

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Comal ISD students soaking up new technology with MacBook laptops

Ever picture your student becoming the next Ansel Adams? Or maybe they'd rather create a hit record or movie.

Students in the Comal ISD now have the chance to learn the latest creative computer technology, as mobile carts full of MacBook laptops, purchased through Bond 2008 funding, are now available for them to use.

Students have already combined multiple Mac programs to create a presentation on motion and sound, have created their own music, and have gone on an online scavenger hunt looking for facts about the U.S. Constitution, using only the click of a mouse.

Kim Farlow had her pre-first students at Bill Brown Elementary use a digital camera at home to take a series of photos. Parents then either saved those photos on a disc or emailed them in. Students used a flash drive to transport the photos to the MacBooks.

Soon, these students – most of them six years old – had created an online photo album using the Mac program Comic Life.

Farlow said she didn't hesitate to try and introduce her young students to this kind of computer technology.

"They are so eager to learn," Farlow said. "I wish I had a video camera when they got the photos in, they all screamed, 'It's working!'"

Farlow said she thinks the Comal ISD's new MacBook laptops will definitely give students a head start on the future.

"Their life will be technology," Farlow said. "This is an incredible opportunity for our students."

Currently, each Comal ISD high school has five mobile MacBook carts, middle schools have four and elementary campuses have three, with each containing 25 laptops. Teachers can sign up to use these Computers on Wheels, affectionately called COWs, via an online campus calendar.

Comal ISD teachers, who all received a laptop, and students around the district, are using the MacBooks and Mac programs in various ways.

Students are making slideshows of artwork using iPhoto and posting them on campus websites, honing debate skills using Garage Band, using Grapher in math class, and are placing podcasts on many different subjects on the web.

"When we got the MacBooks in earlier this summer, we were closing our eyes and trying to envision where we'd be in six months," said Sandra Shelton, Comal ISD Director of Accountability and Instructional Services. "We got here a lot faster than we thought. This is 21st century learning, and I think it's wonderful we're able to provide the students the tools they need."

In addition, students and teachers now have access to iPods, interactive whiteboards, document cameras and wireless internet connections thanks to Bond 2008 funding.

Wendy Lux, an 8th grade U.S. and Pre-AP History teacher at Canyon Middle, had students go on an online scavenger hunt to learn about the U.S. Constitution.

"My students are pretty impressed with the MacBooks," Lux said. "I'm already signed up to use them again."

Instructional technology specialist Mary Griffin had fourth-grade students in Barbara Elliott's class at Hoffmann Lane Elementary creating music with Garage Band.

“Every kind of instrument is on there,” Griffin said. “You can click on percussion, strings, brass, piano. Students arranged the sounds to create their own music.”

Eric Clark’s fifth-grade science students at Arlon Seay Elementary have already used Garage Band to create their own song, make a PowerPoint production, then import their song with a voice layover before downloading video and weblinks to make an individual presentation on motion and sound.

“My mom has one and she was really excited when she found out what are doing in class,” said fifth grader Lily Dutra. “It’s so neat to be able to use these in school. It’s a nice break from the book.”

Instructional technology specialist Trina Maurer said she’s seen nothing but positive faces and results when she enters a classroom working with the MacBooks.

“It’s so great because all the students are fully engaged,” Maurer said. “They are learning invaluable information and a lot of times they don’t consider it school work because they are having so much fun.”

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