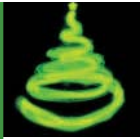


December 2008
Volume 5 Issue 1



SISD



Technology Unplugged



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Welcome to the Christmas edition of the SISD Technology Unplugged newsletter. As you know, the past several months have been challenging for Sherman ISD. As we began implementing many of the technology initiatives specified in the previous bond program, we faced many unexpected delays. The delays have been addressed, and we are beginning to realize the benefits of the proposed improvements. Some of the technology improvements are invisible in the classroom, yet have a significant impact on the quality of service provided through the SISD network. When the network projects are complete, all SISD campuses will have improved infrastructure, important for implementing online learning, curriculum, Internet access, IPTV, VOIP phone systems, security camera systems, wireless network access, and of course, online assessment, etc. Visible changes in the classrooms include projectors and document cameras. The installation of projectors is complete on several SISD campuses, with the remainder scheduled for completion in early 2009. It's exciting to visit our classrooms where teachers are seamlessly using technology to facilitate teaching and learning. Inside this edition of the newsletter, you will read about several technology projects in the district. You may be wondering why it is important for SISD to maintain up to date technology. In the article "The Future of Education," Phillip Scheibmeir, SHS math teacher, provides insight and thought provoking questions about our role as educators in preparing our students for their future. As we consider our schools in the context of the future, we must realize it's more about change than it is about technology. Technology is the tool which is allowing our schools to change. Students, teachers, and administrators have access to more information and better tools for teaching and learning than ever before. Just because we have access to better tools doesn't mean we use them. It's like a farmer who continues to use his horse instead of the tractor to plow the garden, because he likes the horse and doesn't know how to start the tractor. In education, we must get off the horse and start the tractor, even if it means allowing the students to turn the key. It is an exciting time to be in education.

The Gift of Learning

Education is a lifelong journey whose destination expands as you travel.

-Jim Stovall

Thank you for your patience as we continue the process of updating SISD technology. If you have a technology success or project you would like to share, we would love to include it in the newsletter... please share.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!
Mignon Plyler, SISD Technology Team



<http://www.shermanisd.net>

The Future of Education

Are we equipping our students for the future?

*By: Phillip Scheibmeir
Sherman High School, Math Department*

Many challenges face education. One particular concern centers on the use of technology with learning. Some argue that simply having chalk and a blackboard for teachers is sufficient. While there is merit to this belief, it still contends against SISD's mission statement, "To ensure that each student is equipped to excel in our changing environment . . ." Are we

equipping our students for the future? How will technology play a part in this changing environment? Has SISD taken the leap into the 21st century?

Four years ago, SISD purchased Blackboard, software for online education. Admittedly, implementing this software does not guarantee improved learning. Giving teachers a fancy gadget or complex software does not necessarily improve learning. If online courses do not yield better results than traditional methods, why bother?

Anticipate that forty years from now students will no longer ride a yellow bus to a school building. In today's world we see companies like IBM who no longer have a headquarters, instead they hold virtual meetings. I always picture a CEO father sitting on the bleachers during his child's soccer practice conducting a wireless meeting with employees from other states. This business structure was unheard of thirty years ago. Arguably, the meeting could be just as effective in some boardroom, but for obvious reasons corporations prefer this new trend. Technology has changed the way we work. What will be the model for businesses thirty years from now? Exposing students to the next technological advancement provides one more tool of adaptability for an unpredictable society. Teachers should seize any opportunity to incorporate technology in their classroom, not because learning will necessarily improve, but because students are better prepared for the future.

The past fifteen years have had an explosion of growth in the world of online higher education. Names like The University of Phoenix have made massive headway into the once impenetrable college market. Selecting a college has become more complicated since several brick and mortar colleges now offer complete degrees via online. In the high school realm, the [State of Michigan](#) requires students to take at least one online course for graduation. Florida launched an entire [virtual high school](#) back in 1997 and has seen growth exponentially. These developments are revolutionizing education. Florida advertises their online high school in other states, luring students away from their home state. What impact could this have on education in our local schools?

Texas decided to join the race about two years ago. Coming January 2009, the State of Texas will open the portal for The [Texas Virtual School Network](#). School Districts will soon provide accredited online high school courses for any public or private school student registered in the state of Texas. This means any student can take an online course from some teacher in another district and receive credit towards his diploma. All courses are taught by Texas licensed teachers that have received professional development through approved TEA sites.

I received my online certification this past summer from Region 4 in Houston, Texas. I will have opportunities to teach from the comfort of my own home to students sipping lattes at some WiFi Starbucks 300 miles away. For the past three years I have been converting my Geometry courses to a hybrid (half online- half in class) format at Sherman High School. The anecdotal feedback is around 80-20 in favor of having the course semi-online. Most of my students seek online education with eagerness. Potential perks include instant feedback after every completed assignment. Tests no longer require 24 hours (or more) for a teacher to grade, record, and return. Students advance to the next unit or chapter when they have mastered the previous material. Time now depends on learning, not vice-versa. Being sick or absent ceases to be an issue when one can access notes and possibly video lectures from the Internet. There are many more benefits that could be listed. A majority of my students are addicted to this new style while a minority hope that next year's math teacher does things the "old fashion way."

Implementing technology challenges a teacher's time and energy. Why squander hours of labor creating a technological lesson plan that equates to merely 90 minutes in the classroom? The statistics show that online teaching requires more preparation time of teachers than the traditional style. Wouldn't logic dictate that a worthy lesson plan could have been spent keeping the system the way things were? In the short term thinking – yes, but what happens over time? Will certain teaching jobs be replaced by teachers from another city, a different state, or some other country who adapted? I'm not suggesting that teachers will be replaced by technology. I believe teachers are irreplaceable with regards to learning. I am attempting to provoke the mind of any educator to consider what lurks.

For some teachers, just seeing applications of the technology helps them become convinced of their benefits. Others, lacking that pioneer personality, wait for society to dictate changes (i.e. using technology) to them. The failure to acclimate towards current trends makes one prey to what I call the "change or die" syndrome. My recommendation for teachers and students involves incorporating technology in small doses, thereby reaping benefits incrementally. SISD offers numerous opportunities for teacher training on the latest technological and learning developments. I am proud to be a part of a district that has such foresight.



Great Listening Center/Great Literacy Tool – www.Raz-Kids.com

By: *Sharice Jennings*
Technology Specialist, Fairview & Jefferson

Have you ever wanted a large library for a listening center? Have you ever wanted a way to ensure tapes and books from the listening center would not be lost or misplaced? Would access to over 130 books on 27 different levels for up to 36 students be worth \$59 a year? Then have we got a website for you.

The website is called www.Raz-Kids.com. When the students go to the website, they type in their teacher's name, and then choose their name from a list. Each student page has an Assignment tab and a Library tab. The teacher can assign individual books (based on reading level or interest), or the child can choose their own books from the library. The book can be read to the child or the child can view the book and read it on their own. If the student chooses to read the book instead of have it read to

him/her, the student has the option of using a microphone to record him/herself reading the book. Simpler books for younger children have sound with them (background character sounds or background music). When a book is read to a student, the word that is being read is highlighted with a yellow box, so the child can follow along.

Books on Raz-Kids.com are leveled aa-z. A small portion of the books are Read-Only, but most books have comprehension questions the students answer to earn points. The website does tell the student whether they got the answer right or wrong, but it does not tell them what the correct answer is. If the student reads the book again (the site keeps track when the student goes through the book again), the student is allowed to take the test again. The second time through the test, the question order is mixed up.

It's a great site to use multiple times, for homework assignments,

or summer school sessions. Small classes can be combined into one group for maximum use of your dollar. "The children LOVE to read books on Raz-Kids! They are always begging me to stay in from recess to read on Raz-Kids. When they forget their home reading log assignment I have them read on Raz-Kids and they don't think they are being punished. I HIGHLY recommend it for students with low reading abilities because I've seen 2 years' growth in only a few short months!" says Nikki Bitzer, 3rd Grade, Fairview.

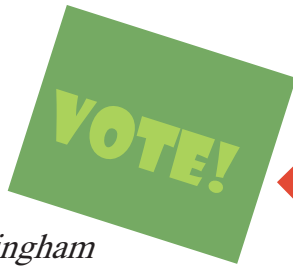
If you would like to know more, you can take an online guided tour of the entire site at <http://www.raz-kids.com/main/Tour>. You can look at the book descriptions for the entire library at <http://www.raz-kids.com/main/BookList/id/1>. And you can type in your email address and read any 5 books from the library for free at <http://www.raz-kids.com/main/ViewPage/name/trialmenu>.

A Treat For Halloween

By: *Kathy Sedlacek*
Technology Specialist, Piner

Martha Stephens, an 8th grade reading teacher at Piner, provided a treat to her students this Halloween. Instead of candy, the students were treated to literary terms using a website featuring Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." As students read the story aloud, they could scroll over words and identify allusion, alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, metaphor, imagery, etc. Some of the more difficult vocabulary words in this poem, circa 1845, such as obeisance, surcease, dirges, and mien were also interactively defined. The trick: students had to find examples of these literary terms in the poem. The treat: The Simpsons' rendition of "The Raven" which was convincingly re-enacted by Homer Simpson. The website link: <http://www.teachersfirst.com/share/raven/st18.html>.





By: Tracey Powers
Technology Specialist, Dillingham

Students at Dillingham Intermediate School participated in the presidential election by voting electronically. Students at this campus joined children at dozens of other schools throughout the county that held mock elections. These elections help familiarize children with the election process. At Dillingham, trained student volunteers acted as poll workers. Their duties included greeting potential voters at the door, answering questions, and assisting with the technology. Students lined up at the designated polling place, showed their identification, and then voted online using laptop computers placed in voting booths.

When asked what it was like to vote in this mock election, fifth grade student Rebecca Petty said, "I felt like I was eighteen and actually voting in the real election."

Voting results were then tallied automatically on a specially designed website, at myteacherpages.com. This is the same resource many of our teachers use to create and maintain their own Web pages in Sherman ISD.



Ballots were cast by 735 students with Barack Obama winning with 475 votes to John McCain's 260 votes.



Thankful for United Streaming!

"I would like to thank Sherman Technology for the help in the classroom with the projectors and United Streaming. I have been able to locate information on every part of World History that I have covered to this date. It allows the students to see a visual of the topic which I think helps them remember, plus I believe it is more enjoyable to them. Once again I would like to thank all of those responsible for this advancement in our classrooms."

Greg Baldwin
Sherman High School
World History

Spooky Stories: A Scary Way to Write!

By: Maggie Free

4th Grade Teacher, Jefferson Elementary

Any teacher knows that getting your students to write can be a bit of a challenge! As a fourth grade teacher, writing is a very important part of my instruction! During the month of October, I came up with an idea for my students to write a spooky story. I thought that it would be a fun way to teach writing, as well as give the students an opportunity to create something of their own! To go along with the written portion of their story, I also thought it would be fun to let the students draw a "comic strip" of certain events in their story. I told Sharice Jennings, the technology specialist for Jefferson Elementary, of my idea. She thought of a great technology component that would enhance the student's work! We decided to have the students create a PowerPoint, and scan pictures from their story to create an online book. The students would type in their story to go along with these pictures and record their voice using a microphone. This project would eventually become a listening station for kindergarten and first grade classes!

When I told my students of the assignment that Ms. Jennings and I had created, they were very excited to get started. Once they started writing, I knew that it was going to be an awesome project! The students wrote so creatively in the first person narrative style. Most of them even had dialogue! I knew that to make a great PowerPoint presentation, they not only needed to have great dialogue, but bright, colorful pictures! The students really worked hard during this portion of the project!

While I was working with the students on the writing portion, Ms. Jennings was preparing technology lessons to help the students during their project. She found a lesson on Learning.com that showed the students how to properly use a scanner, and she reviewed how to make a PowerPoint. The students were so excited to get started on their special project!

Every student took turns scanning their pictures into the computer. They had to learn how to zoom and crop the picture they wanted to use. They also had to learn how to insert a text box into their PowerPoint presentations, so they could type their story. Once the students had completed each step, they were able to move on to the final portion: recording their own voices into the PowerPoint presentation. This was the most fun to watch! There were a lot of students who used sound effects, and they even changed their voices to sound like different characters in the story! The students really had fun recording their story, and had even more fun listening to them!

This project incorporated writing and technology in such a fun, exciting way! The students' writing ability really shined, and they were able to learn so many wonderful things on the computer. As a teacher, I encourage you to use technology with your writing whenever you can. The students really benefit from using something on which they can all be equally creative. My most heartfelt thanks go out to Sharice Jennings. Without her help, this project would have never been possible!

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SISD Technology Unplugged is published by the SISD Technology Department for all of the district employees, the Board of Education and interested patrons.

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