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New system helps teachers link standards with learning resources

Fourth-grade teacher Stephanie Starkey reviews the new CIITS website at Second Street School (Frankfort Independent). Photo by Amy Wallot, July 6, 2011

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Whitley County Middle School mathematics teacher David Atwood likes using digital resources to teach his 7th graders.

"I guess I have an extra dose of imagination," said Atwood, in his fifth year teaching. "I use PowerPoint or some form of electronic media just about every day."

He has used celebrity names in dry mathematics word problems, incorporated the rich and famous into PowerPoint presentations, and changed lyrics in songs to teach lessons.

Atwood also likes to use the electronic resources in Discovery Education through KET's EncycloMedia. In one lesson, he sent half his class to the library with a worksheet, and the other watched a video and took notes. Then they switched and compared notes.

"Within these two groups, they were able to exchange notes and get the full idea of the video," he said.

Matching digital resources to important learning concepts got a lot easier for Kentucky public school teachers Aug. 1 with the launch of the Kentucky Department of Education's Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS). CIITS is a searchable online database that includes the new *Kentucky Core Academic Standards (KCAS)* in English/language arts and mathematics, and deconstructed standards/learning targets linked with high-quality multi-media instructional resources. It is free and available any time, anywhere on an Internet-connected computer.

The rest of Kentucky's academic standards and thousands more instructional resources from some of the nation's top content providers will be added during the 2011-12 school year. For now, all users log in with the same username and password. Once teachers are able to log in individually, CIITS will contain student data, state assessment data and in later versions, formative assessments.

"We are designing CIITS to be a one-stop shop for improving instructional outcomes, teacher effectiveness and leadership in all Kentucky schools," Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said.

The system is designed to help teachers as they implement the new academic standards in mathematics and English/language arts (which also include literacy standards for science, social studies/history and technology classes in grades 6-12).

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"Since Kentucky is the first in the nation to fully implement the new common core standards, Kentucky educators face a challenge in identifying high-quality, engaging instructional resources that support and reinforce the new standards," Holliday said. "CIITS will put those resources at every teacher's fingertips," he said.

The focus of CIITS version 1.0 is to provide teachers with what they need to effectively implement the standards at the classroom level, according to Joe McCowan, CIITS product manager and staff assistant for KDE's Office of Next-Generation Learners.

"CIITS is unique in that it combines the standards, deconstructed standards and resources all in one place," McCowan said. "We hope it will save teachers time as they design their instruction." The Content Leadership Networks broke down the standards in English/language arts and mathematics into deconstructed standards or learning targets that identify what students should be doing or what teachers should be building into their lesson plans, McCowan said.

"Instead of having a broad standard, it drills down into what you would actually do with kids," he said.

Using digital resources

In CIITS, the standards link to 600 aligned resources: video clips and digital images from KET EncycloMedia: Discovery Education that can be used in the classroom, McCowan said.

"They are instructional tools or clips that can be used in lessons that will help demonstrate the standards," he said. "It's not professional development materials that tell you, 'Here's how you teach.' It's more, 'Here is an actual clip or image that you can use in your actual lessons.'"

Atwood compares using digital resources in education to the progression of light throughout human existence.

From cavemen with fire to gas lanterns to light bulbs to energy-efficient bulbs: "The whole idea was we need light. But because of the culture and society, it changed to fit the needs of that individual society. It's the same way with education," he said.

Education has progressed from "sit-and-get" lecturing to cooperative learning to digital learning.

"Education has to be evolving with the students and with what they are involved with in their culture and their society," Atwood said.

Students use Twitter and Facebook, play games online and want to check their interests on the Internet.

"That's their world," he said. "How can teachers not use these things?"

Atwood had several tips for teachers on how to use digital resources to engage students and advance their learning.

"A lot of those clips are very good when I'm teaching a concept and I want to let the kids see the same thing I've just told them, but maybe see it in a little different format," he said.

He tries not to use more than a 5-8 minute clip; if it's longer, he cuts it down using free software, he said.

Atwood recommends using contemporary videos. Students lose focus on the message if they are distracted by 1990s clothes and hair styles. Teachers should always preview a clip before they use it, he added.

Atwood also said teachers should always have a non-digital backup. For instance, he does a *Deal or*

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No Deal lesson, and there is an online game that lets students play like the game show. But he also has traditional file folders that look like the briefcases on the show that he can stick on the whiteboard in case the technology isn't working.

Teachers also should look for media that connect to local culture, he said. Whitley County is a rural, agricultural area, so he tries to find culturally relevant examples.

McCowan said CIITS will be more robust as each version is released. Over the course of the 2011-12 school year, CIITS will be loaded with the rest of Kentucky's content standards as outlined in the *Program of Studies* and *Core Content for Assessment 4.1*; and technology, early-childhood and library standards, along with thousands of aligned instructional resources.

CIITS will be kept updated, he said.

"The intent is once new standards are developed, then we replace the old standards, and we align resources to those new standards," he said.

Even more coming in the future

Holliday has said that, later this school year, lesson plans and instructional units developed by Kentucky's Content Leadership Networks will be included in CIITS.

Ultimately, KDE wants to align professional development so teachers can see how their students are doing in specific areas, and CIITS will include resources to not only help a child in problem areas but also provide professional development for teachers on how to better teach those areas, McCowan said. "We want to be able to connect the teacher of record with the students they are teaching to be able to see the performance, he said. "We want to be able to link that teacher information so we'll be able to see how students are progressing based on their data connected with teacher performance."

In coming years, teachers will even be able to post their materials to share with other teachers.

Atwood is looking forward to that; he's got a lesson he's particularly proud of.

Tell 7th-grade students to use translations to move points on a coordinate plane (the kind with an X/Y axis) from their original position to a new location, and they're not that thrilled.

Teach them using instructions in the *Cha Cha Slide* dance, and they recite the instructions during a school dance, as Atwood found out.

Atwood said he used colored tape to put a coordinate plane on the floor of his classroom. Students represented the dots, did the dance and found themselves in new locations.

"A week or so after that lesson, they had a dance, and they played the *Cha Cha Slide*. The kids on the dance floor were shouting out the rules for translation," Atwood said. "It was pretty cool."

MORE INFO...
CIITS
KDE CIITS help page
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