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Technology impacts learning, teaching techniques

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The use of personal and classroom-based technology and software has changed how schools affect the environment and how students learn in that environment.

Lake Zurich District 95 schools are beginning to look at different ways to say paper through paperless classwork and homework.

For about five years, Lake Zurich Middle School North seventh-grade science teacher Jerry Clemens has assigned paperless homework in his classes to save paper and time.

Students send assignments electronically in a Word document. This allows Clemens to insert his comments and corrections for the student to revise.

Many assignments have multiple rough drafts before the final. It's more environmentally conscious to make revisions electronically instead of printing and revising multiple drafts on hard copy, Clemens said.

Matthews Middle School Principal David Wilm said the District 118 school has talked about going paperless with classwork and homework.

At this time it is not one of Matthews' green initiatives, but Nov. 13 is copy-free day at the school. The purpose is to save paper by having the teachers not use any copied materials that day.

According to a University of Detroit study, paperless grading can increase faculty productivity. Teachers can write comments in the margins of papers as they would on paper, but without printing out a page. Teachers can also save the graded papers electronically as documentation for outcomes assessment without using a copy machine to make copies of graded reports.

Smart Boards

Many schools also use Smart Boards -- a multimedia flat projector similar to a traditional white board one can draw on with erasable markers.

Smart Boards can be plugged in to classroom electronics such as projectors, DVD players, document cameras and MP3 players.

Smart Technologies CEO Nancy Knowlton said the top factors for teachers are integration and ease of use. With the Smart Board, teachers can write in "digital ink," save their work for later or use it as a touch screen to control Internet and media applications.

The Barrington Middle School-Prairie Campus PTO donated 15 Smart Boards to the school. The white boards were installed over the summer for the 2008-09 school year.

St. Anne School also uses interactive whiteboards as a way to engage students in the learning process. The school started using Promethean Activeboards, which are similar to Smart Board in use and function, in its middle school classes at the beginning of 2008. This year the whiteboards are also being used in the elementary classes.

Interactive textbooks

Even textbooks have become Web connected and technology integrated. Many textbooks come with computer programs and online applications students can use to expand their skills.

In School District 300, Eastview Elementary School students were assigned a book to read over the summer.

After reading the book students took an online quiz to test reading comprehension, Principal Jim Zursin said.

Taking the quiz electronically saves paper and students are able to receive their results faster.

This is a common method teachers at Eastview use for homework reading.

Zursin said once publishers offer more books online, the school could assign students to read the hard copy and continue the reading at home online so they don't have to carry the book to and from school.

Kay Bowers of Kinney and Associates in Oakbrook said one of the most popular programs they sell is called "Kids College."

"It's a combination of sports video games with Illinois State Standards lessons in math, reading and language arts," she said.

Bowers said she doesn't expect classrooms to ever be without paper and textbooks.

"But class work is becoming more integrated every day," she said. "Most of the programs we have are Web based so a student can use them anytime and anywhere they have net access. They don't have to be in the classroom."

The instant feedback has changed how teachers teach from generally shuffling papers back and forth to paperless and individual attention.

Robert Crown Elementary School in District 118 allows students the opportunity to do reading assignments through their language arts series online, Principal Terrence Brennan said.

The language arts textbook can be accessed online. The school does not require students to do their assignments this way since the school is not 100 percent paperless and not all students have access to a computer at home.

"Districtwide, we want to preserve our natural resources by looking at ways to be greener," Brennan said.

At a few classrooms at Sunny Hill School in District 220, students have computers built into their desks. The computers, which were donated to the school by the school district's Education Foundation, are used as an everyday part of class.

Elementary school students districtwide take standardized tests electronically to decrease paper usage and to receive test scores faster and more accurately, District 220 spokesman Jeff Arnett said.

Keeping pace

By using technology instead of paper, Bowers said students can work more at their own pace.

Instead of a teacher handing out an assignment on paper, sending the student home for the day, getting it back, grading it, and giving it back to the student, Bowers said, a teacher gets immediate feedback if there is something a student doesn't understand.

"So it's not just 'green,' it's more efficient all around in terms of time and the child learning a skill," she said. "You can reinforce, correct, and remediate -- in class and all without paper."



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