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Holy Trinity learns with Smart technology

By Samaia Hernandez , Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD - It's modern, interactive and changing the way students learn at Holy Trinity School.

When Mary Beth Applegate recommended a lesson plan to first-grade teacher Carolle Smith, which allowed students to adopt a sea turtle in Florida and follow its migration patterns online, she had no idea a Smart Board computer display system would come of it.

But now the devices are drastically changing the way students learn everything from science to religious songs.

By January, six of nine classrooms in the nearly century-old school at 11 N. Whittlesey Ave. will be equipped with the touch-sensitive displays that allow students to bring the Internet and interactive and visual instruction to grades kindergarten through eight.

The boards are covering areas inside classrooms, where chalk board instruction once reigned.

"In response to the sign of the times, Holy Trinity School recognizes that interactive learning is the wave of the future and it's the way that children are coming to us learning," said Sister Kathleen Kelly, the school's principal.

Twenty-one hands shot up into the air Monday morning in Smith's first-grade class. Everyone wanted a chance to draw, add and practice handwriting on the large screen. Afterward, as students sang a song of praise to God, they followed images of flowers and trees on screen, imagery of elements mentioned in the religious hymn.

"It's made a major difference in first grade," said Applegate, who is responsible for finding lesson plans to integrate technology into the curriculum. "(Smith) uses the Smart Board in almost all her lessons. It's cut the learning time in half." Smart is a Canadian company that makes the boards.

The classroom-friendly computers are also eliminating clutter in lower grades.

Developing mathematical motor skills once required the use of messy blocks.

Now students point to objects on the board. Stationary paper maps are also replaced with movable, sizable images of continents that can be superimposed over one another.

Smith and Applegate's turtle lesson plan won the 2009 Archdiocese of Hartford's Technology Award, which recognizes one school each year for innovative and efficient integration of technology.

A Smart Board, which arrived last month, was the prize, drawing such buzz around the school that an anonymous donor provided another. The school then purchased an additional system on its own.

The interactive computers, which cost about \$3,000 each, are now in first-, fifth-, and sixth-grade classrooms.

Seventh-grade teacher Darlene Bailey and Wadsworth Investments recently purchased another for the seventh-grade, and the school used its Scholastic points from a book fair to purchase two more for the second- and third-graders.

"The grades that don't have them, we bring into the classrooms that do," Applegate said. "There isn't a subject that is not integrated into the Smart Board."

"It's awesome, because it knows everything," said Matthew Halligan, 10, after students in the fifth grade took turns matching science vocabulary words to their corresponding definitions by dragging the words on screen with their fingertips.

Over the summer, Smith attended a Wallingford public school workshop where she learned how to use the device and draw on its



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countless programs and applications. The key, she said, is not expecting students to adapt to old learning techniques but rather to work with a generation with highly developed visual sides of the brain from growing up with computers.

"You can allow them to direct the learning, truly," Smith said, "because you have access to the world at your fingertips."

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