

Podcasting, more all part of school district's technology plan

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Morgann Pospisil, Tasia Borchardt and Dominic Long wore journalist hats last week.

The fifth graders had interviewed Dudley teachers and administrators about newly renovated space in the elementary.

On this day, the high ability learners were ready for a lighter assignment.

As technology integration specialist Lori Long opened up her laptop, she told them she found several musical selections that might work for the beginning and end of their podcast.

In this case, the podcast will be a written story about the renovations that will also be an auditory broadcast on the school's Web site.

"That's the one," shouted Dominic Long excitedly about the song he was hearing.

Seconds later—after listening to the last jingle—Morgann said she liked it for the end of the podcast.

"It sounds like a thank you for watching our show," she said.

Once the students finish the project, they'll teach the technology to fellow fifth graders.

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The fifth-grade teachers are also in the know after attending a technology conference where they learned the art of creating podcasts and how to integrate them and other technology into the classroom.

Learning about podcasting is part of an overall plan to introduce the technology to fifth graders and later the whole elementary, Long said.

“Our goal is to get to vodcasts this spring,” she said, explaining that vodcasts use video instead of only audio when broadcast on a Web site.

The podcasts can be downloaded to a variety of computer devices, including, computers and iPods and from the school's Web site.

Before class was over, students played with three of the school's 25 new iPod Touches which are hand-held computers.

Long showed them several applications on the miniature computers including “Google Earth.”

For Tasia, learning about new technology is fun.



Morgann said she thinks it's different from what kids at other schools do.

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So far this year, the students said they've completed some assignments on laptops and used clickers while in fourth grade.

Students use clickers, or remote-control-like devices, to respond to teacher questions which are recorded on computers and give instantaneous feedback.

Long and technology coordinator Jo Wiggins are responsible for many of the technological upgrades in the school.

Since her hire as a technology integration specialist in 2007, Long has showed staff and students how to incorporate technology into the curriculum.

Wiggins takes care of computer hardware issues.

In the beginning, Long scheduled time with teachers to show them what technology is available and how to use it.

"Since then, we've grown together and now they're moving at the same speed we are," she said.

Long noted that teachers use certain tools to enhance teaching and students use technology with which they are comfortable.

"It's not top-down teaching anymore but very collaborative," she said.

Long said staff members aren't forced to use technology that makes them uncomfortable.

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At this point, she said posting grades online is required for teachers as is having an individual Web site that can be accessed from the school's Web site.

For Long, technology in the classroom is important because "it's the way of the world."

"And we bring the walls down figuratively with technology," she said.

For example, video conferences bring places like Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo to the school.

Fourth graders will soon use the technology to visit the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, TX.

With what is available to staff and students and how they are using it, Long views Gothenburg Public Schools as miles ahead of other schools its size.

Support from Educational Service Unit 10—in terms of technical and professional support—has been invaluable, Long said.

"When you have 25 new iPods, what do you do with them? How do you maintain and manage them?"

As teachers begin using newer technology with larger applications, Long and Wiggins are busier than before.

"It takes time, energy and cooperation to be able to offer such things to our students and staff," she said.

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Still, it's important to keep technology's role in perspective.

"It's a tool, not a replacement for teaching or material," Long explained. "It's a means of getting the knowledge into the minds of students in a way they can relate to and understand."

There's no doubt in Long's mind that technology is what kids relate to today.

Long said her kindergartner uses an iPod shuffle to play music.

"If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," she said with a laugh.

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