

Schools aim to keep up with technology

Kids will blog anyway - why not teach them how to blog correctly? So believes the Division of Catholic Schools in its major effort to stay ahead of technology, beginning with a strategic plan spearheaded in 2000.

“Our Catholic schools are on the cutting edge of technology,” said Susan Lakomy, computer instructor and teacher trainer at St. John School, Westminster. “We offer technology education from grades K-12, unlike the public schools.”

Yet to teach students correctly, teachers themselves must stay abreast of the latest and greatest tech tools.

Through the generosity of the Catholic Family Foundation, the administration team initially began training 40 Catholic school teachers, such as Mrs. Lakomy, in 2000 to become technology leaders. In turn, teachers carried the newest ideas and learning back to their schools to build teams of tech leaders.

“Technology has a role to play in the curriculum,” said Carole Redline, director of academic technology for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. “The premise was that technology would not be a subject, but these leaders would teach the teachers to enhance their curriculum.”

Click ahead to 2008. Dr. Redline’s job remains as trainer of trainers, teaching the latest tools of online communications and collaboration.

“Students are blogging and podcasting,” she said. “We have to teach them to use the tools and use them safely.”

In summer 2008 the archdiocese offered archdiocesan teachers about 20 face-to-face courses throughout Maryland. (Visit www.ideas4us.com.) Four hundred participated, and more will take online courses in the fall.

Dr. Redline has written some of the courses and others are written by the instructor, yet all are sent to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for review and approval, along with Dr. Redline's recommendation.

"Our schools are well ahead of the public school," said Dr. Redline. "If a Catholic school is going to be chosen, one of the important reasons might be because of its technology."

At the college level, graduate level or through continuing professional development, teachers must earn six credits every five years to remain certified; credits are then applied toward recertification. By offering these technology courses, the archdiocese is encouraging teachers to keep up to speed.

"It gives me a hook," said Dr. Redline. "If you have to take courses, why not take them in technology?"

Schools are required to formulate technology plans, which are revised every three years. How do these ultimately impact students?

"Students are already there," she said. "We need to keep up."

Mrs. Lakomy's students visit Web sites related to class topics, do research, take virtual field trips and produce professional quality publications.

Courses help teachers first learn, and then teach, how to create podcasts, blogs and wikis, and how to do video broadcasting and more.

"When teachers use technology," she said, "they turn tedious tasks, such as

proofreading and editing, into a workable, motivating undertaking. The more they learn about technology, the greater enthusiasm they have for incorporating it into their lessons.”

Students with special needs can be more readily accommodated as well since technology allows for a greater degree of differentiation or individualization.

Archdiocesan schools are beginning to build dynamic Web sites, which provide venues for information to be communicated in a safe Internet environment.

St. Clement Mary Hofbauer School, Rosedale, created and designed its own site and offers its knowledge to other schools through a Learning Management System called Crusaders for Learning, which includes online assignment collection, tests, grade book, curriculum mapping, book reviews, school store and more.

“What St. Clement’s is doing is great and is an example of ingenuity,” said Dr. Redline. “There’s something about teachers who are pioneers of technology,” said Dr. Redline. “It makes me proud to work with them.”