

DESKTOP APPLICATIONS EMPOWER STUDENTS

Rob Schiltz, Superintendent at St. Francis Community Schools USD 297, reports that the district started using the Kan-ed Empowered Desktop in January of 2006. Roughly 325 individuals have access to use the Desktop.

Schiltz says that the most powerful application used is Atomic Learning, which provides web-based training and support for dozens of software applications. Schiltz even had a personal story about how Atomic Learning tutorials taught him to use Excel. "When I first took the job as Superintendent, I needed to learn how to use Excel. I had tried to learn on my own a time or two, but you have to have a use for Excel. When I took this job, I definitely had a use for it. I learned everything I know about it from Atomic Learning. It's a wonderful tool and still, if there are questions that I have, that's the first place I go."

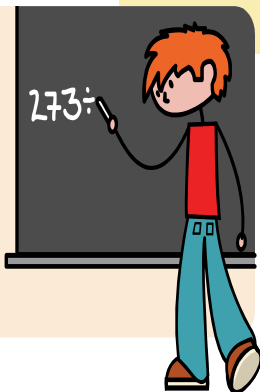
Describing the application in greater detail, Schiltz said, "If you go to Atomic Learning, there is a whole list of programs for which they have tutorials. You just click on a video and it's typically a one to three minute video, and it shows you how to do a particular task in a program. It's not somebody just telling you how to do it. You don't have to read how to do it. It literally shows you. And they're progressive. It goes from one skill to the next. It's a great tool."

Brenda Day, Journalism teacher, uses several features of the Empowered Desktop in her classroom. As Day explained further, "I use the Kan-ed Desktop extensively in my journalism and desktop publishing classes. One handy feature of the Desktop is Atomic Learning, specifically Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator and iMovie tutorials. I begin by going through one tutorial together as a group with my class and then assign individual tutorials to them. I follow up with projects that test their knowledge and encourage them to refer back to the lessons often when they need a refresher. Using these lessons has freed me to teach design, journalistic writing, photography, and not get stuck just teaching the technical side of the programs. I believe the students feel empowered because they recognize that they are teaching themselves. I also love and use the Visual Thesaurus. We have used it as a brainstorming tool when working on theme packages, and I encourage students to use it when they are having difficulty coming up with a title for their copy. I love Kan-ed!"

At the K-6 level, Title I Reading and Math teacher, Kim Queen, has been using the Empowered Desktop for the past two years. "I use it at least weekly, sometimes daily to provide extra instruction and practice of math skills/concepts for students in a transition program between the grades of Kindergarten and First and for academically low students in Third grade. Since I only teach math in these grades, I use Dive into Math most frequently. Each time I use it, my goal is to have the student complete two full lessons. Each lesson includes sections called Instruction, Activity, and Test. I require that my students' test scores be 80% or higher before they go on to the next lesson. Each test allows students to review the questions they missed, and students are required to discuss any missed questions with me. If the students are able to complete two full lessons, I allow them to go to another educational website to play games. My transition math students have shown great growth. I started them out at the Kindergarten level, and now they are well into the first grade level," Queen said.

Like Day, Queen also uses Visual Thesaurus with her students. As she explains, "I have recommended the Visual Thesaurus Spelling Bee program for use by other teachers to help their students prepare for the annual spelling bee. This program is helpful because students hear a word, and then try to type the correct spelling. If the word is missed two times, the student is given hints as to how to spell it. At any point, the student can 'surrender' and the computer provides him/her with the correct spelling. The score is kept for the students, and top spellers are listed for everyone to see. Visual Thesaurus also has a Word of the Day. I love reading those definitions and trying to use the

One thing is certain; St. Francis is using the resources daily with students and seeing many benefits. "The Kan-ed Empowered Desktop has provided some software for us that we would otherwise have to pay for. I understand that we do pay for some of the features that we have added, but at very, very reasonable prices. If we didn't have it, we probably wouldn't be using Atomic Learning, Dive Into Math, or the Backpack," Schiltz said.



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