Through such interactions, students self-evaluate and self-correct their lists and budgets.



The Power of Social Networking

One of the most powerful elements of Seedplay is its integrated, online, social networking component. It gives students the contemporary, connectivity and communication tools needed to broadcast their projects, seek fans, advisors, micro-funders, and supporters. When their project is completed, the networking component then provides the student with the mechanism to announce the success, express appreciation for each contribution of invested time and resources – and even announce the next project! Learning to use and appropriately apply social-networking tools – to meet constructive goals -- is an essential part of every Seedplay project.





Drop-out Prevention and Beyond

Seedplay is designed as a supplemental component that can be a motivating enhancement to virtually any core course of study or program. It is particularly at home in an English, Language Arts, Reading or Language Development course by virtue of its communication-centric model. Seedplay's projects invite every student to read, write, listen and speak -- all four language development processes -- throughout each stage of project creation, launch, and evaluation. And students exercise higher order thinking as they analyze, compare, draw conclusions, and evaluate gathered information. By its very nature, Seedplay is cross curricular -- where consumer mathematics and thematic projects can suggest use in Social Studies, Mathematics or even Science courses. Seedplay can evoke a new level of student interest and involvement wherever it is used.

Students engage in both online and paper and pen activities. To access Seedplay's online functions, they can attend whole-class sessions in a computer lab, or simple rotations using in-class computers -- all while normal instructional activities are being conducted. The implementation model is specifically designed to accommodate the widest range of classroom schedules and requirements. Recommendations for implementation during the school day, extended day, or summer school are detailed in the Teacher's Edition.

Micro-Fundraising

Micro-fundraising is the practice of gathering supporters who contribute monetary donations -- in small scale -- to a worthy endeavor (thus the prefix "micro"). A student may post a Seedplay project that includes a list of needed materials and their cost. Using Seedplay's social media component, the student then generates a list of email contacts -- inviting them to review the project, and lend moral or tangible support. Fans, supporters, faculty advisors, and community members view the project -- and its financial requirements. They can elect to become a donor through Seedplay's secure commerce functions to cover a part or all of a project.

To assure a viable pool of donors for student projects, school and district leadership will want to contact local businesses, industry and social organizations as potential funders. These groups may wish to support student projects through individual donations, or with lump-sum contributions. Local newspapers may wish to provide on-going coverage of schools that produce a continuous stream of projects that enhance the quality of community. And they may wish to recognize involvement of businesses and groups that endorse such projects. Seedplay's vision and spirit is imaginative and infectious -- involvement can easily span and unify an entire community.





Completing Projects That Transform

In the adolescent culture today, we hear of conflicts involving the misrepresentation of respect. Some see it as a commodity gained or lost on demand – often as a function of intimidation. Yet when respect is demanded, it is rarely commanded. True respect must be earned. Projects where students capably reach outside themselves to transform their school or community in meaningful ways -- earn praise and recognition. These are a means to earn genuine, lasting respect.

“Ask any teacher, and you will hear great stories of individual student transformation. Ask any district administrator, and you’ll next hear stories of schools that broke the mold and transformed a dynamic. And last, ask any community leader, and you will hear stories of the transformation of whole neighborhoods and entire cities.

In each case there was a vision, a rally point, and a leader.

What if your school is filled with transformational vision, many rally points, and many, many leaders? You know it is.

Let Seedplay be your partner – together we’ll create a safe place where students learn to dream and transform -- their school, their community, and themselves.” ~ Harlan Gaston

Harlan Gaston

Harlan Gaston is an artist and social entrepreneur with a vision to help young people realize their fullest potential.

He grew up in the inner city neighborhood of Watts in South Central Los Angeles, and overcame many challenges to attend Stanford University at the age of 16.

At 20, Harlan became the world’s youngest and first American Reinhard Mohn Fellow with Bertelsmann AG, consulting with business leadership from around the world.

Drawing on these experiences, Harlan designed an exemplary program for student goal setting – selling over 50,000 audio books and DVDs.

And now Harlan has developed Seedplay – his latest innovation to help students envision – and realize – a fulfilling future.



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Your guide to securing 2011 e-Rate dollars



With more than \$2 billion in school funding for broadband access at stake, here's how to ensure your fair share

Since its inception in 1997, the federal e-Rate has disbursed more than \$19 billion in discounts to help schools and libraries purchase telecommunications services and internet access. Over the years, the e-Rate has undergone minor tweaks to prevent waste and bring more value to applicants. This year, however, marks the biggest set of changes in more than a decade. To make sure you're getting the most out of the program, read on.

e-Rate gets facelift with wireless pilot, community access

FCC also indexes the program to inflation and lets schools use dark fiber or other existing networks

From staff and wire services

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Sept. 23 voted to upgrade and modernize the federal \$2.25 billion-a-year e-Rate program by allowing schools to make e-Rate funded, internet-enabled computers available to the community after normal school operating hours—a step that supporters say will help students and community members build important digital literacy skills.

The FCC also voted to let e-Rate participants use funds to connect to the internet in the most cost-effective way possible, including through existing state, regional, and local networks or by employing unused fiber-optic lines already in place.

The agency also approved a pilot program that will support off-campus wireless internet connectivity for mobile learning devices. The pilot will explore the benefits that low-cost, accessible mobile devices can bring to students, including helping to close the technology access gap between children from affluent communities and those from economically disadvantaged areas.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said the agency's actions recognize that "digital literacy is essential in a digital economy, and that connected schools and libraries are a requirement to digital literacy. We fail our students if we don't teach basic digital skills."

The FCC's plans for an off-campus wireless pilot are in line with the Obama administration's goal of broadband and community access, said John Harrington, CEO of e-Rate consulting firm Funds For Learning. By expanding a school's wireless internet reach into its surrounding neighborhood, community members suddenly have access to a reliable network with fairly light evening traffic.

"It can become a beacon, literally, for internet access," he said.

While details stemming from the FCC's vote will reveal more information, for now "the [program's] overall direction is definitely one that makes sense," Harrington added.

The steps come after the National Broadband Plan laid out a series of recommendations to promote broadband-enabled learning inside and outside classrooms, including modernizing the e-Rate program. The plan found that basic broadband con-

nectivity struggles to keep pace with high-tech tools that today's students use. In fact, an FCC survey revealed that 79 percent of responding e-Rate recipients said they needed faster connections to meet the demands of students, teachers, and library patrons.

One notable change classifies dark fiber—or unused fiber—as an acceptable service under the e-Rate program.

During the technology boom of the 1990s, many telecom companies installed more fiber-optic cables than would ever be used. The dot-com bust led to an oversupply of unused dark fiber, enabling many companies to purchase their own dark fiber and create their own networks.

Transceivers at either end of the fiber-optic lines activate the fiber, and simply switching out the transceivers for higher-

speed versions will increase network speed and capacity.

When the e-Rate program first got off the ground, many schools used dial-up internet connections but have since transitioned to wireless connectivity and high-bandwidth applications, Harrington said.

"It just makes sense that the program has to catch up to meet where we are today," he added. "The change that will allow schools to lease dark fiber is a big step forward, because if a school can lease dark fiber, what they have is a nearly unlimited bandwidth pipe. It opens the doors to more bandwidth."

Other improvements designed to bring the e-Rate up to date include indexing the cap on funding to inflation in a fiscally responsible manner; supporting connections to dormitories of schools that serve students

facing unique challenges; strengthening protections against waste, fraud, and abuse; and streamlining the application process.

The FCC also voted to open up unused airwaves between television stations for wireless broadband networks that will be more powerful and can travel farther than today's Wi-Fi hot spots.

The five-member FCC voted unanimously to allow the use of so-called "white spaces" between TV stations to deliver broadband connections that can function like Wi-Fi networks on steroids. The agency is calling the new technology "super Wi-Fi" and hopes to see devices with the new technology start to appear within a year.

Leading technology companies, including Google Inc., Microsoft Corp., and Dell Inc., are eager to develop the market. They say television white spaces are ideally suited for broadband because they are able to penetrate walls, have plenty of capacity, and can travel several miles.

Just like the spectrum used by Wi-Fi, the white spaces will be available to all users free of charge, with no license required. The FCC hopes they will help ease strain on the nation's increasingly crowded airwaves as more consumers go online using laptops and data-hungry smart phones.

Although the FCC first voted to allow the use of white spaces for broadband nearly two years ago, the plan ran into serious opposition from television broadcasters worried about interference with their over-the-air signals. Wireless microphone manufacturers and users—including churches, theaters, schools, karaoke bars, and all types of performers—raised similar concerns.

The FCC's Sept. 23 vote mandates the creation of a database with a map of TV channels across the country, as well as big wireless microphone users, such as Broadway theaters and sports leagues. White-spaces networks and devices would be required to determine their own location and then consult the database to find vacant frequencies to use. The FCC is also setting aside at least two channels for minor users of wireless microphones.

David Donovan, president of the Association for Maximum Service Television, said the group will work with the FCC to develop the technical protections to safeguard television signals. **esn**

e-Rate administrator: New rules should help fund more applicants

Laura Devaney, Managing Editor

The head of the agency that administers the federal e-Rate program had strong words of support for new FCC rules that he said would further streamline the program and should deliver funding to a greater number of applicants.

In an interview with *eSchool News*, Mel Blackwell, vice president of the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), said e-Rate coordinators have a lot to look forward to this year.

"The FCC issued a great order," Blackwell said. "I think it ... sets out a lot of good things for applicants and service providers."

Indexing the cap on e-Rate funding to inflation will bring the program up to date in a fiscally responsible manner, Blackwell said. He added that raising the cap for the 2011 funding year by 3 percent should help USAC fund more applicants.

In terms of the application process, schools and libraries will see some changes in the existing e-Rate forms. USAC has tweaked the applications so it can collect more applicant data, but the agency has eliminated questions and information that might be unnecessary.

Blackwell said the shorter applications make things easier, which can help applicants identify mistakes quicker.

"One of the biggest problems in the whole application process is that new people come on so frequently," Blackwell said. "Anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of applicants could be new e-Rate coordinators." Simplified forms will help those new applicants as they adjust to different e-Rate rules and deadlines and maintain records, he said.

In fact, USAC is working on a mechanism—similar to filing federal tax returns—that will present schools and libraries with their previous year's e-Rate application and give them an easy way to make any necessary changes before submitting the application for the new filing year, instead of having to start from scratch.

"That will simplify a lot of things," Blackwell said. It also will help new e-Rate coordinators, he added, who might not have access to a prior year's e-Rate applications. USAC hopes to make this feature live in a future funding year.



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ELMO's Wireless Tablet a 'handheld, hands-on' platform for creative visual learning

ELMO USA's Wireless Tablet is a 21st-century classroom technology that provides a "handheld, hands-on" platform to learn and create in the digital medium. Teachers and students can use the ELMO Wireless Tablet to draw, annotate, manipulate images, and interact with multimedia resources and applications from all areas of the classroom (with a working range of 50 feet). When fully charged, the Wireless Tablet provides approximately 18 hours of continuous operation time.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet functions with an ergonomically designed electronic pen that provides smooth annotation with pressure-regulated line width. The pen can be switched between "Pencil," "Brush," and "Marker" modes and used for multiple functions, including blackboard, document camera, PC operation (to work as a mouse), and PC drawing.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet comes with Image Mate Accent software, a suite of annotation tools used to create and add effects for greater visual impact. Through the Image Mate Accent interface, users can draw on live images projected from a document camera, as well as incorporate digital multimedia, capture still images, and record video with audio in four modes, including time lapse for stop-motion or model animation.

The ELMO Wireless Tablet is available at a retail price of \$399.

<http://www.elmousa.com>



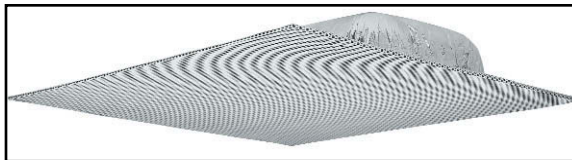
Epson's AP-60 Projector Sound Solution makes audio part of learning

The Epson AP-60 Projector Sound Solution gives educators the option of adding audio capabilities to any new or existing Epson projector. The AP-60 solution includes four speakers and 60 watts of sound (two 30-watt channels), along with a wireless infrared pendant microphone. The speakers will enable educators to optimize the audio components of multimedia instructional content. The wireless IR pendant microphone enables a teacher's voice to be heard more clearly throughout the classroom and helps to preserve teachers' voices throughout the school day.

<http://www.epson.com/bfoffers>

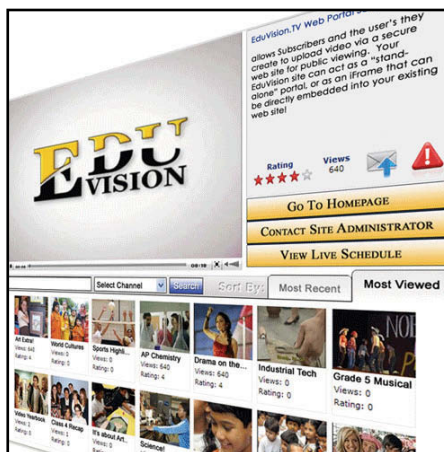
Extron's FF 220T Flat Field Speaker provides wide coverage—and simple installation

The Extron FF 220T is a full-range sound field speaker for 70 volt or 100 volt systems. It features Extron's patent-pending Flat Field Technology, which reduces beaming of middle and high frequencies directly under the speaker—delivering consistent sound levels and reducing the number of speakers required. In addition, the



FF 220T offers an extraordinarily wide dispersion area of 170 degrees, providing a very wide room coverage pattern, which is especially important for rooms with low ceilings. The FF 220T is designed for quick and easy installation and does not require any pre-installation procedures, such as cutting holes through ceiling tiles and mounting supporting hardware.

<http://www.extron.com>



Easy-to-use video platform gives schools their own IP-TV broadcast station

More than a powerful video streaming platform, JDL Horizons' EduVision is a full-featured communications package that essentially provides any school, district, or association with its own IP television broadcast station. It's built around Flash-format video streaming, the simplest and most trouble-free technology available for users of all popular computer operating systems, and works within a full range of web browsers.

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K¹² recently acquired Aventa Learning, which delivers online courses to middle and high school students in partnership with schools and districts. Aventa offers turnkey virtual-school solutions that include online courses, instruction, and technology, or curriculum-only solutions in which Aventa online courses are taught and delivered by school staff. Aventa offers more than 140 online courses, including core, elective, world language, Advanced Placement, and AP Exam Review. Additionally, Aventa credit recovery courses are diagnostically driven, testing students at the start of each unit to ensure repetition only of the material the student did not master the first time through the course.

<http://www.k12.com/educators>

<http://www.aventallearning.com>



New portable digital microscope can be used in the classroom ... or in the field

Ken-A-Vision introduces the kena, an award-winning new portable digital microscope that performs in the classroom or in the field. Simply plug the USB cable into your computer or netbook, launch the multi-platform Applied Vision Software, and go! You can magnify, capture, and modify still images and videos.

The removable camera head fits snugly in your hand or onto the sleek, sturdy metal base. Kena has 2x, 4x, and 10x objectives (for 20x, 40x, and 100x magnifications) and cool, bright LED lighting on top and bottom for viewing of specimens and slides. The unique silicone stage pad eliminates the need for stage clips.

Additional features include a convenient handle that acts as a cord wrap, an easy-turn turret that houses the objective lenses and top light, a touch tube extender to gauge focal distances when being handheld, and a storage bag.

Innovative, affordable, and energy efficient, Kena is an ideal 21st-century classroom solution.

<http://www.ken-a-vision.com>

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the real world, congratulations, you've just created a free-range social club.

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Peoples Education has a 20-year legacy of providing high-quality, state-customized materials that help teachers review state standards and prepare for state exams, and the company now offers a robust print-based program as well as a series of web-based tools.

These multimedia programs were designed to work together, processing formative assessment data and directing students to the targeted instruction and/or practice needed to improve. The overarching goal is to give teachers meaningful tools and access to the appropriate data they need to impact teaching and learning in the classroom. This is done through comprehensive skills-based instruction in the print materials, access to an infinite pool of practice items with ePath Practice Path, and a flexible yet actionable progress monitoring tool, ePath Assess.

Peoples Education is introducing a new Common Core Standards series, featuring all three components and built around these common state standards. Print materials will be available this fall, and web-based programs will follow in January.

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When it comes to teaching and learning, ēno click opens a world of imagination for students. According to Eva LaMar, third grade teacher and technology integration specialist at Riverbend Elementary School in Springfield, OR, “It is extremely motivating to watch my students develop a thirst for knowledge when using ēno click. When students have the drive to explore, take chances, and learn alongside their teacher, they are learners by choice.”

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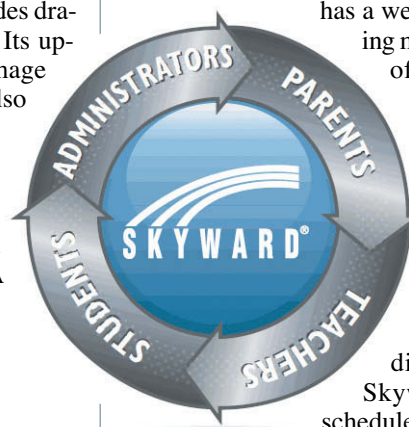
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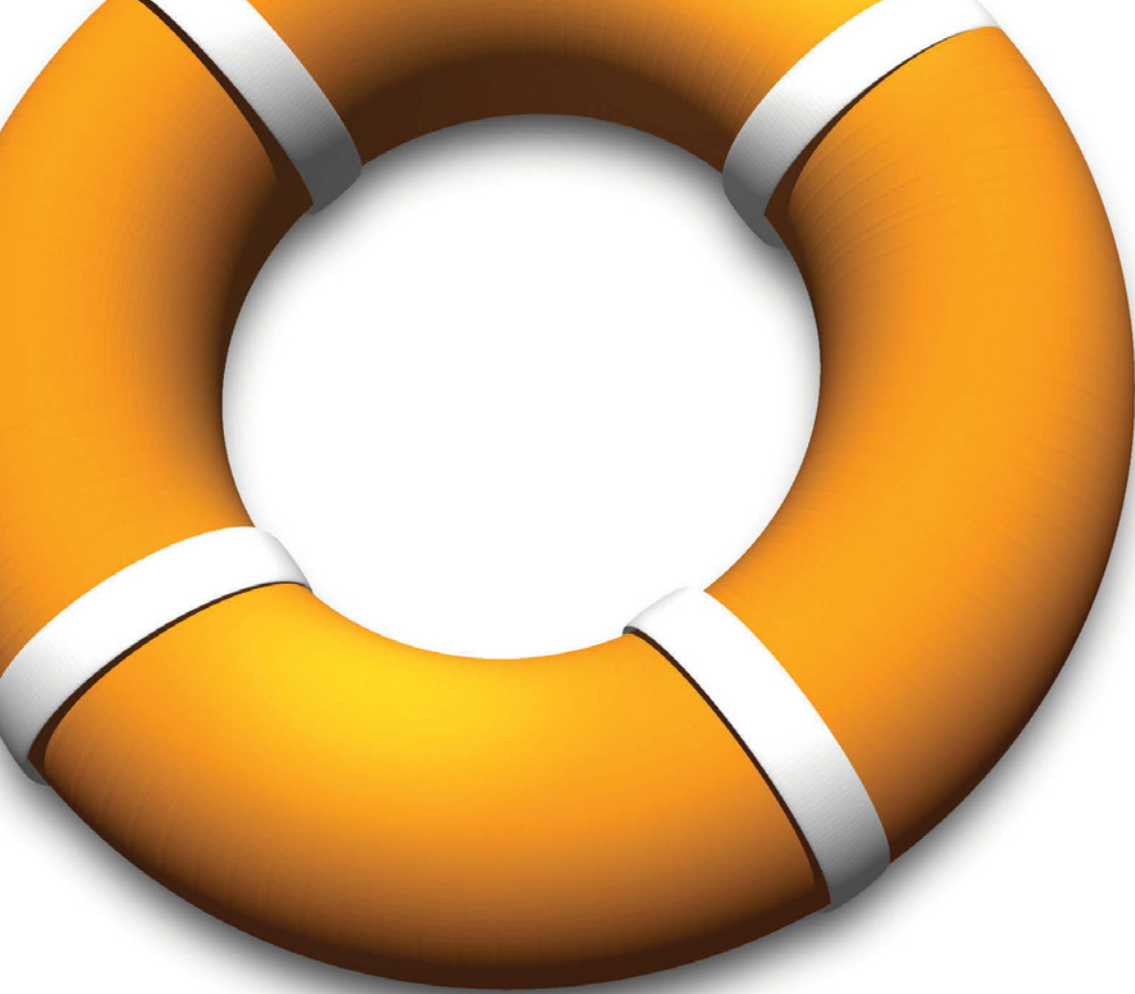
“Skyward’s Project Management [team] did an excellent job with the data conversion. Their knowledge of the product, coupled with our knowledge of the existing systems, made for a great team and played a huge factor in our success. In fact, we beat our expected production schedule deadline by approximately 15 percent,” said Cindy Nagasawa-Cruz, IT director for Utah’s Jordan School District.

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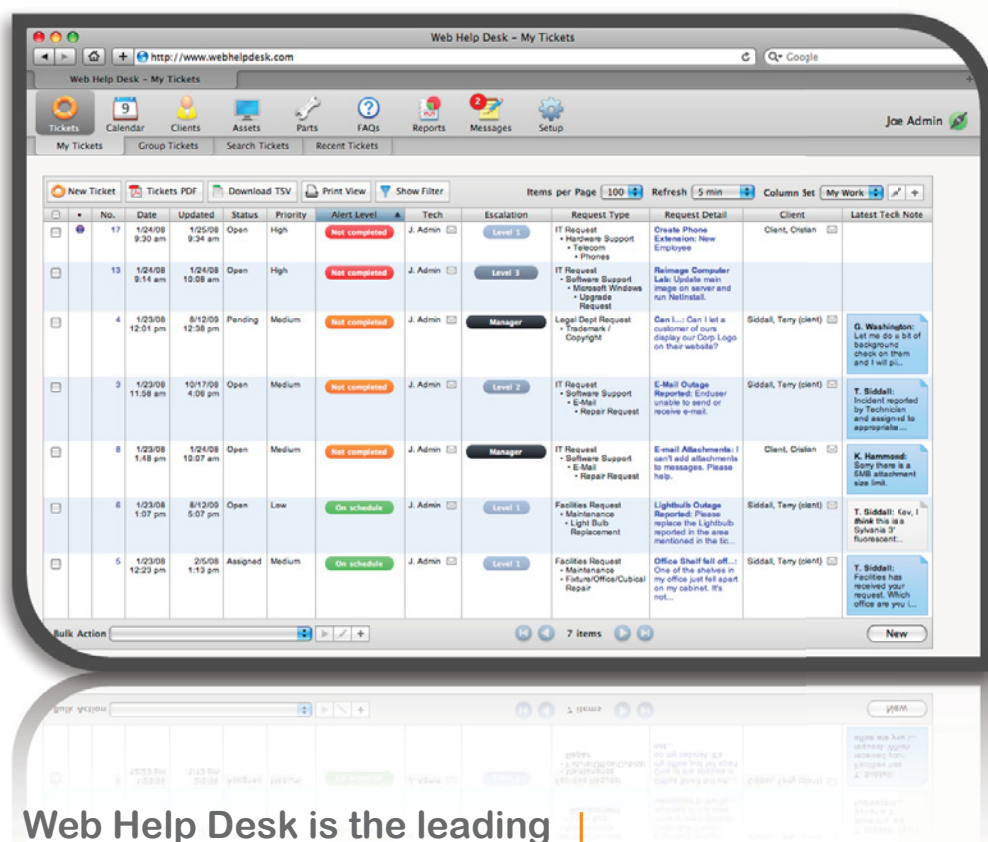




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