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# Local classrooms stay on the cutting edge of technology

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BEREA — In the last few years, schools have come a long way when it comes to the technology used in the classrooms. Ten years ago a school may have had one computer lab. Those big, bulky projectors that required transparencies were commonplace in every classroom. The Internet was almost unheard of. Most teachers were lucky if they even had a computer in their classroom.

But today, all that has changed and those ugly projectors have been replaced with document cameras, computers have made it into almost every room in the school (sans the bathroom) and Internet access is everywhere.

"The technology has made it a lot easier for students to reach information quicker," said Brenda Pridemore, the Berea school district technology coordinator.

The use of technology is to give students, especially students from low-income families, the confidence and skills in using technology that they will need after graduation, according to www.edu.gov. The Web site states the future in both higher education and the world of work will

be infused with technology and the schools have a responsibility to prepare the students for that.

The first computer lab brought to Berea might have had a 20 Megs hard drive, four Megs of RAM (random access memory) and a seven inch screen, Pridemore said. And there was no Internet, all the computers were linked together on the same server, and if one section of the links went out, they all did, she said.

Today, Berea has a whole list of upgraded technology, with two intelligent classrooms, three wireless laptop carts with 50 laptops total, and high-speed Internet connections in all classrooms, just to name a few. And the computers now have about 1000 times the RAM than before, Pridemore said.

Attendance, grades, and discipline are all recorded and reported through computers, Pridemore said. Berea has an automated announcement system that makes mass phone calls to parents or guardian's home phones and cell phones, notifying them when their child's soccer team will be arriving from the away game, or if their child wasn't at school that day, she said.

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from the front

The intelligent classrooms at Berea were bought with \$15,000 provided by Gear Up, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. They include smart boards, which are chalk board sized interactive touch screens, a multi-media projector, document cameras that will magnify onto the screen whatever is placed underneath. They are powerful enough to enhance a penny so you can see Lincoln sitting on his chair, Pridemore said.

"It (technology) has come leaps and bounds," Pridemore said.

Madison County schools are also upgrading the technology they use, with drop down screens, ceiling mounted projec-

tors, computer labs, Internet access and document cameras, just to name a few, said Brenda McGuire, technology resource manager for Silver Creek Elementary.

Last year Silver Creek implemented the Turning Point program, in which teachers create lessons, or even tests and quizzes, as a presentation on the projector. The students are assigned little clickers, like a remote control, to answer the questions. It's like the audience polls seen on some of the game shows, you can see the results and get immediate feedback, McGuire said.

"It's unbelievable where we've come from," McGuire said.

Right now the Madison County schools are in the process of developing a distance learning cen-

ter, where teachers can do live instruction with other classes over seas, said Charlene McGee, district technology coordinator for Madison County schools. Like the Mandarin Chinese class being taught at Madison Southern, the teacher could simultaneously teach that class somewhere else, McGee said. Or if there is an instructional day for teachers, but the teacher doesn't want to leave the classroom all day, during their planning period they can go to a quiet room and receive the instruction over the Internet, she said.

With Internet access available in all the classrooms, the schools in both districts strictly monitor what Web sites are being looked at. At Berea schools if a student is trying to access a page that has been restricted, a page pops up that says "STOP." The pro-

gram constantly upgrades itself with sites inappropriate for children or that can be a distraction for them, like Myspace or gaming Web sites, Pridemore said.

Even cafeterias are joining in on the technology craze by installing touch screen monitors for the students to check out their lunch, Pridemore said. Every child is given a number, which registers when the student went through the line and what they bought. Before the touch screens were installed, students used punch tickets.

The children with free and reduced lunch had a different colored ticket than the other students, which caused them to be singled out, said Tracy Hill, technology resource manager for Berea schools.

But now, with the touch screens, no one knows

who pays what for their lunch, she said.

It doesn't matter which school district your child is in, because schools all around the country are upgrading their technology with grants from the government. Last year, the General Assembly backed an initiative, called the Instructional Device Upgrade, with \$50 million for workstation device replacement and \$29 million to establish broadband circuit for each school district, according to an article written by Deanna Lee-Sherman. Berea schools received \$82,000 of the IDU money to purchase 141 workstations (computers) for the students only. Berea also received a \$60,000 grant from the Beaumont Foundation three years ago to purchase new technology, Pridemore said. The

Madison County schools receive some grant money to fund their technology and have had community groups donate money, but very little of it has come from the general fund, McGee said.

Like it or not, technology has integrated its way into the schools, and every day life. It's hard to imagine where we would be today without computers and Internet, cell phones and smart boards, but the days of pen and paper and overhead projectors are out the door and a new era of technology has been ushered in.

"We've gone from radio to color TV — we were in the stone ages, now we're the Jetsons," said Ken Isaacs, service manager for all of Madison

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County schools. . .

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