

Kan-ed Network Provides Kansas School District Access to Virtual Museum Visits, Tours of England, and More

Wellington USD 353 is taking full advantage of Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) through the Kan-ed network. Kay Tibbs, Technology Director at Wellington USD 353, explained various ways that Wellington is currently using IDL in the district. "We can send and receive video and host a class. We'd like to start offering some of our Agriculture classes to schools that don't have an Ag teacher or an Ag program. We are working with South Central Kansas Service Center to get some of those ideas started. Also, some of the smaller districts in the area have needs like Algebra II, Algebra III. They just don't have the teachers qualified to teach it, and so we could offer that to them. And the South Central Kansas Service Center has a Mandarin Chinese class that has grown in great popularity. Students absolutely love the class."

Elementary students are given the opportunity to learn Spanish over IDL as early as fourth grade. "When they get to middle school and high school, they are better prepared for Spanish classes. They get the background information that wouldn't be available to them without the access to IDL that the Kan-ed network provides," Tibbs said.

Wellington USD is also taking virtual field trips to places such as museums located in New York using IDL. As Tibbs explains, "The museums offer interactive distance learning classes where students can virtually be at the museum, such as the Baseball Hall of Fame museum. Students get a wonderful, rich experience by interacting with the docents at the museum who give them information and answer their questions. They get to see some of the artifacts that they may otherwise never get to see."

Tibbs described another field trip of sorts, where students "travel" through England. As she described, "They take students through a small town in England with a video camera, and they talk about what they see and the likenesses and differences of England and Kansas. The students actually get to ask questions and get answers right away by interacting with the tour guide."

Use of IDL has also impacted the 15 to 20 seniors at the high school who are enrolled in concurrent classes through local community colleges. Tibbs shared a story where several students taking a speech class through Pratt Community College were asked to upload a speech video to the Pratt website; however, it did not work properly. So instead, they "arranged for the teacher, who is actually in Ottawa, to watch the students giving their speech in the IDL lab. We were able to let our students do their speech and then interact with the teacher. The teacher could give them immediate feedback instead of having to watch them on a video and trying to give them feedback."

While excited about the many educational opportunities provided to the district through IDL, Tibbs shared the same concerns that many Kan-ed members have. "I'm concerned about the legislature cutting funding of Kan-ed. It would almost destroy what we have going with the IDL. We have IDL equipment in every building, and it is used frequently. It is a wonderful resource to bring in the classes that we have that we just don't have the manpower or the skilled teachers to teach. With funding cuts, we will be using our IDL labs a lot more in the future to help reduce costs of bringing in classes," Tibbs said.

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Wellington USD 353

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