

Ramsey's iPad Initiative

In recent years, the iPad has received a tremendous amount of attention by the K-12 education community. Schools throughout the country have begun to utilize the iPad as an integrated learning tool, providing immediate access to educational resources on the Internet, interactive, multi-media electronic textbooks, thousands of "apps" in every subject area, and production applications that enable students to apply and use content in increasingly complex ways. The iPad's organizational apps have proven very valuable in assisting students in organizing notes, managing assignments, storing documents and other sources, and conducting research. Heavy back packs may soon become a concern of the past. Skill development and reading instruction apps have been especially useful and productive for both regular and special education students, allowing for diagnostic assessments and differentiation of instruction. The *Horizon Report*, an internationally recognized research report on technology in education, found that mobile devices and apps are becoming increasingly "compelling tools" in K-12 classrooms. The report points out that these technologies are becoming a pervasive part of everyday life and that students have "ever-increasing expectations to be able to work...and learn on these devices." Most compelling, is the evidence that iPads promote a sense of ownership in the learning process and foster increased active participation and in-depth understanding of content.

A little more than a year ago, Tom O'Hern, the district's Technology Director, and I proposed a pilot program to the Board of Education to examine the value of iPads as a one-to-one learning and instructional tool in the Ramsey Schools. We selected the eighth grade class for the pilot and worked in cooperation with consultants from the Apple Corporation and colleagues from schools who have implemented the use of iPads. Combining funds from our technology budget, a grant from the Ramsey Adult School, and a federal grant from USDOE, we initiated the pilot program. We gave iPads, and provided professional development, to the eighth grade teachers six months in advance of distributing iPads to the students. The teachers identified and explored worthwhile applications, developed several new instructional practices that leverage the potential of the iPad as a learning tool, and redesigned some of the curriculum to allow for the integration of iPads into daily lessons. Mr. O'Hern did a phenomenal job of ensuring that the district's technology network could support this endeavor. Now, four months after distributing iPads to the students, we are seeing many positive indications that the iPads contribute significantly to our educational program.

While we continue to examine the degree to which our curriculum objectives are promoted by the use of mobile technology in the eighth grade classrooms, I have also initiated a K-12 Mobile Technology Research and Development Committee, composed of forty teachers from throughout the district, to take an in-depth look at instructional practices, applications, and

research on mobile technology from a K-12 perspective. Members of the Committee are visiting schools that have implemented iPad use and they are attending workshops, webinars, and conferences to fully understand the potential for mobile technology in education. In June, a report will be made to the Board of Education, summarizing the findings of the Committee. Based on the success we are having with our eighth grade students, our intent is to allow our eighth graders to continue their use of the iPads in grade 9. If iPads continue to represent a significant advantage for our students, our long range proposal would be to permit students in grades eight through twelve to bring their own iPads to school beginning in the 2014-15 school year. Use of mobile devices in grades K-7, is being evaluated by the K-12 Committee and recommendations will be forthcoming.

The Ramsey School District is committed to ensuring that we provide the most current and effective teaching practices and best possible learning environment for our students. Our students deserve the best preparation we can provide to guarantee their success in a competitive, technologically advanced, global economy. I will continue to update the community on the district's iPad Initiative as we move forward.