Atchison County Community Schools Find Keys for Younger Users

U.S. elementary students are primarily digital natives – born into an era of the Internet, video games, and portable, fast computers and cell phones. According to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, today's students are "media multi-taskers." However, it is important that students are taught how to use technology correctly. Therefore, it is critical that teachers utilize technology in the classroom throughout the curriculum.

According to the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), multimedia tools can provide a rich environment for conducting project-based learning, which can help students to: increase knowledge and skills in the particular discipline being addressed; master research and higher order thinking skills; increase knowledge and skills in making use of information technology; and become further engaged in the subject.

In addition to these benefits, most states require that students meet a technology-focused standard prior to graduation. Generally, students should know how to use technology as a tool of research, organization, evaluation and communication, as well as understand the ethical and legal issues surrounding the access and use of information technology.

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Located in rural Northeast Kansas, Atchison County Community Schools, Unified School District #377, boasts three levels of schools (elementary, middle and high school) that perform above the average in state assessment scores. To maintain this level of achievement, USD 377 wanted to make sure they were providing the best available technology to their students, especially since technology is not always present at home.

The district has a strict technology standard that each student must master touch type by the eighth grade, which inspired Alison Ostertag, a literacy leader for the district, and her technology committee to address an issue they had been observing for some time: younger computer users have hands that are often too small for regular size keyboards and mice.

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After researching options, the committee chose the Kids Keyboard and Mini Mice from Califone International, Inc. "We thought that the special coloring and coding on the Kids Keyboard would be very helpful to our kindergarten through second graders," Ostertag said. "And, we knew by combining the keyboard with our other computer accessories, we could provide our younger students with a safe, computer-based learning center."

The Kids Keyboard from Califone offers the ideal size for smaller fingers, added durability and safety features, and bright, inspiring colors. The keyboard uses a color-coded layout to help beginning readers identify and locate function, number, consonant, and vowel keys and build their confidence as they learn writing and keyboarding skills. The design also introduces students to the standardized QWERTY format and Microsoft Office Hot Keys, including the icon-coded keys for Save, Print, Cut, Copy, and Paste.

As schools transition to 21st century learning models, computer-based writing skills are essential for students to thrive in a rapidly changing technological world. USD #377 purchased Kids Keyboards for each elementary school in the district, in addition to the preschool.

The district also purchased a number of Mini Mice from Califone. Sized for younger students, the Mini Mouse can help keep students engaged and inspired during computer activities. And roller button functionality and optical tracking provide higher accuracy and ease-of-use for students who may feel frustrated by "touchy" mice. The Califone Mini Mouse comes in a wide and narrow version to properly fit children's hands.

Both the Mini Mouse and Kids Keyboard come in rugged ABS plastic construction and reinforced connectors for durability and safety. USB and PS2 connectors are included to ensure universal compatibility. The Kids Keyboard and Mini-Mouse are available seperately and as bundled package along with a red Listening First™ headphone.

"The students notice the change in how much easier it is for them to type properly. The teachers are happy that their students will not be practicing their 'hunting and pecking' skills moving forward," Ostertag concluded.