

# The STANDARD

ISSUE 3 WINTER 2015

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEER PARK UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ENHANCING INSTRUCTION VIA **Technology**



Across the school district, connecting each building, each student and each educator, technology serves to facilitate professional development and innovation for teachers, anchor security and safety systems, provide cost-saving initiatives, and above all, enhance the curriculum and learning experience for Deer Park's students at every grade level.

"With technology ever advancing, it is important that our students and staff keep

pace," said Andrew Choi, Deer Park's instructional technology administrator. "Our district continues to provide routine access to the latest administrative and instructional technology tools to support 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, individualize instruction and expand the boundaries for learning to take place. It is an integral tool in order to prepare our students for college and careers and the challenges to come."

## A Shared Vision for Research

The district's recently introduced ELA and social studies research paper project teaches more than 900 students in grades 9-11 how to do research, using the same methodology across grades. Funded by an STLE Grant for the 2014-2015 school year, the project harnesses the power of Google Docs in all its facets, from developing topics and evaluating sources, to creating outlines and writing final drafts.

"For a few years now, we've had a vision that research could be a shared project to benefit students,"

said Heather Stewart, the district's curriculum associate for social studies and FACS. "Students and teachers needed to have a common language around research."

The research project was formulated by a team of Deer Park leaders last summer. A group of nine social studies and ELA teachers met to map out grade-level assignments, turnkeying the project to the two departments and facilitating monthly mini-lessons for the high school's teachers. The group looked at best instructional practices in both their own and



colleagues' classrooms.

"It was imperative that it was teacher-developed in terms of the product and the process," said Christina Poppe, the district's

curriculum associate for ELA, library and reading. "Teachers can digest it better than if it's just given to them."

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## Parent Portal

The district is providing progress reports (at Robert Frost and the high school) and report cards (districtwide) electronically through the Parent Portal in lieu of postal mail. The Parent Portal also provides real-time access to student attendance history, grades, assessment scores, transportation, schedules and teacher messages. Legal parents/guardians can sign up by completing the Parent Portal Access Form available on the district website by choosing "Parents/Students" and then "Infinite Campus Parent Portal." Any questions can be emailed to: [parentportal@deerparkschools.org](mailto:parentportal@deerparkschools.org).

# Technology Updates

The Virtual Desktop Infrastructure program initial phases are complete, giving administrators and pilot teachers the ability to remotely access a simplified version of their Deer Park desktop on any Internet-enabled device. More teacher and student access will be rolled out this March and July, with the goal of having enough licenses by September to sustain any peak numbers of staff and student users. "This will expand the computing resources of Deer Park to our staff and students outside the district," said instructional technology administrator Andrew Choi.

A districtwide upgrade to MacBook Air laptop carts has provided access to the most current applications and a wealth of Internet resources. Previous MacBook laptops were more than seven years old, and the aging equipment had operating system limitations without the ability to upgrade. It was recycled or sold to a buyback vendor, and the funds were channeled back into the instructional technology program.

Ensuring every student has a device in front of them, Google Chromebook carts were deployed in the high school and JFK. This cost-effective instructional technology tool allows access to the Internet and harnesses the power of Google Apps for Education. Coupled with the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure, students will be able to access their Deer Park

Windows applications on a non-Windows device.

An initiative to implement districtwide wireless access is in full swing, fully completed at Frost, two-thirds complete at the high school (with the final phase in summer 2015) and one-third complete at JFK (phase two in summer 2015 and phase three in summer 2016). Pockets of wireless access are available at JQA and May Moore, with the first phase of installation scheduled at both for this summer.

A second green screen studio (following the May Moore furnishing in January 2014) has been installed at JFK through a Tanger Kids grant. Teachers and students can create content and share knowledge, and as students move up from May Moore to JFK, the technology will be there for them. The judicious use of Skyping and videoconferencing between schools as well as with outside experts provides a vehicle for virtual field trips to take place and will also continue whenever opportunities arise throughout the year.

Administrative technology tools are also strengthening safety and security in the schools. "Our district continues to place a strong emphasis on the safety of our students and staff," said Choi. "Our schools and ancillary support buildings are equipped with surveillance cameras and

## Text Alerts Opt-in

Members of the school community may elect to opt-in to receive districtwide alerts and notifications via text message or email. The system will complement our current School Messenger notification service for households with school-age children and district personnel. School community members may easily opt-out at any time. Standard text messaging rates will apply to anyone receiving messages. For more information, choose the "Text Alerts" button on the district website.



door access control. All of our schools are outfitted with a SAVE Hotline, which is a dedicated phone that dials directly out to a Suffolk County law enforcement operator in the event of a crisis situation when time is of the essence.”

There are 152 surveillance cameras (internal and external) active among the district’s five school buildings and five ancillary support buildings that motion record, with footage kept on retention. Surveillance cameras are also available for remote access by administrators and principals to survey buildings and lots in the event of inclement weather. Twenty-five of the existing cameras were upgraded to high resolution last spring, with the older models being repurposed.

Installed a year ago in all five school buildings, district office, and Washington School the dedicated SAVE Hotline phones demonstrate the district’s goal to be proactive rather than reactive when planning for emergency situations. On the Suffolk County Police Department’s end, our schools’ information pops up automatically and the exact location where the call is being placed shows on a building map.

ISONAS door access control, outfitted in May 2013 on 21 doors

districtwide, regulates access to school building exterior doors via proximity cards issued to all staff. All doors remained locked, not propped, and are on schedule for when they can be accessed. All attempts to gain entry, whether successful or not, are logged, so the district knows who is entering a building and where.

Complying with the Children’s Internet Protection Act, the district’s Barracuda web filter is designed to block access to inappropriate websites. Our staff remains vigilant in monitoring student access on the Internet, and continues to provide students with Internet and safety lessons to ensure they have the tools to be safe and successful learners.

On the cost-savings end of technology, the Verdiem green IT initiative reduces PC energy waste and emissions across the network and more than 900 PCs. Any computers that remain on are automatically shut down at 9 p.m. each night and then awoken in the morning before staff arrival. The Equitrac system manages printing districtwide, regulating monthly print quotas for teachers and students and requiring print release at copy machines and printers to ensure confidential information does



not sit in the printer bay for others to pick up, thus saving on printing and paper costs. Other cost savings come from the recycling of ink and toner cartridges (\$1,215.30 in reimbursement since 2011) and obsolete or broken tools (\$2,889.94 since 2012).

Instructional software subscriptions listed on the district website’s IT page provide what Choi calls “a one-stop shop for the different subscriptions we provide, many of them web-based and accessible from home,” including Brain POP, Castle Learning, Discovery Education, Google Apps, IXL, Study Island and Typing Pal.

Raz-Kids, a fun, interactive K-5 initiative across all three elementary school buildings, started this school year after being piloted last spring. A web-based program that can use any Internet-enabled device to log in and read books at an assigned reading level, it’s being used in general classes as well as ENL, reading, literature and speech, and in the fourth and fifth grades for special education and the Special Program Regents class. “The good thing is

that it makes reading fun for all levels,” said teacher Jenny Dixon. “The students are thoroughly engaged.” The teacher can easily monitor student progress and adjust the assigned reading level as students master comprehension. Parents can also track reading progress and gain a better understanding of reading levels. More than 400 books are available through Raz-Kids, including Spanish-language texts, poetry, songs and nonfiction, all correlated to the Common Core Standards. Students can even read aloud at home into the program, which sends the recordings to the teacher as a message for evaluation.

At the middle and high schools and JFK, Overdrive provides a web-based e-book library for grades four and up. Students can take out up to five books at a time via this free digital library, choosing from 522 titles made available to Deer Park over the last five years. “Overdrive is an extension of the library we have in the district, and students will always have a book available to them,” said Frost librarian Kathleen Leibow.

*“Our district continues to place a strong emphasis on the safety of our students and staff...”*



# A Virtual Resource

The high school's virtual program, based at the Washington School building, provides students – including those who are injured or have missed school – with an opportunity to complete their required credits using the licensed Odysseyware software for individualized coursework.

The virtual program has been in existence for approximately five years, and a few dozen students take advantage of the resource each year in any of three ways: in study hall or library, at home (for students who need to complete their coursework but cannot get to the high school), or at the Washington site in the mornings or on days off.

The fact that this valuable program is in-house gives Deer Park students a closer option than attending



BOCES or Wilson Tech. “We have the resources and the talent to keep it here at the district,” said teacher Anne Marie Abeltin. “We graduate five or six students each year who wouldn’t have graduated without being able to complete their work through the virtual program.”



## TYPING TECH

At JFK, computer lab teaching assistant Linda Esposito is using the Typing Pal keyboarding software to teach third-graders how to type correctly. This keyboarding program, piloted late in the 2011-2012 school year and fully initiated in September 2012, rotates classes every 10 weeks.

While using Typing Pal, students cover their hands with a small blanket, forcing them to not look at the keyboard and thus improving their typing skills. The children work at their own pace, with the program

providing instant feedback on typing accuracy and speed in words per minute. The teacher can scale the difficulty of the settings based on the individual student's progress in hitting his or her target goals.

“Typing is an essential skill that will benefit the students during their time in Deer Park and beyond,” said instructional technology administrator Andrew Choi.

# Speaking with a Green Screen



Beginning in January, students in May Moore’s English as a New Language program began using the school’s green screen studio to create videos, allowing them to successfully practice their communication skills. The studio was installed during the 2012-2013 school year as a result of a BOCES grant.

In Megan Boccard’s second-grade class, ENL students created a Valentine’s Day-themed video production in which the children chose valentines and then interviewed each other in regard to who they chose and why.

Ashley Lovett’s 24 ENL first-graders used the studio to produce a TV news segment – complete with anchors, weather reports and other news – on Alaska, compiling all they had learned about the state during a recent nonfiction reading unit.

“It was our first experience with the green screen, and we were both excited to learn more about producing with it,” said Lovett. Both teachers noted that the experience proved to be a great confidence builder for the language learners, giving them a fun and productive method to practice their speaking skills without distractions. The resulting videos were shared privately with parents on Vimeo, enabling them to see what is being done in class.

“The green screen is a great way students can share knowledge with each other and the greater community,” said instructional technology administrator Andrew Choi.

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## Google Classroom

At Robert Frost, sixth-grade science teacher Carey Okurowski has piloted an adoption of Google Classroom to great success. In the beginning of the year, she created student accounts and began posting homework, tests and quizzes for students to complete online. She later branched out into announcements,

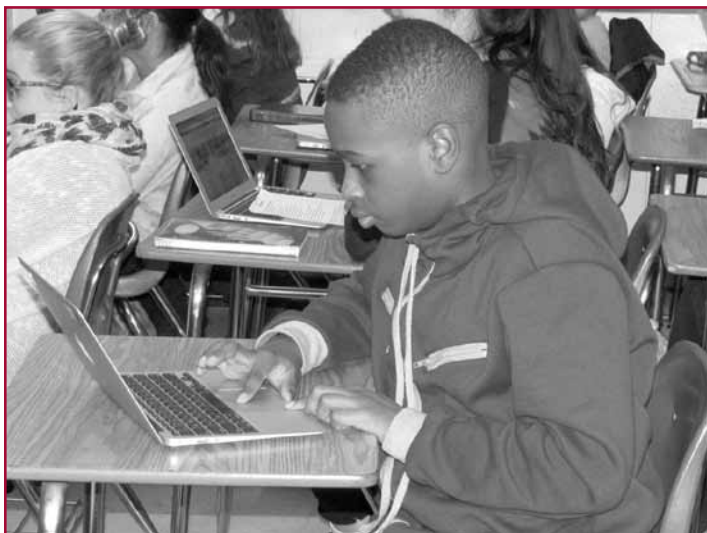
videos and now, a major science fair project.

“I use it more out of the classroom than in it,” she said, comparing it to the “flipped classroom” model in which students learn content online and homework is done in the classroom with teacher and students discussing and solving problems.

One of the nicer features about Google Classroom as opposed to the earlier Google Drive is that when Okurowski shares a document, it automatically creates individual folders for the students, putting everything in the right folder. “It keeps the kids organized, with less in their backpacks, and keeps me organized too,” she said.

It also timestamps every change or correction so she can see who did what in a team project, gives her the ability to comment on students’ homework and them the chance to ask her questions remotely, and enables parental access.

“It’s truly an important additional tool for teachers,” she said. “I can easily see how my students are progressing from one day to the next.”





# TECH-ENABLED Trading Cards

At JQA, technology and literacy have been melded at an early age thanks to a gradewide initiative implemented in January. Each student in the school's second-grade classes created "trading card" posters of their favorite books, in conjunction with JQA's current reading theme, using their MacBook

Air laptops, the Photobooth application and the Big Huge Labs website. Teachers were first trained to use the software and computers, then assisted the students in taking pictures via Photobooth and making the posters using Big Huge Labs.

In Denise Vadala's classroom, students also created animal-

themed poster cards, sharing facts and knowledge that tie into JQA's emphasis on nonfiction. Students chose an animal and researched it, gathering facts and determining which facts were important and why an author chose them. They picked their top four or five facts and an image to print on the card.





# Collaborative Coaching

As a result of a \$525,000 STLE grant to strengthen teacher effectiveness, the district has implemented a new teacher coaching program. Three highly effective teachers were appointed as teacher leader coaches – Christopher Kauter for instructional technology, Tara Wellbrock for literacy and Rosanne Alfieri for math – to coordinate professional development and curriculum writing projects, participate in training workshops, provide turnkey training, support teacher and parent curriculum resource development, demonstrate model lessons for their colleagues, participate in Teacher Studio and assist in managing the grant.

“We have some of the best instructional leaders in the state,” said Kimberly Skillen, district administrator for secondary curriculum and instruction. “The grant was so beneficial for us because we could invest time and money in resources we already have.”

“Teachers have been very receptive to our roles,” said Alfieri. “Everyone wants us to come into their classroom.” Wellbrock said, “We were seen as leaders before this, and the grant allowed us to leverage that.”

In the first round of this mentoring and lesson modeling process, the teacher observes the leader. In the next, they co-teach. By the final round, the teacher teaches and receives feedback from the coach in a gradual release of support and responsibility. “When teachers see it in practice, the light bulb goes off,” said Skillen.

Teachers at each grade level across the district are taking additional professional development and leading training, and 45 other teachers are coaching on a smaller scale, on stipend, to support instruction and model lessons.

“The biggest difference we recognized as a result of the grant was being able to provide thoughtful, targeted professional development based on teacher and student need,” said Danielle Sheridan, district administrator for elementary curriculum and instruction.

“Having a collaborative approach helps students in so many ways,” said Wellbrock. “It is coherent, and the consistency of instruction enables them to think more deeply.”

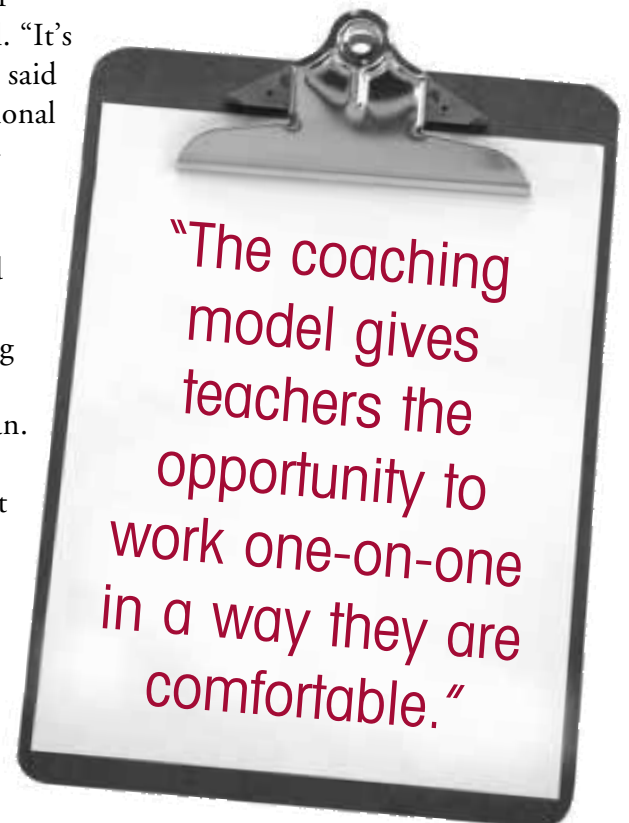
The leaders emphasize using student data to revise their approach and the material. “It’s not just new curriculum,” said Skillen. “It’s new instructional approaches and a student-centered process.”

An increased use of student collaboration and digital media is a long-term goal for the coaching system in grades three to five, according to Sheridan. “We want every student to complete a PowerPoint presentation, digital collage or green screen video,” she said. “We need to make it a part of students’ daily lives.”

In a particularly massive undertaking

that achieved remarkable results, Kauter trained teachers to be fluent in Google Docs for the high school’s cross-curricular research paper project (see page 1 of this newsletter). “I made sure every teacher felt comfortable with the technology,” he said. “We are already seeing a cultural change in just a few months.”

Tech initiatives could have been overwhelming for the district, Skillen said, but that’s mitigated by the coaching model. “The coaching model gives teachers the opportunity to work one-on-one in a way they are comfortable,” she said, citing the benefits of co-teaching and troubleshooting technology. “It’s a shift from teachers using technology for the sake of technology to using it to enhance instruction.”



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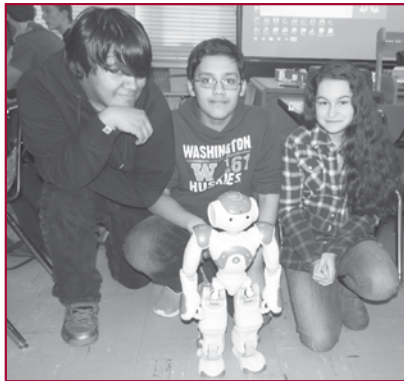
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**Postal Customer**

# Return to Robotics

After a hiatus of several years, the high school's Robotics Club has returned with a reconfigured, programming-based mission. In years past, the club focused on building robots from scratch, but this new edition uses two recently acquired Nao robots, both of the same model, to assist in teaching the engaged students how to program.

"The overall goal is helping kids learn 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills," explained club co-adviser David Knuffke. "These robots have more abilities than earlier kinds, and I look forward to seeing the different things we can do and accomplish."

The fascinating humanoid blue and orange machines, obtained through a grant, utilize face and shape recognition to interact with their environment, per instructions



High school freshmen and Robotics Club members (from left) Concepcion Amaya, Slauddin Ayubi and Danielle Tirado.

programmed by the 10 to 15 students attending each club meeting.

"Working with the robot is easy, but the programming is hard," said freshman Slauddin Ayubi, "but it's worth it to see what it can really do, and a first step for the future in helping the disabled and elderly."

"Programming will be such an integral part of our lives as we get older," added fellow freshman Danielle Tirado, expressing a deep-seated awareness among all the Robotics students that their work in programming the Nao robots will sow the seeds of future careers and beneficial technological advances.

## A Shared Vision for Research

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In step one, the social studies teacher introduces the project and provides feedback on the student's resulting thesis or claim. The project then moves to ELA, where the teacher and student evaluate sources and determine if the sources are viable. In the next step, the social studies teacher gives a lesson on outlining and the student prepares an outline and planning page. The final product is submitted in both classes and graded by both teachers separately, using different rubrics.

The whole project is submitted using Google Docs, which teachers can use to comment in real time, functioning as a virtual classroom, thanks to guidance from Google-certified teacher Christopher Kauter. "It was a good learning experience for teachers who were novices with Google Docs," said Poppe. "Mr. Kauter's on-site support system provided professional development for them throughout the process."

The overall research process significantly enhances student learning. "One thing we focused on through the whole process is what's best for students, including preparing for college and improving test scores," said Stewart. "This will help them be comfortable with developing their own thinking about research and supporting their opinions with evidence."

The educators involved are talking to teachers, looking into the future sustainability of the research project and how it might be efficiently expanded, but for now they are excited by the transition and proud of how committed the teachers were to ensuring its success. "It's wonderful to watch the process unfold after the incredible amount of work that went into it," said Stewart.

### Upcoming Budget Work Session/Open Meetings

March 10 – 7:30 p.m.  
March 17 – 7:30 p.m.  
March 24 – 8 p.m.  
March 31 – 7:30 p.m.  
April 14 – 7:30 p.m.  
April 21 – 7:30 p.m. (Adopt Budget)  
April 28 – 7:30 p.m.  
May 12 – 7:30 p.m. (Public Hearing)

All meetings at District Office