

This summer many of you may have had the opportunity to use technology to make the process of educating your students more exciting and enriching. As we move into an uncertain future, we know that technology will play an important role in our children's lives. Not because they will be computer programmers, but because they will need to know how to use a computer to accomplish their job objectives. Whether it be word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and/or hypermedia, our students will be expected to know how to use these tools to get the job done.

The Wrong Road

We have to ask ourselves a fundamental question in our approach to teaching, and our subsequent use of technology in the educational process. This question is, "What is it we want to do with computers?" Do we want computers to teach our children, or do we want our children to use computers as tools to achieve their objectives? Which is the more powerful view?

In most districts, it is very clear that many are divided on this issue. Administration usually prefers integrated learning systems that provide students with "canned" lessons. These are advertised as being able to raise student scores on the TAAS. Integrated Learning Systems are also "teacher-proof" and allow the district to spend little in staff development. The view is one that teachers can't teach, so let's use the computer to do a better job.

Extensive research in how children learn has shown that integrated learning systems--programs like the ones found in Edgewood Labs, such as IDEAL and CCC--are ineffective at ALL levels. Poor students do not benefit from daily doses of reading and math; "good" students find the repetition unchallenging; and ESL/BBL students find it a frustrating experience. Sadly, the TAAS tests for primarily higher order thinking skills, not only basic skills. Higher order thinking skills are NOT taught in computer labs. Lab Managers are inadequately trained, and the needed teachers are kept ignorant of the software.

Despite overwhelming research to the contrary, District Administration continues to purchase costly Integrated Learning Systems that focus on developing basic skills. So, what's the alternative? Invest money, time, and train teachers in the use of technology as a tool. Why waste \$32,000 or \$40,000 on integrated learning systems like CCC when you can easily purchase a program like Clarisworks (includes a word processor, spreadsheet, database and draw/paint tools) for \$20.00 per machine? Why WASTE so much money on integrated learning systems when they don't even target the REAL problem--that our students do not know the processes involved in problem-solving and decision-making? Why teach our kids how to click on buttons on the screen to complete multiple choice questions when they should be learning to navigate and use the computer's operating system?

These are some of the questions that we, as teachers and parents, need to ask of the all-knowing administration. But, what's the alternative?

The alternative is teaching our kids how to use these tools on the computer. It also means using the computer ourselves to simulate real life situations in the classroom so that we can model the problem-solving process to our students.

What is the price? The price is investing \$32,000 in STAFF DEVELOPMENT, KIDS' AND PARENTS' TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTES, AND THIRD PARTY SOFTWARE DIRECTLY SUITED TO INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS, NOT PURCHASED TO SPEND FEDERAL FUNDS.

If there is some question as to the validity of the research alluded to in this unauthorized, probably politically incorrect newsletter, take a moment to refer to TECHNOLOGY & LEARNING, ELECTRONIC LEARNING, and other major journals where the researchers are not paid by vendors (such as what ILSs in our district do--hire their own researchers to report positive results. Sounds kind of suspicious, doesn't it?).

To end the final issue of TECH-NEWS, here's a quote that should be the rallying cry of every teacher in the district that wants to teach their kids how to think, not click:

ASK NOT WHAT COMPUTERS CAN DO TO YOUR STUDENTS, BUT WHAT YOUR STUDENTS CAN

DO WITH COMPUTERS.