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Program to demonstrate how computer tablets can blend with curriculum

There is something captivating about the Apple iPad, the ubiquitous computer tablet that has revolutionized the digital world.

Northern Ozaukee School District technology coordinator Dave Malueg and second-grade teacher Lori Marini have seen the teaching power of the computer devices, and soon Ozaukee Elementary School students will, too.

Malueg and Marini spearheaded a campaign for a four-month pilot program to bring a dozen iPad 2 devices into the elementary school.

The duo was so successful in making their pitch to the Parent Teacher Resource group, the school's parent organization, agreed last week to purchase 20 32-gigabyte iPads. The gift will be enough to provide all the devices needed for the pilot program, as well as additional tablets for use by other teachers and students.

"This is awesome news for us," said Malueg, who placed the order for the tablet computers early last week.

Delivery of the personal computers is expected this week.

"After the PTR saw the presentation we put together on our proposal for a pilot program, the iPads pretty much sold themselves. I think it is fair to say kids do find the iPads addicting," Malueg said.

Up until the pilot program was proposed, Marini had been working with students on an iPad she brought from home.

She said students have been very responsive to the interactive software accessed through the iPad, including educational apps such as Smartypants and Hungry Fish

The productivity software suite Google Apps can also be accessed from the pads for creating documents, presentations and charts.

“We (NOSD) migrated to Google Apps about a year and a half ago. This includes e-mail and a basic office suite of applications,” Malueg said. “Google Apps allows students to collaborate on documents in real time without having to e-mail files to each other.”

Marini said students like the touch-screen interface of the iPads, and the instant feedback most apps provide.

She said the computer tablets can be so much fun to use, her second-graders aren’t aware they are learning concepts.

“These students are part of a cohort known as ‘Digital Natives,’” Marini said.

“Since they were born, the Internet has been in place, and after each passing day technology is more integrated into their everyday life. I feel the use of technology, and iPads specifically for this project, make learning more appealing, engaging and interactive for them. They are able to gain instant feedback and that motivates some learners.”

Marini said the devices have raised the concept of being user friendly to a new level and have “endless possibilities.”

“With little to no demonstration, students can sit down with a new app and begin to learn instantaneously. I feel there will be less ‘down’ time for students during the day because when they are finished with an assigned project, they will want to play a game that in turn enhances their learning. As a teacher, and a parent, I would approve and encourage that type of play in the classroom,” she said.

Malueg agreed that the interactivity and appeal of the iPads can’t be ignored.

“The interface is so intuitive. Children take right to it. No mouse, just use your finger,” he said.

“We have to remember that the boom of the Internet started in the early 1990s. That means an 18-year-old today has always known a world and life with the Internet. The Internet to them is a phone to us. It has always been there and they expect to be able to use it.”

Malueg said the portability of the iPads is especially appealing because the district’s entire campus is wired for WiFi access.

Apple Computer announced last week the release of iBooks software that will promote the development of digital textbooks, which could be accessed via iPads.

Image Info: SECOND-GRADE TEACHER Lori Marini has been using borrowed Apple iPads to introduce her students to educational apps. That process is about to become a lot easier when 20 iPads purchased for a pilot program by Ozaukee Elementary School's Parent Teacher Resource group arrive this week. At left, Mason Norwood worked on a math app called Hungry Fish. Photo by Mark Jaeger