

It's a New Game

Educators Turn to Innovative Practices

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Laptops Reboot Learning Process

Goodbye, textbooks. Hello, PCs. A “living textbook” initiative at North Daviess 21st Century High School in Elnora (a rural Southern Indiana community) provides freshmen and sophomores with laptops to house their academic achievements.

Each spring, laptops will be collected for refurbishing. In the fall, they will be returned to students, who can access stored information once they resync with the school’s server.

“The key component is once they get through with their four years of high school, they have the same laptop,” explains principal Jed Jerrels. “At the end of their 12th grade year, they select their best projects and take that laptop as a digital portfolio with them.”

North Daviess reportedly launched the program, implemented this academic year, faster than any school in the United States. The rental fee for this year is \$55 for freshmen and \$73 for sophomores, with plans to expand the program to additional grades.

“The living textbook initiative is pushed by our desire and motivation in our district to provide 21st century learning to our students,” asserts technology/curriculum coordinator Todd Whitlock. “With the project-based, New Tech learning model, the living textbook seemed to fit right into that initiative.”

Wireless infrastructure at North Daviess keeps students connected to its computer network from any location in the building as well as their homes.

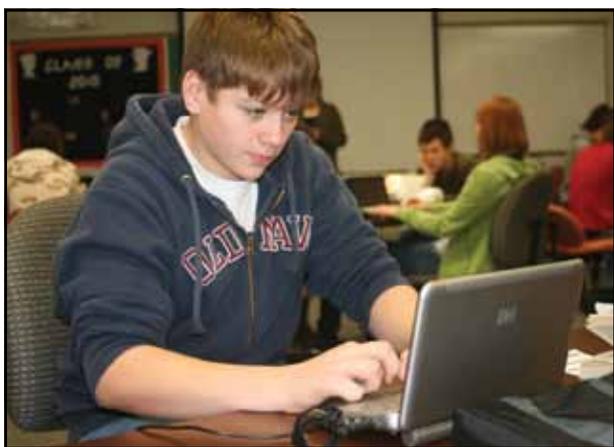
“We’re in a rural setting down here,” Jerrels notes. “I’m thinking around 75% or 80% of students are all that have Internet access at home. We’re making that digital divide a lot closer. Through this process, we can see the kids not only gaining computer skills – because that’s one of the topics of technology literacy – but also becoming more engaged in the rigors and the relevance we’ve developed in the projects.”

One New Tech course challenges students to improve algebraic presentations involving properties of exponents and scientific notations. In a world studies class, students are learning about the Industrial Revolution and will ultimately create an exhibit based on research and other coursework.

Even some of the traditional classes are incorporating the living textbook model.

“We didn’t think we would get that (type of) buy-in that quickly,” Jerrels shares. “It’s fast becoming the norm instead of the exception.”

Whitlock anticipates that within three to four years, the program will encompass fifth-grade students through high school seniors.



At North Daviess 21st Century High School, students tackle projects using laptops instead of textbooks, providing around-the-clock access to coursework and the ability to store academic achievements.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Jed Jerrels and Todd Whitlock, North Daviess 21st Century High School, at (812) 636-8000 or www.ndaviess.k12.in.us/nd21

High Schoolers Get an Early Start on College

Eric Ban has a message for the 2,500 students attending Crown Point High School (CPHS), where he serves as principal: “Perform. Perform. Perform.” This mantra is driving a partnership with local universities that helps students jumpstart their college education and prepare for future careers.

Starting last fall, qualifying students at CPHS began taking classes offered by Indiana

University Northwest and Purdue University Calumet. Top performers on annual college readiness assessments – covering math, science, reading and English – conducted at the high school can complete university courses such as pre-calculus, speech and general chemistry.

CPHS teachers follow university lesson plans and receive input from professors. Participants earn dual credit (high school and college). Enrollment costs of \$15 per credit hour (\$45 per class) are expected to cut tuition expenses by as much as 90%.

Highlights of the partnership include CPHS focus areas in advanced placement courses; instruction in a variety of trades (automotive, culinary arts, engineering and more); and 21st century technology (including reading and math labs). In addition, a customized learning plan is developed for each incoming high school freshman.

“What we’re trying to do is move college programming in high schools from a retail model to a wholesale model,” Ban stresses. “If the high schools think of themselves as wholesalers, there are a lot of things we could do to reduce the costs of how we deliver services – from the admissions process to the teaching and learning process.”

Approximately 600 CPHS students are enrolled in classes at the two universities. Separately, the high school provides college credit through Ivy Tech Community College.

Ban reflects, “I think (when it comes to) the classic idea of the American public high school, kids aren’t buying what we’re selling anymore, so we have to figure out: How do we become more relevant and what does that look like as we retool to meet new sets of expectations?”



Hands-on training in automotive and other industries is built into Crown Point High School’s curriculum.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Eric Ban, Crown Point High School, at (219) 663-4885 or www.cphsbulldogs.com

Indiana University Northwest at www.iun.edu

Purdue University Calumet at www.calumet.purdue.edu

Taking Leadership Training to a New Level

Training today is advancing to a whole new level.

That’s good news for teachers and administrators in Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC). Last July, the district implemented a staff training initiative called the Learning Leadership Cadre (LLC), which emphasizes systemic change as a way to enhance student achievement and provide new leadership opportunities for participants.

The LLC is an intensive two-year program revolving around leadership, collaboration, engagement (“making sure we’re creating an environment in which we’re engaging students in their own learning and engaging staff in ongoing development”) and data.

Currently, there are educator and administrator programs. An executive category will be introduced in the coming months stressing financial management and entrepreneurial thinking. Individuals will be added to each group annually.

Superintendent Vince Bertram cites several reasons for launching the program. “One was a shortage of ‘change’ leaders in our system. We also had a scarcity of strong leadership candidates to fill principal and executive leader positions ... and we were concerned with insufficient capacity to lead in the 21st century environment.”

Participants use hands-on learning and research-based theory to identify specific needs in the corporation and develop related projects. Faculty members from Brown University visit several times a year to conduct multiple-day workshops. In turn, participants travel to the Ivy League campus for in-depth training.

We do a lot of case studies (covering topics such as school law, facilities and community partnerships),” Bertram states. “They (Brown staff members) present research to us, we visit schools and

Kenneth Wong, Ph.D., education department chair at Brown University, addresses Learning Leadership Cadre members during a training session. Nearly 40 administrators and educators comprise the group.



we have group discussions.

“The Brown connection is significant for us. It’s one thing to read about studies and it’s another to be in a classroom with people who wrote the book. These are the individuals doing the research, going into the district, discovering best practices and helping people learn.”

All members of the cadre have been placed in leadership positions within the district.

“These are not discrete courses,” Bertram remarks. “It’s a continuum of experiences. For us to have a powerful experience, we have to replicate what people are actually going to experience in schools.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Vince Bertram, Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, at (812) 435-8453 or www.evsc.k12.in.us

States Partnering to Transform Education

A six-state consortium is working to implement many of the report’s recommendations to revamp the country’s public education systems.

America’s public education systems aren’t making the grade – and it’s time for a major overhaul. At least that’s what a national report on increasing global workforce competitiveness and maximizing preschool through postsecondary education is advocating.

The study incorporates features of successful models in other countries. It has spawned a six-state consortium (comprised of Arizona, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Utah) dedicated to implementing many of its recommendations.

The report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, was published in 2006 by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. It asserts that public education systems are outdated and the only remedy is revolutionary reform.

One approach is to create “personal competitiveness accounts” to promote work-related education and training. The U.S. government would deposit \$500 into an account for every newborn and add lower-level contributions until he or she turns 16 – and thereafter in some cases. Employers, states and others could provide tax-exempt contributions. The goal is for account holders to use the money to cover tuition costs (at accredited institutions) and fees for course materials.

Among other proposals are improving teacher compensation (boosting salaries and enhancing retirement benefits) and transferring ownership of schools from local school districts to independent contractors (most would be limited-liability corporations led by teachers).

Officials in New Hampshire are exploring an early high school graduation option described in *Tough Choices*. A pilot program is underway involving the development of a statewide exam evaluating college readiness that would allow students to enter the community or technical college systems following their 10th grade year.

In neighboring Massachusetts, the focus is on enhancing teacher recruitment, training and retention as well as high-quality, universal early childhood education – both key elements of the *Tough Choices* agenda.

Each state in the consortium, which began forming in late 2008, will work closely with experts provided by the National Center on Education and the Economy on individual initiatives. Additional coalition partners are the National Education Association (the country’s largest teachers union), the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: *Tough Choices or Tough Times* at www.azed.gov/AIMSTaskForce/Research/ToughChoices_EXECSUM.pdf

