



Customizing Teaching Strategies Through the Empowered Desktop

Spring Hill Schools USD 230

Serves: 2,500+ students,
250+ educators

Member Since:
December 10, 2002

Haysville USD 261

Serves: 4,000+ students,
700+ educators

Member Since:
October 10, 2002

Pike Valley USD 426

Serves: 250+ students,
35+ educators

Member Since:
September 27, 2005

South Brown County USD 430

Serves: 600+ students,
95+ educators

Member Since:
March 9, 2006

Garden City USD 457

Serves: 7,000+ students,
1,100+ educators

Member Since:
November 11, 2002

Dighton USD 482

Serves: 250+ students,
65+ educators

Member Since:
September 15, 2003

The Kan-ed Empowered Desktop is a customizable web portal filled with applications and resources for Kansas teachers and students. Theresa Kraus, a math teacher with Pike Valley USD 426, explains, "The Empowered Desktop is personalized for our school, so the students know where to look for the available resources." A few of the applications available on Empowered Desktop are Backpack, a web-based file management system with Internet storage space and sharing capabilities; netTrekker d.i., an academic search engine with 180,000 educationally relevant websites that are aligned to state standards; Test Builder, an online environment for creating, delivering, and assessing practice tests for state assessments; and Financial Foundations for Kansas Kids, standards-based, interactive computer lessons on economic principles and personal financial literacy. School districts also have the ability to add applications to the Empowered Desktop, enabling all of their teachers and students access to these targeted resources.

Students are able to use the Backpack application to save files and then access them from any computer with an Internet connection. Rodney Clay, Technology Teacher at South Brown County USD 430's Everest Middle School, says, "The ability to use the Backpack has made file transferring for students much less of an issue. It also has freed up class time, as I would have to virus scan any storage device brought into the classroom."

Teaching how to research over the Internet can be a daunting task for teachers of any grade, but with the help of netTrekker d.i., teachers can be confident the information they and their students are accessing is relevant and accurate. "It's just an excellent resource; it's a quick place that I can get where I want to go. It's all compiled right there," explains Tamie Linenberger, Science and Social Studies Teacher for 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at Dighton USD 482. Grant Jones, a teacher with Haysville USD 261's Learning by Design Virtual Charter School, adds, "The Empowered Desktop has put a wide range of safe search possibilities at our students' fingertips. It makes project-based learning more streamlined."

"I love Kan-ed. I use the Test Builder on Empowered Desktop the most," states Christine Roitz, Middle School Math Teacher/Instructional Coach at Spring Hill Schools USD 230. Jenny Bjurstrom, 3rd grade teacher at Garden City USD 457's Garfield Elementary Schools, explains how teachers in her school use the Test Builder applications, "We've used Test Builder to create practice formatives that our students can practice for the state assessments, and also that we use to teach them the strategies and take them step-by-step through the testing process—how we want them to prepare for the real state assessments. It's been a valuable resource to have that available because it is just set up so much the way the state assessments are set up." Linenberger shares her thoughts on Test Builder, "With the science and the social studies there isn't as much out there for state assessment practice. You can find a billion examples for reading and math. Test Builder is my primary source for science and social studies examples."

Bjurstrom explains another application she uses regularly in her classroom, "I've also used the Financial Foundations for Kansas Kids with my economics lessons. The kids have really enjoyed it because it contains short video clips and is interactive. I project it onto my Smart Board and present it in front of the whole class. Whenever there's an activity piece, I use cooperative learning strategies and have them discuss their responses, and then we do the activity together as a class." Bjurstrom uses this cooperative learning strategy frequently with the Discovery Education application, an application USD 457 has added to the Empowered Desktop. "I use the Discovery Education a lot. I know a lot of other teachers in my building do as well. We use it generally for science and social studies to help build background and help illustrate the things that we're teaching in class as a supplemental resource," Bjurstrom explains.

Kan-ed's Empowered Desktop gives teachers and students a multitude of resources and applications that they can customize to enhance their teaching and learning strategies.