

RIVERSIDE PRINCIPAL CLOSES IN ON NATIONAL AWARD**Finalist in contest****BY PAUL SCHOTT****Brian A. Pounds / Hearst Connecticut Media**

Bammy Award national finalist Principal Chris Weiss chats with student Sabrina Knoll, 9, as she works in her fifth-grade class at Riverside School on Thursday. Weiss is up for the Innovator of the Year award bringing technology into the classroom.



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Bammy Award national finalist Principal Chris Weiss chats with student Austin Janssen, 11, as he work on his iPad in his fifth-grade class at Riverside School in Greenwich on Thursday. Weiss is up for the

Innovator of the Year award for bringing technology into the classroom.

An iPad lighting up every desk, 3-D printers and robots humming in the media center and student videos screening at school board meetings. This is the Riverside School of 2015 — where technology is ubiquitous and innovation is expected.

Leading the charge into the digital era is the man in the school's front office: Principal Christopher Weiss.

In the past two years, Weiss has overseen Riverside's implementation of the school district's digital learning initiative and led its embrace of other science, technology, engineering and math initiatives.

Riverside's emergence as a STEM leader has not gone unnoticed. Weiss has amassed a Twitter following nearly 10,000 and a number of accolades. His latest recognition is a national honor: He was a finalist in the Academy of Education Arts and Sciences International's Bammy Awards in the Innovator of the Year category.

"I owe a significant amount of gratitude to this district for providing me an environment where I can innovate," Weiss said. "Everyone is supportive of the innovation taking place here and throughout the district. Everyone is incorporating technology and innovative practices in their work."

The digital learning initiative, which now gives every student in the district an iPad or Chrome-book laptop, has driven the technological shift at Riverside in the past three years. In the 2013-14 school year, Riverside became one of the first two schools in the district to launch the program.

Blending the iPads with traditional ways of learning — writing with a pen in a journal — has made digital learning a success, Weiss.

"We always use the iPads in ways that add to the curriculum and add to the instruction," Weiss said. "If it's not going to work, then we don't use it. We use it when it makes sense. We always want to make sure we have actual face time with the kids."

The iPads are supposed to encourage innovation, but not be the innovation itself, Weiss said. Students can use the devices for assignments in all their subjects and they make showcasing student work easy. At a Board of Education meeting at Riverside in April, Weiss showed a video montage of student testimonials about digital learning which was shot with iPads.

“Chris was instrumental in setting a visionary and supportive tone for creating what has become a vibrant learning community where outstanding examples of teaching and learning in a DLE (digital learning environment) are developed and shared district-wide,” Nona Ullman, the district’s digital learning project manager, wrote in her Bammy Award nomination for Weiss.

The iPads work well with other initiatives started in the past year, including the weekly “Genius Hour” sessions in which students work on projects that they choose and a STEM fair held in May.

“Chris has been an influential factor in the creation of a true digital environment at Riverside School,” said Riverside PTA Co-President Sarah Fugelsang. “With the help of our teachers, staff, and PTA, this environment continues to grow and flourish and greatly benefits all of our students.”

More changes are on the way. In the media center, an “innovation space” will open this year with the 3-D printers and robots. It is designed as a hub where students can work together and experiment.

For about two years, Weiss has been chronicling his school’s technological advances with a lively Twitter feed under the handle@ChrisWeissCT. Through the social network, he shares news and ideas with educators and others who follow him. His following by far is the largest of any educator in Greenwich. Retweets and mentions from the likes of author and motivational speaker Angela Maiers have contributed to the growth of his audience.

“It’s about sharing what you’re doing with people across the country and the world,” Weiss said of his tweeting. “My focus is on technology, innovation and education. It’s all geared towards how do we incorporate better use of technology and innovative practices.” pschott@scni.com; 203-625-4439; twitter: @paulschott