Looking At The ISSUES

May 4, 2007

Schools Finally Connected, but Personal Technology Lags

The nation's schools have met an important technology benchmark. Virtually 100% of all public schools in the United States are now connected to the Internet according to a report released late last year by the U.S. Department of Education.[1] That was up from 35% in 1994. Additionally, 45% are using wireless connectivity.

The report, Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2005, contains findings from the most recent national study on the level of technology in our schools.

Though all schools are connected to the Internet, classroom connection was found to be another issue. Schools reported that only 94% of their instructional rooms were connected and that figure varied by school characteristics with urban classrooms at about 88%. Wireless connectivity existed in only about 15% of instructional rooms.

While gains in connectivity remained impressive, the nation was not quite to the "one student-one computer" stage. The ratio of students to computers was 3.8 to 1 overall. This number varied by school size, instructional level, and poverty. Curiously, it was both the schools with the lowest and highest poverty rates that had the highest number of students per computer.

Despite their increased use by adults, personal technology such as hand-held computers is provided to students in only about 8% of the schools. In another category, only ten percent reported having laptops available for students to borrow and less than a fifth of these would lend the laptop for the entire academic year. Of the 90% who did not have laptops, only 3% reported any plans to make laptops available to students in the next academic year, underscoring slow growth in this area. Indeed, individual student access to any kind of personal technology seems to be the last frontier.

That's why it was significant when the Canton City Schools received national attention last year after completing a two-year initiative to integrate the Texas Instruments TI-Navigator™ Classroom Learning System and graphing calculators into math classrooms prompting Melendy Lovett, president of Texas Instruments Education and Productivity Solutions to say, "CCS is truly a success story when it comes to leaders' and teachers' commitment to improving student engagement and math performance using graphing technology."[2]

Looking At The Week

Television Interview

Adele Gelb was interviewed by Eugene Norris, host of "Joy in Our Town," broadcast on television's WDLI. The conversation focused on college access, the "KnowHow2Go" campaign and the work of the Stark Education Partnership. The program will be aired on a date to be announced.

$5,000 Winner

Congratulations to Wendy Lichtenwalter, Early College High School, for winning a $5,000 professional development prize from the KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

[1] Wells, J., and Lewis, L. (2006). Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994–2005 (NCES 2007-020). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007020

[2] See the news release on the Texas Instruments web site, Ohio's Canton City School District Increases Math Achievement Using Texas Instruments Graphing Technology. http://education.ti.com/educationportal/sites/US/nonProductSingle/about_press_release_news86.html