

Teachers get schooled on iPads

Monte Vista Christian School hosts seminar about iPad integration

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Don Johnson, superintendent of Cascade Christian Schools in Seattle, and Annette Johnson, superintendent of Portland Christian School in Oregon, learn to use their iPads.

Monte Vista Christian School last year became the first school in the U.S. to fully incorporate Apple iPads into its curriculum, doing away with some textbooks and a large percentage of its library books.

The school's ninth- through 12th-graders use iPads for taking notes, accessing assignments and classroom materials, turning in homework and taking tests.

They can also use the machines to study and see their grades. The move into the digital world made MVCS a pioneer in the use of technology in the classroom. On Thursday, 41 teachers from Christian schools across the country visited the school to learn how to use the technology in their own schools.

"This is the school that's leading the way," said Aaron Coon of Westminster Christian Academy in Lafayette, La.

Coon said the juniors and seniors in his school each got iPads for the first time this year, but said that a lack of technological knowledge on the part of the educators has made it difficult to incorporate them into the curriculum.

"We're taking baby steps," he said. "I feel like we have this big sword, and we're only using it to cut butter."

Eventually the school plans for each student in its middle school and high school to use an iPad.

Coon, a physics teacher, said a simple attachment and a downloaded app can turn the iPad into a scientific tool that can gauge magnetic fields, motion, force and electric current.

"The learning is unlimited," he said.

Brendan Doolittle, director of advancement and technology for Claremont-based Western Christian Schools, said his district is in the early stages of transitioning to digital books.

The use of iPads, he said, helps educators stay abreast of the changing technology that has become part and parcel of young people's lives, but too often eludes older educators.

"The language of children has changed," he said. "This helps us speak that language. When this is in front of your kids, there's no limit to what they can learn and create." Trish Main, an English teacher from Wheaton Academy in Chicago, said her school has a small number of iPads, Mac-Books and other digital readers, and is considering using them more widely.

She said that educators in her school are hoping that switching to iPads would allow students there to jettison the heavy textbooks they currently carry, instead accessing them digitally.

Teachers from Wheaton were at the seminar to learn how to build the right infrastructure to allow hundreds of students to be online at the same time.

"We're not asking teachers to change everything about the way they teach," Main said, "but how can they use technology to enhance the way they teach."

Thomas White, who has helped MVCS with its digital transformation and who taught many of the classes for the visiting teachers, said the iPads allow schools to save money by relegating paper books, classroom notes and traditional homework to the pages of history .

"For the first time in a school setting, we have a device that gives us the potential to go truly paperless," he said.

Joe Teroro, a teacher from Maranatha Christian School in San Diego, said his school is considering using digital readers .

"We've definitely been learning a lot," he said. "We're going to see if the technology can work for us."

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