Inspiration® SOFTWARE, INC

The Leader in Visual Thinking and Learning™

CASE STUDY

North Canton City School District
Ohio

Ohio district adopts Kidspiration® for its cross-curricular ability

While cost savings are expected, it's the visual learning approach of the software that is the real attraction.

"Some kids are so visual," says Pattie Knox, Tech Specialist and self-appointed Head Cheerleader for Kidspiration software in North Canton City School District, Ohio. "You can give kids a blank piece of paper and they don't know where to begin," but with a Kidspiration template, they have the visual cues they need to organize their thoughts into a cohesive whole. When the students switch from the template to the outline, they "are amazed to see what they've done."

That "ah ha" moment is enough for Knox. Since first seeing a Kidspiration demonstration, she has pushed steadily for her schools to adopt it. Starting in the fall of 2002, the district will have 200 Kidspiration licenses and 200 Inspiration® licenses spread over four elementary schools with five computers per classroom. And Knox is excited by the possibilities, to say the least. Professional development begins this summer. Teachers will be required to attend a one-hour introduction to Kidspiration where they will learn to understand the software, learn to design their own templates, and get a glimpse of what they can do in their classes. This required training is a first for the district. Usually what happens, says Knox, is "we buy some software, we put it on all of the computers, and some teachers use it, some don't." This time, all the teachers will be trained on Kidspiration and Inspiration, and there will be a coordinated push to have them integrate the programs into their classrooms.

"As a tech specialist, I can see that in the long run we will save money on software. If we take the time to train our teachers in Kidspiration [and Inspiration] use, we'll eliminate the perceived need for specialized software. Kidspiration is truly cross-curricular, it can be used to do almost anything." Teachers can create tailor-made activities that address concepts anywhere in the curriculum. "We're not buying software," says Knox, "we're buying a teaching concept."

No waiting for "I can do it" satisfaction

The district received the software just last month, in April of 2002. But teachers didn't wait for their summer training before they started to put Kidspiration to use in their classroom. Some jumped right in. In one school, for instance, fifth graders designed Kidspiration templates for their first-grade "book buddies." The older kids created a lesson for their younger buddies, then sat down with them to help them work through it. Fifth graders first recorded the instructions in their own voices, then chose words and pictures for the template that the first graders had to click and drag to the appropriate places. Both sets of students benefited: the fifth graders learned by teaching others, while the first graders learned both the lesson in the template and the "I can do it" satisfaction that came from completing it. Working in pairs is a useful strategy even without a second class. For instance, Knox likes to pair up two first

graders at each computer: one to read the instructions, the other to work with Kidspiration at the keyboard. Then they switch. This method frees up a lot of an instructor's time, as well as empowers students to think that they are running their own show. Knox says this approach has been used successfully in multiple grade levels for lessons involving "compare and contrast" and to teach about the different branches of the U.S. government, for example.

Knox is also a great believer in the Web as a medium for learning. She loves the fact that it is so easy to convert Kidspiration documents to HTML format—just a few simple clicks—which allows her to post students' work online quickly. She has been part of several collaborative online projects and is looking forward to the next one, which will be centered entirely on Kidspiration.

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The ability to share templates is just one reason for her enthusiasm. "We love that we get ideas and lesson plans from across the country" for things to do with Kidspiration, Knox comments. First-grade teachers nationwide need to teach the same concepts, and they are all looking for new and stimulating ways to present those concepts. Sharing Kidspiration templates via the Web is like tapping into a global teaching community. "If a teacher in California can find a template online made by a teacher in Ohio, that's awesome," she explains.

More math and science in the future

Kidspiration's future in North Canton looks bright. Knox sees the use of Kidspiration expanding from language arts to other disciplines in a natural progression. For instance, Kidspiration is "incredible for classifying," and she is already dreaming up ideas for more Web-based applications that highlight that functionality, as well as more math and science templates.

Or perhaps she will focus on boosting the district's fourth-grade proficiency scores, which are always a big challenge, she says. A series of Kidspiration templates could easily be developed to address those specific concepts. She has a few months to decide. Mostly, however, Knox is "just excited to find out how I'm going to use it," she concludes after her few weeks of experience with the versatile software. "Kidspiration has just got it all!"

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