

**HAMILTON AVENUE, RIVERSIDE PARTICIPATE**

# With iPads, digital learning in school is elementary

BY PAUL SCHOTT



Left, Paraprofessional Christian Monson helps Jordon Jones, left, and Anthony Pereira, center, use iPads during an open house to showcase the district's digital learning initiative at Hamilton Avenue School in Greenwich recently.



**Below, Emma Bookless, left, and Valentina Toro have fun in second grade social studies.**

**Lindsay Perry/Staff photographer**

When the Greenwich School District launched its Digital Learning Environment initiative in February by distributing iPads to all students at Hamilton Avenue and Riverside schools, the hope was to increase the use of technology in classrooms, allow teachers to better tailor lessons to each student, engage more students in their learning and encourage more classroom collaboration.

The message at a recent “digital learning open house” at Hamilton Avenue — mission largely accomplished.

“I think the iPads are very educational and fun,” said Hamilton Avenue fifth-grader Serene Vernazza. “They can help you learn new things. I like the tools. They’re very helpful.”

Fellow fifth-grader Eithan Ilagan shared a similar view and also noted the expectations for students’ use of the Apple devices.

“There’s a lot of responsibility,” he said. “People think that it’s a toy, but it’s not. You have to take care of it.”

Teachers, too, offered generally favorable reports about the initiative. While they note that adapting to the iPads was not instantaneous for them and their students, they appear supportive of the increased role of technology in the classroom.

“It gives us another way to support their learning,” said Lisa Cutler, a kindergarten teacher. “It helps us differentiate while we’re teaching. It gives us different options to use with the kids.”

Hamilton Avenue Principal Cynthia Womack, speaking to attendees who included district administrators and Board of Education members, was equally enthused.

“We know how important digital learning is, and the student engagement has increased so much,” Womack said. “We find the extra energy because we know it’s going to be so beneficial and add so much value for student learning.”

There were, however, challenges in implementing the initiative, most significantly introducing it in the same year that the district launched a new elementary math curriculum and instituted the Common Core math standards.

“This was a tremendous undertaking, and it took a lot of collaboration and even sacrifice in the sense that we had to focus on the digital learning,” said Irene Parisi, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and professional learning. “We had to be very creative on how do we implement mathematics, the new math-standards curriculum at the same time as digital learning. We really learned to marry those things together.”

Board of Education members who attended the open house gave high marks for digital learning’s classroom impact.

“From the standpoint of how fresh and new it is, I’m very impressed with how integrated it already is into the daily learning,” said Debbie Appelbaum.

A major district report on the initiative’s first year is set to be presented to the school board in August.

Educators and board members are now turning their attention to the upcoming school year. In 2014-15, digital learning will expand to the middle

schools, where all sixth-graders will receive Chromebook computers. Like this year, administrators said faculty training in the in-classroom uses of the devices will be key.

“In phase two, what we want to do is ratchet up the opportunities we provide by a notch and develop a rich professional learning curriculum for our teaching staff,” said Phillip Dunn, the district’s director of digital learning and technology.

Board of Education member Adriana Ospina agreed.

“I think you’re going to need a lot of cooperation and good communication,” she said. “The principals need to know their teachers.

“We’re going to need principals to do a lot of walkthroughs and to share up the chain of command, so best practices can be shared.”

Hamilton Avenue faculty said at the open house that they are committed to improving in the second year. Second-grade teacher Kristen Lovullo plans to learn more apps and incorporate at least one iPad-based lesson a day into her instruction next year.

“I think digital learning is really engaging,” Lovullo said. “They’re in second grade, and they’re researching. They’re doing more high-level tasks. It helps the students get more excited about learning.” [pschott@scni.com](mailto:pschott@scni.com); 203-625-4439; twitter: @paulschott