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New computer hardware to give teachers a bird's eye view

School Board shells out \$45,000 for new system

ENGLEWOOD -- A new computer hardware system purchased by the [Charlotte County School Board](#) will allow computer instructors to spend more time teaching and less time walking around the room.

"It will give teachers the ability to look at all students at the same time and make sure everyone is on task," said Charlotte County coordinator of technology and information John Weant.

Videodidact, the name of the newly purchased hardware, enables the teacher total control and overall view of each computer in the class with a touch of a button. The teacher can scan through students' screens, whether they are on the Internet or in a word-processing document.

A small keypad allows the teacher, via remote control, to single out one particular computer in the room, shut off the monitors of all computers, and control one or all of the computers.

Charlotte County is the first school district in Florida to utilize the hardware.

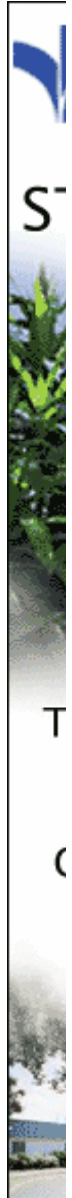
"It's more than just being able to see if a student is working on what he or she is supposed to," Weant said. "The system will allow teachers to assist students if they are having a problem by looking at the students' screen from their desk without leaving the front of the room."

The hardware has been placed in computer classes at [Lemon Bay High School](#), L.A. Ainger and Kingsway Elementary school in Port Charlotte. The 90 units cost \$500 each. The \$45,000 to purchase the equipment was funded from the School Board's technology budget.

Research teacher Todd Alexander will be one of the three teachers to have the new equipment in his class at Ainger this fall.

"I was very impressed," Alexander said after he previewed the system. "It gives a lot of flexibility on how you can use your lab."

Alexander called the new hardware "a nice teaching tool."



"At times, it's hard to monitor every student in the class," he said. "But it's much more than a watchdog. Sometimes, students find a better or easier way to do something. Now I can let the students take over the computers and show everyone what they are doing."

Being able to observe what a student is doing may be one of the benefits of the new system, but Alexander said he is looking forward to the ways the product can improve the curriculum.

"It won't change what I teach, but it will provide different ways that I can teach," he said.

Videodidact is a German product and had been installed in more than 7,000 classrooms in Europe. It is subsidized by Education and Business Services, an Englewood-based company. Wolfgang Beaugrand, owner of EBS, said Videodidact operates independent of any software, hardware or local network installed in the classroom.

"It doesn't matter what operating system the school has or what speed the Internet connection is," Beaugrand said.

Other advantages of Videodidact, according to Beaugrand, are that teachers can easily send their screen to any or all of the students and demonstrate how to solve a problem, and teachers can disable a student's computer and operate it as if he or she is sitting in front of the computer.

"If the instructor wants to know what the students are doing, they simply look into the student's computer without leaving their station and without the student knowing it," he said. "There is also a help button on the student's computer so a student can let the teacher know they need help without the embarrassment of letting the whole class know."

Weant said the School Board will review the new system throughout the year and decide whether to purchase additional units for all computer classrooms in Charlotte County for the 2002-2003 school year.

"Computers do not create better students -- teachers do," Weant said. "While it's the teachers' responsibility to teach, it's our responsibility to provide them with the best tools possible."

"We think (Videodidact) is going to be the solution we've been looking for," Weant added.

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