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Floydada students wired for success with laptop-lease program

BY D. LANCE LUNSFORD
AVALANCHE-JOURNAL

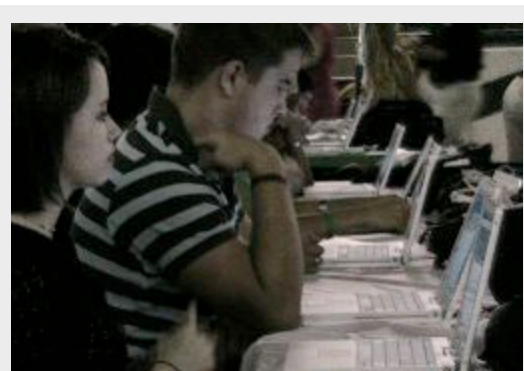
FLOYDADA - Students are plugging in and logging on here after Wednesday's distribution of Apple iBook laptop computers to 300 students.

The Floydada Independent School District was one of 22 schools in Texas to receive computers as part of the Texas Education Agency's Technology Immersion Pilot in 2004 for its junior high school. It worked so well, said officials, they decided to extend the program to the high school this year without state funding assistance.

Floydada ISD Supt. Jerry Vaughn challenged the students Wednesday to utilize the technology to further their intelligence.

"You're very fortunate to have this opportunity, and I would like to challenge you to seize this opportunity and use it the best you can," said Vaughn.

The computers become a part of



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everyday life for the students as teachers develop curriculums through the iBook medium.

"They have this technology 24-7," said Vaughn. "They take it home with them. It's theirs, just like a textbook."

The program, operated under the TEA, used federal grant funding of \$390,000 for junior high school students in 2004. Floydada ISD introduced the program at the junior high level, implementing the program and getting students accustomed to a different kind of learning.

"And all of a sudden, we had these eighth-graders we were going to move into high school. And we were going to give them back their Big Chief tab and crayon," said Vaughn.

It prompted Vaughn and school board members to cough up \$600,000 for a four-year lease agreement with Apple.

Today's generation of high school students are the first to grow up with technology rather than be integrated with it, paving a path to their acceptance of such programs. And though the daily use of a computer for an average teen may involve e-mail communication or music file sharing, schools are moving more and more into an age of technology. It is important, said Texas Tech Department of Education Professor Steven Crooks, to implement viable curriculums while also introducing the new technology.

"It's a sweeping generalization to say computers will affect learning without other conditions," said Crooks, whose specialty involves instructional applications of computers and instructional design. "As much thought and preparation needs to go into how they use them just as much as just having them."

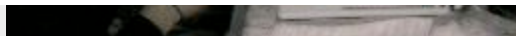
Figuring the coordination's importance, Vaughn stresses the program's focus does just that.

"It's not a technology initiative. It's a learning initiative to change the way teaching and learning is done," said Vaughn.

Apple instructors were on hand Wednesday as students made their first click of the mouse to begin implementing that learning method amid a few whoops from students as the power came on.

For students growing up in the rural expanse of Floydada - located 49 miles northwest of Lubbock with a population of 3,884 - the technology immediately levels the playing field and puts the world at students' fingertips, said Vaughn. In the meantime, they link up immediately with an expanse a few may not have had access to in the first place.

With 86 percent of students falling into low socioeconomic state standards and 75 percent if its student body Hispanic, 60 percent of Floydada students do not have computer access at home. Immediately, said officials, this brings those with limited computer access into the computer age before leaving high school to enter college or the work force.



D. Lance Lunsford / Avalanche - Journal

Students await distribution of Apple iBook laptop computers Wednesday at Floydada High School.

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"In today's society ... if you're not computer literate, you can't go anywhere," said FISD Board President William Dean.

On Wednesday, students in Floydada were excitedly drinking at the cup of change.

"For the first time, we can say we're doing something no one else has done," said Floydada High School Principal Wayne Mooren, noting their placement of laptop computers with every student in grades 6 through 12. "Today is the day that learning forever changes at Floydada High School."

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