Learning Technology with Technology

How a Georgia school district reduces its use of textbooks while its students accelerate their learning like never before.

Background:

Information Technology is a subject that evolves more rapidly than any other field of study in our schools today. If teachers and students are not brought up to date on new developments each year, their skills and knowledge base quickly become outdated.

For the past five years, teachers and students in Fulton County, Georgia have turned to LearnKey, of St. George, Utah, to provide interactive courseware to help enhance and sustain the IT instruction in the classroom.

Located just outside the Atlanta city limits, the Fulton County School System is one of the oldest and largest school districts in Georgia. It has a reputation as a premier school system due to its commitment to continual improvement. Recently that commitment has been coupled with the vision to embrace e-learning, which has helped to further Fulton's position and bolster its ability to provide innovative education resources that drive student achievement.

Fulton's dedication to e-learning has yielded what some consider an unusual result--certain textbooks are used, less frequently as primary resources, yet actual learning is more vigorous and engaging than ever.

Challenge:

"We found that many of our students who were serious about IT actually had a greater knowledge base than some of the teachers," said Cheryl Clemons, Coordinator Career and Technical Education. "We put out a RFP for a solution that would help both students who desired to advance more quickly and enable our teachers to be empowered to come up to speed and stay updated on current technologies. We felt that e-learning was the best way to go and we wanted a solution that matched our programs of study regarding IT services support, digital media and design, computer programming and networking."

The teacher is the core element to any classroom environment. Fulton wanted to incorporate an e-learning program, not to replace the teacher, but to assist them. E-learning can provide students with engaging information they can learn from as well as help teachers become more effective at what they do best—teaching!

Solution:

LearnKey has been providing video-based instruction for two decades and has become expert at providing content in a way that is entertaining and educational. One of the most important factors in good pedagogy is identifying student learning modalities, or in other words, discovering the best way for students to process, learn and comprehend information. LearnKey's multimedia delivery provides resources and methods of instruction for all types of learners, whether they be visual—students who learn through video, pictures, diagrams, etc.; auditory—students who learn through listening to the spoken word; or kinesthetic—students who find it easier to take in new information through interactivity and becoming physically involved.

World-renowned experts deliver their subject matter through video presentations and hands-on demonstrations. Each course is coupled with pre- and post-tests to track and monitor progress.

"We have incorporated a variety of e-learning courses from LearnKey into the classroom such as: Microsoft Visual Basic®, Adobe® Photoshop®, Macromedia® Dreamweaver®, Microsoft Office

FrontPage®, A+ certification preparation and others," Clemons said. "LearnKey has also helped us to individualize instruction. We've seen several thousand students go through the program, but our IT classes actually started off very small. It wasn't possible for us to have a separate A+ class or a separate networking class – sometimes we had to combine classes. With LearnKey, it's easy for a teacher to facilitate learning in an environment where the students can work individually, at their own pace with e-learning as opposed to relying on teacher-led instruction alone."

Even though there is a board policy that requires that the schools provide textbooks for each student, Fulton County has seen an interesting development regarding the actual use of some hard-copy textbooks—they are getting dusty.

"What really happens in a classroom is that the students don't have to refer to those text books as often because of the learning that is available on the screen," Clemons said. "We still have some teachers that hold onto the idea of, 'We must have a textbook,' but the more they become involved with LearnKey and its courseware, the more teachers get away from relying solely on textbooks."

One practical reason for favoring e-learning is it can be updated immediately when new developments occur in the subject. "You know how often the technology changes and the actual software applications themselves change, but with LearnKey we have the opportunity to stay continually updated."

Bruce Swann is a teacher at Banneker High School. He has seen more than 400 students participate in this program at his school. "This is really great for dedicated students who are serious and can work on their own. They can take off and learn as much as their little hearts desire," he said. "We also find it beneficial when a student joins a class late in the semester and is unfamiliar with the subject. We can put them on LearnKey until the end of the semester. It really helps when students need to recover or come up to speed."

Fulton County has discovered that LearnKey is not just valuable for the students; the teachers can benefit both personally and professionally as well.

"We've found it really shines when instructors need to use it themselves," Swann said. "It's the best way to learn the content of the IT curriculum and in turn, instruct the students."

OnlineExpert is LearnKey's next-generation course delivery infrastructure and e-learning platform. Teachers use OnlineExpert to access the courses for anytime, anywhere learning, allowing them to take the courses themselves at home during evenings, weekends, or over the summer break.

Clemons explained, "LearnKey courses can count as professional learning units and they have actually become very popular because if a teacher takes the course during the summer when they are off contract, they earn a stipend of $100 per professional learning unit for each course they take."

Conclusion:

The students and teachers in the Fulton County School System have witnessed first-hand the usefulness and power of LearnKey's e-learning courseware. Many students use the training they receive to prepare for technology certifications such as A+, Net+, iNet+ and others. They also use LearnKey as a stepping stone to advanced learning at some of the nation's top colleges and universities.