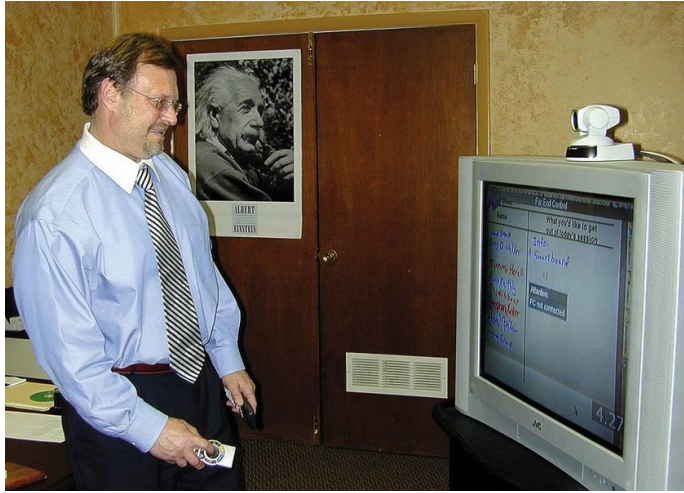


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EPS technology department works on variety of projects

By Cass Rains

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With the pace ever quickening in the advancement of technologies, Mike King and his staff have their work cut out for them. King, the director of Information Technology, has been working to bring the school district technology to the forefront, matching the sophistication of other schools in the state, or passing them. King uses a meeting agenda to show the eight items the 7-month-old IT department has been working on. "One of the biggest projects introduced this year was the increase of bandwidth," he said. "New state

Department of Education mandates have been passed for online testing." Formerly running at about 128 kilobytes per second, the EPS' old system was "... not able to accomplish what the state wanted." With help from Southwestern Bell, now AT&T, King said the district's bandwidth is about 100 megabytes, or 1,000 kbps.

Along with all the new technologies, teachers will be the ones learning how to integrate the use of the technologies into their classrooms and curriculums and operate the equipment. The Information Technology Training Center helps teachers train to use some of the district's newest classroom tools, including the district's 16 teleconferencing units. The units consist of a Web cam and a TV, but with a high-speed Internet connection and a desktop-computer setup, the units make distance learning a lot less tasking than it used to be. "This technology allows students to take virtual field trips easily," King said. "Groups of students are going on virtual field trips four or five times a month."

Teachers can experience distance learning as well. King said all professional development in-service programs for technology training can be accessed by teachers and district staff and can be streamed to computer desktops for viewing. A pilot-project has also begun for implementing an electronic grade book into classrooms, which would allow teachers to centralize and easily distribute information. King said the department hopes to have the project online by next year.

Another program in the works would decrease the amount of key entries if a student transfers within in the school district. The Student Tracking and Reporting system would make a student's information, such as name, birth date and other personal information. "When a student enters the district, it is the one time the data will have to be entered," King said. "It will eliminate a lot of key entries."

The IT department is also updating all the elementary schools' labs with the newest version of the Success Maker software. The software teaches math, reading and language arts with science and social studies lessons incorporated into the math and reading curriculums.

A goal for next school year is to have students receive a minimum of 25 hours of training each year with the software, King said. The implementation of SMART Board technology in local schools is another project the department hopes to achieve.

SMART Board technology, a large interactive board that functions as a personal computer that allows users to press the board's touch-sensitive surface to access and control any computer application is going to be integrated soon. The use of Renaissance Responders, small remote control-like devices, could allow students to click a button to answer a questions projected onto the board. Classes could take tests using the "remotes" and teachers could download the information from the responders and process the information directly into their electronic grade books. "It's a true integration," King said of the technologies abilities to streamline information. "It can be processed in real time, can be printed off or transferred to the electronic grade book. "This could be used to help student in benchmark and assessment tests by letting teachers see which question s students had the most difficulty with."

As well as integrating new technologies, King said the district is also working keyboarding classes into curriculums. "It's an important skill all students need to know," King said. "It is a very marketable skill students should have after graduation." King was sure to thank the IT department's technicians and staff for the progress made in such a short time. "None of this could have ever occurred if not for our excellent technicians and staff," King said. "Each one is an expert in a specific are and they do a wonderful job."