

# Alliance



LOWER HUDSON REGIONAL INFORMATION CENTER  
Southern Westchester BOCES - Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES - Rockland BOCES

A publication of the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center



A group of administrators discuss the effects of the EETT grant in their districts during a special breakout session.

## EETT Kick-Off Celebrates Grant Acquisition

The importance of data-driven decision-making and how teachers can use it to improve instruction, together with finding the best ways to assess a child's progress in school, were the focal points of a Dec. 1 kick-off meeting highlighting the Enhancing Education Through Technology grant.

The \$700,000 grant, which is being used to raise student performance in math and English Language Arts, is intended to eliminate achievement gaps among middle school students in a number of local school districts and parochial schools through the effective use of technology and formative assessments in the process of teaching and learning.

The recipients of the grant include Bedford, Brewster, Elmsford, Greenburgh Central 7, Haverstraw-Stony Point, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, Nyack, Peekskill, Port Chester, Ramapo, Tarrytown, Tuckahoe, and White Plains. St. Anne's School, Ossining, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School, Elmsford, and

Sacred Heart School in Mount Vernon are also recipients.

The grant, which is being administered by the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center and Southern Westchester BOCES, is currently in its second phase.

In recent years, educators have been realizing the benefits of data-driven decision making as a way to provide better information about the performance of students. In an introductory talk at the Edith Macy Center, Peter Reilly, former co-director at the RIC and now an educa-

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## Local Districts Embrace One-to-One Computing

There was a time when students learned primarily through textbooks, when teachers used the chalkboard exclusively and when computers were housed in either a technology lab or a school library.

With the onset of one-to-one technology initiatives, educators across the nation, including some in our own region (in partnership with the LHRIC's Model Schools Program), have turned to more innovative ways of teaching and learning that give students and teachers the opportunity to use portable laptops, notebooks, or tablet PCs in the classroom and at home.

### Looking to the Future

At the Lakeland School District, Director of Instructional Technology Linda Brandon is excited about a pilot program that began last September involving a group of ninth-grade students and their teachers from the Walter Panas and Lakeland high schools.

The idea was to give each student a laptop computer, with one school getting Dell computers and the other one receiving MACs,

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## EETT Kick-Off Celebrates Grant Acquisition...

tional consultant, reiterated the importance of proper data collection and how teachers and administrators can improve instruction at their schools and become more effective leaders through extensive professional development and training.

"Data can help us learn about students' learning styles, their gifts and weaknesses, and their perception of school," said Mr. Reilly. In his "Walking New Roads" presentation, Mr. Reilly talked about the new and exciting technology initiatives taking place in schools all across the nation. Grant recipients are encouraged to avail of the opportunities the RIC offers in terms of instructional technology workshops, which are provided by the Model Schools Department as part of the grant process.

Mr. Reilly referred to several innovative projects that some schools are already using, including the creation of podcasts by second-graders at a Nebraska elementary school; an interactive Internet project called Bugscope that gives students the opportunity to use the University of Indiana's electron microscope to capture images of insects; the use of probes as motion detectors; the creation of online comic books; and an initiative called "Bloggers with a Cause."

In order to enhance student learning and inform teacher practice, Karen Bailey, national director of professional development for Performance Pathways, suggested that educators use formative assessment to enlighten both educators and children. "Assessments should tell us how students are feeling, what it means for them and how they use what they learn," noted Ms. Bailey. "The way we're doing it right now is not working for kids, and it's not working for us either, especially when over 50 percent of teachers in their first five years of employment leave the profession."

Referring to the work of Rick Stiggins, a nationally-known assessment expert, Ms. Bailey noted that relying on just one type of evaluation can "enhance or destroy a student's desire to succeed." Mr. Stiggins' research suggests that students achieve at higher levels when teachers think more deeply about how their classroom assessments fit into the larger instructional environment.

Ms. Bailey asked the audience what, if any, information teachers are getting from the

current assessment techniques they are using. Most felt that obtaining student test scores and grades was the primary motive for assessing students.

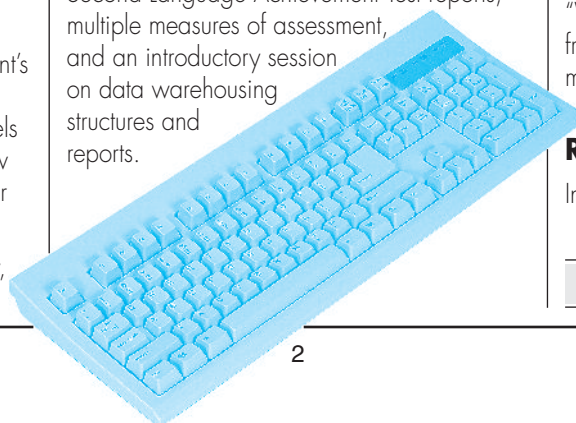
Ms. Bailey cautioned, however, that teachers who rely on such a summative evaluation system don't always get the opportunity to ask students what knowledge they have obtained from testing, nor do they get a chance to discuss it with them. "We get results and then we move on," she said.

In order to see success across the spectrum, Ms. Bailey suggested that educators use a combination of summative and formative assessment plans. Teachers don't usually implement such a strategy because assessment has always been viewed as a series of isolated testing events, that is, tests given at the end of an instructional unit or time period, she explained.

With formative assessment, the focus is on helping the student discover what material he or she knows, what additional information they need to further their knowledge of the subject, and in the case of the teacher, how the gap can be closed between students who are progressing and those who are not.

Ms. Bailey suggested that teachers implement several strategies to involve students in their own assessments. They include providing an understandable vision of the learning target; sharing models of student work and allowing students to score those samples; offering students frequent, descriptive feedback; teaching students to self-assess and set goals; designing lessons that focus on one-on-one learning; teaching students to focus on self-revision; and engaging them in self-reflection. In the end, said Ms. Bailey, "Teachers must come together and reflect on these strategies to make it work; you are, after all, masters of your own classroom."

During the afternoon, groups of teachers broke off to share their experiences and to discuss various topics, including a review of suggested New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test reports, multiple measures of assessment, and an introductory session on data warehousing structures and reports.



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## Local Districts Embrace One-to-One Computing...

explained Ms. Brandon. The goal is to help students acquire the appropriate 21st century learning tools necessary for future job development, and to prepare them both academically and personally.

Sarah Martabano, the LHRIC's distance learning coordinator, and Jodi Wexler of Apple provided one-day training sessions for Lakeland teachers using both platforms. Students were later given a lesson on how to care for their new machines, and parents were also invited to an informational session.

The ubiquitous nature of technology and its use by students was important to the district's decision-making process. "For some time, we've realized the importance of one-to-one computing, which I think will be an eventuality in most schools," said Ms. Brandon. "This idea was once a pipe dream, but with the size and cost of laptops decreasing, it has become a viable option for the present and one that is being pursued by many school districts."

At both high schools, instructors are expected to create classrooms that are less "teacher-centered and more student-centered." That means enhancing instruction through interactive and collaborative online tools, curriculum-based websites, interactive software programs, and online tutorials.

Ms. Brandon said students participating in the initiative must demonstrate an understanding of the material they're working with and that the research they do must be well thought out. "A multimedia project, for example, might look pretty on the computer, but that doesn't mean the understanding is there," she noted. Students already have an array of online resources at their fingertips, although if the program is expanded, Ms. Brandon said the district may find it necessary to purchase additional digital materials and rely less on paper and books.

"We are already getting positive feedback from parents who say their kids are more motivated as a result," she said. "I think they really feel empowered by this."

## Reciprocal Learning is Key

In the Putnam Valley School District, students

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## Local Districts Embrace One-to-One Computing...

in the fourth through 12th grades have access to their own laptop computers as part of a one-to-one laptop program. This is the fifth year of a phase-in program that started with seventh-grade students, said Putnam Valley Middle School Principal Ed Hallisey, who credits the success of the initiative to solid staff training and support. The project is based upon what Mr. Hallisey described as a "solid technology infrastructure that has been tested, tested, tested."

Before investing in the project, which was financed through a combination of BOCES, state aid and eRate funds, teachers needed to know that the initiative would help everyone involved. "You have to understand that a laptop or piece of computer technology is going to be a kid's tool," noted Mr. Hallisey, "and that we're not always going to know as much as the students."

Staff development took place after school on a "turnkey" basis, with one person being trained at a time. Mr. Hallisey said instructors have become "fearless users of technology" in a reciprocal learning environment that stresses the importance of both teachers and students all learning at the same time.

Mr. Hallisey believes the one-to-one laptop initiative is a logical first step in improving the instructional process and exposing students to 21st century skills, and he is proud of the fact that Putnam Valley is one of the few districts in the region fully committed to such an initiative.

"We really wanted to put together a program that moved our students to a higher level,"



Instructor Sue Erichsen of the Lakeland School District works with a student at Walter Panas High School. The student is using a laptop that he received through the one-to-one laptop initiative.

he said. "And we also wanted to provide something for the kids that would give them an advantage and make them more competitive."

### Cell Phones in the Classroom

When North Rockland School District's Sue Tomko started looking at ways to successfully integrate technology into the learning environment, one thing came to mind: cell phones. "They are pretty much everywhere, the technology is sustainable, everybody has them, and the kids already know how to use them."

Ms. Tomko, the director of information systems, has been successful in securing a grant for the district based on the research of Elliot

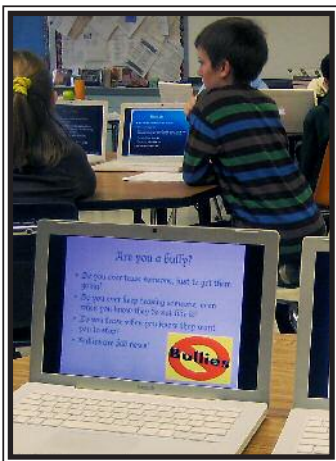
Solloway, a professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of Michigan, and Cathleen Norris, a Regents professor at the University of North Texas. Both developed a mobile learning environment for students that allows them to map concepts, animate drawings, surf the Internet, and integrate lessons and assignments, all on a cell phone.

The cell phones will have no voice or texting capabilities, and will be used as personal mobile learning devices (computers) in this one-to-one project, explained Ms. Tomko. "The future of learning will not require learners to be tethered to buildings," she said. "Learning will be mobile."

The smart phones that fifth-graders at Haverstraw Middle School will use in the spring will be provided by the HTC Corporation, with service provided by the Verizon Wireless network. Ms. Tomko explained that the devices have a small keyboard that slides out for easy use, making them look like mini laptops. The 80 or so cell phones will operate through a cellular network optimization service that will not affect the building's outdated electrical configuration.

Ms. Tomko believes the time is right for such an initiative, although she admits that some educators might need to be sold on the idea. "The challenge is to get people to accept this as a device and a tool for educational purposes, not as a distraction in the classroom."

According to Ms. Tomko, the North Rockland School District is one of the first in the northeast to implement such an initiative. Teachers will use software developed through Professor Soloway's company, GoKnow!, which will enable lesson delivery. A virtual private network has been set up so that students' and teachers' cell phone computers can safely access a filtered Internet via the VPN from home. "Our kids are so excited about this," said Ms. Tomko. "They can't wait to get their hands on these cell phone computers."



Examples of one-to-one technology initiatives in action throughout our region. On the left is one of the laptops being used by students in the Putnam Valley School District and to the right is a student in the North Rockland School District showing off her newly acquired smart phone.

## LHRIC Celebrates Launch of SuccessMaker

The Curriculum and Technology Integration team of the LHRIC's Model Schools division celebrated the launch of an updated version of SuccessMaker® during a special Nov. 2 event titled "Advancing Education in the Digital Age."

The innovative software program, developed by Pearson Education Inc., is geared toward students in kindergarten through eighth grade and includes digital, standards-based instruction in English Language Arts and math. The event, held at the LHRIC's offices in Elmsford, also highlighted the Port Chester School District's success with the program.

During her introductory remarks before educators from several local school districts, Maureen Martin, Pearson's east region project manager, said the updated version continues to offer a diagnostic tool that focuses on "an individualized, self-paced learning path that is geared toward each child."

SuccessMaker's interactive multimedia math course continues to cover a wide variety of concepts, including algebra, geometry, measurement, probability, data analysis, and patterns, among other concepts. This newest version places more emphasis on the use of alternative strategies such as the scratchpad, which allows students to make choices about how they solve those problems.

The updated reading program includes animated video clips and text, enhanced by audio support. Colorful characters like Chameleon and Parrot keep the stories interesting. Students in grades 5-8 can choose a "cognitive coach" or avatar to help them stay on task. Reading passages are Lexile leveled and cover a wide range of fiction and non-fiction stories, bringing ELA skills into social studies and science content areas.

To see how students performed on individual sessions, Ms. Martin said that SuccessMaker provides teachers with several key strategies. For example, on the grades 6-8 reading exercises, teachers can check summarizing, questioning, predicting, previewing, and organizational skills.

Lou Cuglietto, principal of John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Port Chester, said the program has been very successful in turning around student performance at his school. The students who participate in



Lou Cuglietto, principal of JFK Elementary School in Port Chester, talks about the positive effects of SuccessMaker on his students during the recent kick-off session.

the initiative at JFK Elementary are chosen, explained Mr. Cuglietto, based on the school's data records and upon the recommendation of teachers.

Later on in the presentation, Greg Adams-Woodford, director of early learning at Pearson, and Karen Gifford, its product manager, participated in the discussion via videoconference. Both outlined the company's product development process and the initiatives they are currently working on. In addition, Grace Stopani, Pearson's grants and funding manager, spoke about sources for funding a SuccessMaker initiative such as grant and stimulus funds.

Allowing both teachers and administrators access to SuccessMaker data is one goal, as is providing increased ways for them to manage that data. Also in the works is a plan to aggregate reports to school districts, adding item-level assessments for younger grade levels, providing additional practice activities for grades 2-5 lessons, evaluating the program's math content, and licensing improvements.

### Did you know that...

- The LHRIC's Model Schools Program has a Video on Demand service available to school districts interested in the hosting and streaming of video content to end users. The department piloted the service in 2008/09 with five districts. Go to

[http://www.lhric.org/instructional\\_tech.cfm?subpage=524](http://www.lhric.org/instructional_tech.cfm?subpage=524) for details, examples, and pricing information.

- School districts may suggest content for courses and sessions delivered through the Model Schools Department. Do you have a need for a session that's not addressed in the core catalog? Tell us about it. If the need is shared by other

districts in the region, we'll look at incorporating it into our calendar of offers (<http://www.lhric.org/forms.cfm?myForm=21>)

- ELA coordinators and teachers from the Peekskill School District were recently trained on Performance Pathways Performance Tracker and Assessment Building software products. The training was

conducted by staff at the LHRIC who are overseeing the Enhancing Education Through Technology Grant initiative.

- The LHRIC's data analysis staff presented a second session to Pace University education instructors as part of a collaboration between SWBOCES/LHRIC and the Pace Graduate Education Program.

## TLI Sessions Provide Educators with Ideas for Advancement

The LHRIC's Technology Leadership Institute kicked off another school year with a thought-provoking lineup of speakers at its annual retreat at the Mohonk Mountain House last October, and on Jan. 15 continued to provide local school district leaders with innovative new ideas during a session titled "21st Century Influencer," presented by teacher and successful blogger Vicki Davis.

Speaking on the topic "Online Learning – Now is the Time," Florida Virtual School President and CEO **Julie Young** described the phenomenal success of the school, which offers supplemental free online courses to middle and high school students living in Florida. The virtual school, based in Orlando, also serves students, schools and districts around the country through tuition-based instruction, curriculum provision and training.

Ms. Young said she founded the school in 1997 because she felt there were too many "inequalities" in the classroom, including teachers who lacked proficiency in certain technologies, a lack of funding in some school districts, low student expectations, and poor leadership. Up to 20 virtual schools exist throughout the country, all of them offering a standards-based curriculum aligned to individual state requirements.

The inequalities that exist throughout Florida are "phenomenal," said Ms. Young, referring to the state's diversity in population and wealth. For example, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools caters to approximately 350,000 students, while other school districts accommodate much smaller student populations and have less money to work with. "So often, a child's education is about their zip code," said Ms. Young, referring to the challenges that exist in poorer districts.

With that in mind, she set about creating an online educational program geared toward the needs and individuality of each student. "Our original idea was to create a system where kids could go to school year-round, at any time of day, with teachers working from their homes," she explained. Ms. Young thought that if her school could focus more on achievement and less on the time it took to complete a course, students might perform at higher levels.

Students who have taken AP courses at FVS,



FVS President and CEO Julie Young presents at the TLI event held at Mohonk Mountain House.

she said, continue to outperform their peers across Florida and around the country. Ms. Young said she is not concerned about cheating or teacher performance because the results speak for themselves. "We look at the data every day, at what teachers are doing, and at what the students are doing," she said.

Student progress is also tracked through monthly telephone conferences between students, their parents and FVHS instructors, all of whom are available to answer questions 12 hours a day, seven days a week. The school currently offers 90 different courses, including core subjects, foreign languages (of which Chinese is one), and a slew of interesting electives.

Referring to other educational models across the country, Ms. Young said educators need to further examine what students are doing when they're not in school and somehow make that part of the educational curriculum. Examples include a new suite of digital game-based courses at FVHS called "Conspiracy Code." The courses, which are completely

immersed within a game, allow students to learn at a "much deeper" level and to stay engaged for longer, she said.

During an afternoon session, also on Oct. 16, Dr. **Christopher Moersch** talked to school district administrators about the funds they typically spend on technology and how it impacts academic growth among students.

In his presentation titled "Teaching 2.0: Challenging the Interactive Generation," Dr. Moersch, founder of the internationally

recognized and research-based LoTi (Levels of Technology Implementation) framework, encouraged district administrators to participate in an initiative that promises to take a district's existing technology infusion programs and convert them into something that will help districts assess, plan, implement, and sustain student achievement using 21st century teaching, learning and leadership.

The LoTi plan, explained Dr. Moersch, helps schools identify the staff development needs of classroom teachers using what is known as a LoTi digital-age survey assessment. This includes a comprehensive and manageable action plan tied to student achievement, using effective coaching techniques to empower all stakeholders, and sustaining change through classroom walkthroughs and professional learning communities.

Dr. Moersch suggested several "big ideas" that would enhance instruction. They include implementing the H.E.A.T. (Higher-order

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## TLI Sessions Provide Educators with Ideas...

thinking, Engaged learning, Authentic learning, and Technology use) framework, which includes six levels of engagement.

Students should be engaged in collaboration beyond the classroom; involved in learning that has a purpose and that directly impacts them; and determining which applications best address their needs.

**Vicki Davis**, who runs the award-winning blog, "Cool Cat Teacher," from her school in rural Georgia, said her life as an instructor was transformed once she fully embraced technology and began to realize the limitless possibilities available to her and her students.

Over the past several years, Ms. Davis, who has been featured in Thomas Freidman's book, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, and Don Tapscott's *Grown Up Digital*, has created three wiki-centered projects for her students to work on. They include Flat Classroom, Horizon and Digiteen, created with the help of Julie Lindsey, an Australian teacher and technology leader who has taught in Zambia, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Qatar and China.

One of the first Flat Classroom projects involved collaboration with Ms. Lindsey, who was teaching at the time in Bangladesh. The idea was to promote what Ms. Davis called "higher order living" among her students and expose them to other cultures around the world. Students in both countries were paired up and asked to create wikis and multimedia resources while implementing the flatteners outlined in Mr. Friedman's book.

The project had phenomenal implications, said Ms. Davis, because it showed both groups that judging others on the color of their skin or their religion was unfair. In 2009, Ms. Davis took the idea even further by sending a group of her own students to Qatar to participate in the Flat Classroom Conference. The conference enabled students to learn more about each other and use Web 2.0 tools to create a variety of projects, which were subsequently judged by a panel of educators.

The winning project, eracism.org, was created by a multi-national group of four students to promote awareness of racism on a global basis and to work together to solve the world's problems. Since then, she has initiated several projects at her school, where students of all grades work on a variety of interesting multimedia initiatives.

Despite her affinity for all things technological, Ms. Davis does not use technology for technology's sake. "Just because it's trendy does not mean that it's always good," she said. Instructors, she explained, should use tools that enable them to become better teachers and more importantly, use the tools that work.

Toward the end of her presentation, Ms. Davis highlighted several local success stories, including the one-to-one laptop program in the Putnam Valley School District, the smart phone initiative in the North Rockland Schools, and the work of Jody Kennedy, an art teacher and videoconferencing coordinator in the White Plains School District.

To mirror the efforts of these and other innovative teachers across the country, Ms. Davis suggested that TLI participants connect with each other, get to know technology

leaders in the region, and creatively find ways for the professional development of teachers by participating in, for example, Google's "The 23 Things Project," designed to introduce teachers to tools that can enhance their classrooms.



Vicki Davis, shown above, at the recent TLI event at the Edith Macy Center.

## LHRIC and District Develop Early Warning System on Dropouts

**The Lower Hudson Regional Information Center Student Services is currently working with the New Rochelle School District and Certica Solutions, the developer of Certify®, to identify potential high school drop-outs. The project was initiated six months ago based on the suggestion of Susan Yom, the district's chief information officer, in an effort to increase graduation rates.**

The Certify software is a rules-validation engine. It enables the RIC and districts to write business rules that run against data in the districts' databases. For example, the rules identify students who have failed a Math Regents exam and who have low attendance based on records in the student information system.

Over time, explained Data Integration Manager Joseph Fitzgerald, administrators, guidance counselors and others can see the students who are increasingly at risk of dropping out of school. The process can be run on a daily basis, giving educators the ability to spot the problem ahead of time and take the necessary action, he said.

Mr. Fitzgerald said the project is timely given the federal government's push to lower the national drop-out rate. According to research conducted in 2005 by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, nearly one-third of all high school students leave the public school system before graduating, many of them coming from poor and/or minority backgrounds.

A report by the National High School Center cited two major factors to influence drop-out rates. They include a student's course performance and their attendance during the first year of high school.

The government's \$4.35 billion dollar Race to the Top program is another initiative that will hopefully reduce drop-out rates. Grants will be awarded to districts that make concerted efforts to fix the problem.

## Districts Consider Latest Technology Trends

**A number of local school districts turned out recently to learn about the latest technology trends being rolled out across the country and how such technologies can help schools narrow the digital divide.**

The Technology Solutions Briefing (TSB), hosted by the LHRIC's Technology Services Division, was conducted, in part, by Bill Rust, research director of Gartner Inc., a leading information technology research and advisory company. It included several strategies that schools can use to move forward into the 21st century.

Providing more technology to students does not always translate to better results, cautioned Mr. Rust. In fact, there are several districts across the nation that have less technology than others, but are still doing better, he noted. More importantly, educators should be thinking about their accountability to students and their families, and how accessible a district's technology is.

The changing nature of the learner must also be considered, Mr. Rust said, in addition to the possibility of extending the learning and working environment of all students. "Instead of the 'meat and potato' classes we've been offering all along, how about sharing the resources and creating a virtual classroom complete with schedules and innovative instruction that kids can work with and do in an economical fashion?" Rather than bringing "old lessons to the technology world," Mr. Rust suggested that educators create a new e-learning curriculum that would keep students motivated.

To remain accountable to the communities they serve, districts must be mindful of the Enrollment, Placement and Registration (EPR) programs and student information systems they have in place so they can adequately meet accountability mandates set by the federal government. Mr. Rust said that by next year, primary and secondary schools must adhere to such standards.

In addition, he stressed the need for increased outreach to district stakeholders. Successful examples include the Virginia Beach School District's creation of a student portal where each student has control of his or her own web page, and the Ohio State Education Department's creation of a new education data warehouse where teachers can view student results against

technology's sake and placing a relative value on these initiatives is also crucial.

Thinking outside of the box is a key strategy that most districts fail to do at the outset, he said. "We need to think more about what's going on out there in terms of technology,



Bill Rust, research director of Gartner Inc., discusses the latest technology trends during a recent session at the LHRIC's offices in Elmsford.

state standards.

While Gartner predicted some time ago that 50 percent of the one-to-one computing initiatives would fail due to a lack of sustainability, there is considerable evidence that if adequately aligned to the curriculum, one-to-one initiatives can be meaningful for students.

Mr. Rust cited the Nova 5000 computing device, a hybrid of a laptop and personal digital assistant that cost less than \$300 each, but is easy to maintain and easily adaptable to the educational environment. To get additional value from such a purchase, schools would need to install at least 10 to 15 textbooks on the device and make them available to students on a daily basis.

Understanding the total cost of ownership is also important, said Mr. Rust. "Cost means nothing if it's not of value to your school district." Assessing the risks versus the awards is important too, as is making sure the integration of new technology is the right fit for a district. Avoiding technology for

and we need to know who our customers are and what their roles are, and who we are serving."

Other topics discussed during the half-day session included infrastructure changes to the IT profession; the future economic outlook for IT professionals; green IT initiatives; and an overview of RIC offerings, including a presentation of the SAN/NAS systems by Robert Predgo, manager of Technology Services; and an update on virtualization by Anthony Ferrante.

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Thomas DiBuono, *Director of Facilities and Operations*



Apple systems engineer Matthew Roe gives workshop participants a lesson in how to use the company's program, Podcast Producer.

## Model Schools Unveils Podcast Pilot Initiative

**The Model Schools Program of the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center has introduced a podcasting pilot program to several local school districts to gather feedback on the design, user interface and workflow of Apple's Podcast Producer, which is being centrally hosted at the LHRIC's Operations Department.**

During a half-day kick-off session held recently at the RIC's offices in Elmsford, Matthew Roe of Apple explained the nuts and bolts of the video capture, processing and publishing system. It can be used to create and publish podcasts of lectures, training sessions, and other audio and video projects to a wiki or blog page within the program or to another external web page.

In order to participate in the three-month pilot and to have the ability to create content, users must have access to a Macintosh, which runs either the Mac OS X Leopard (10.5) or Snow Leopard (10.6) operating systems. Students, parents and faculty using the system can see/access the content from any Macintosh or Windows computer that has an Internet connection.

The districts involved in this initiative include Ardsley, Blind Brook, North Rockland, Somers, and Yorktown.

"The focus is to make podcast creation very easy," said Mr. Roe, a systems engineer in Apple's upstate New York location, "so that a less technical teacher can share content or ad-hoc subject review material with very little effort, making this easier than it has ever been." In addition, teachers can post information in the form of wikis using the same software.

During the November session, Mr. Roe showed participants how easy podcast creation can be. All a user has to do, he explained, is sit in front of a webcam, give a brief description of the material being recorded, include a written description of the podcast, and post it online. "Everything else is done by the server," said Mr. Roe, "and it is created in such a way that anyone can access it from anywhere in the world."

Mr. Roe said the product, which was launched by Apple two years ago and is being used in several upstate school districts, is becoming increasingly popular, especially among teens collaborating and discussing podcasts outside of the classroom.

"This is an effective way to communicate with students, teachers and with parents, too," said Mr. Roe, "and of course it's an ideal choice for schools interested in participating in 21st century learning initiatives."