LTConnections

Field reports on learning with technologies

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Eliminating e-waste

The things students learn from technology can stay with them a long time. But the tools that they learned with often cannot. That's why Rhodes School, a middle school in River Grove, has developed a way to help recycle the never-ending stream of e-waste generated by schools, businesses and consumers. And in working to find ways to recycle tech tools, students at Rhodes have utilized other forms of technology to get the job done.

The project, under the guidance of school technology coordinator John Mertes, started in 2003 as a joint project with West Cook County Solid Waste Agency (WCCSWA) to help schools deal with outdated or unusable technology. Castoff computers and other electronics are collected at a one-day event and recycled. Since its inception, the project has collected more than 630,000 pounds of materials, including the 132,000 pounds—in seven full semis—that it collected at this year's event June 6-7.

But the seventh- and eighth-grade students learn about more than just e-waste. As Mertes points out, the project goes beyond the obvious science curriculum; students incorporate language arts, math and tech skills into operating and promoting the project. To get the project off the ground, one group wrote a grant to Sea World to help with funding; others wrote letters and designed promotional fliers to distribute to local stores. They send e-mails to schools and listservs and work with Rhodes' administration, WCCSWA and the Illinois Recycling Association to create speeches for conventions and conferences. They've researched and created charts about e-waste and created a PowerPoint production on the subject. They've created a Web site for schools to register what they'll bring, and as the schools register, students create a database to help determine truck needs.

Sea World selected Rhodes as one of only eight North American winners of its Environmental Excellence Award, and gave the school a $10,000 grant to help with funding. They've been honored by both the Illinois governor and lieutenant governor. And to continue the school's environmental activities—aside from an already-thriving in-school recycling program—Rhodes wrote and received a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation to install a solar array at the school, which students use to study solar energy.

Making—and saving—memories

Kristen Ganzel's students will always remember this past school year—they've got the disk to prove it.

Ganzel, a fifth-grade special education teacher at Westchester Intermediate School, worked with her seven students this year to create a video yearbook. Throughout the yearlong process, they took digital photos of their activities, both inside and outside of the classroom—science experiments, field trips, students' participation in band and a spelling bee.

Ganzel imported the pictures into Photo Story 3, a slideshow-creation program. Students then wrote captions for the pictures and for introductory slides and read and recorded them. Students could also bring in music CDs from home to provide background and transition music; the class listened to each proposed selection and then chose the music, working as a group.

At the end of the year, the school's tech coordinator burned the yearbooks onto disks, and students had a finished product to take home and share with their families.

In completing the yearbooks, the students had learned how to work as a team, how to summarize and synthesize visual information; how to improve their sentence-building skills. But most importantly, Ganzel says, "they were excited because *they* had their own yearbook."

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