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Schools

Fifth-grade students get kid friendly computers

By Lauren Gibaldi | November 01, 2007

OVIDEO - This year, St. Luke's Lutheran School in Oviedo has done something no other school in the nation has done before. They provided StudentMates, modified laptop computers, to every student in the fifth grade.

"I saw them at [the Florida Educational Technology Conference] this past year and was interested," said Steve Landbower, director of technology at the school. "I contacted the company, One2OneMates, and went from there." Landbower is responsible for gathering the funding to start the project.

The StudentMates are modified laptops made specifically for young students. Complete with a full keyboard and color touch screen, the laptop also has wireless internet, a word processor, spreadsheet, a mathematical program called Math Score, a typing tutor, messaging client, and more. All programs are Linux based and compatible with Microsoft.

The computers quickly became a valuable asset to the classroom.

Becky Landbower, fifth-grade teacher, believes that the StudentMates are helping the students academically.

"They're a wonderful asset to each lesson," Becky said. "The students are able to sit close and work together. They are learning how to search for information while using the Internet. The computers are also helping their typing skills.

"It's better than sitting in a computer lab. Because they're portable, we are able to go down to a pond for observations with them and use the Internet to pull up information."

Currently, rather than laptops, all students in grades sixth through eighth have palm pilots with programs similar to the StudentMates.

The laptops are a way of getting the fifth-grade students more acquainted with the digital world before starting sixth grade. Steve said the StudentMates are better for younger students because of their full-sized keyboards and screens.

Principal Pat Leopold is thrilled with the project. "It's providing students with a way to use technology on a daily basis," Leopold said. He hopes to eventually provide computers to more students.

"The teachers love them," Leopold said.

Steve said that eventually he wants enough computers for "one to one" interaction, meaning one

Weather
Conditions
for
Oviedo, FL



for every student.

Every year the school provides a technology budget for school equipment. To afford the StudentMates, the school had an auction that raised \$60,000. All of the money went toward purchasing the laptops.

Becky said that easily distracted students stay focused while using the computers.

"Only when I'm too slow in giving directions are they distracted," Becky said. "I just have to keep them on task; if they're using the Internet, they have a worksheet to do at the same time."

Along with being effective during daily class, the computers are also training the students for the future.

Becky said the computers are giving the students the background to do things more quickly. "They are learning the programs and how to use the Internet," she said. "It's preparing them."

"Some students are still struggling with handwriting," Steve said. "This is an effective way for them to turn in neat work."

"While heading into high school, it will help them with papers," Leopold said. "They are learning different applications that are needed in the work force. It is helping them think outside the box, explore and create."

school computers

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