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Educators take instruction online

By: BEN FRUMIN - Staff Writer

ENCINITAS ---- The night before any big calculus test, as many as 25 Torrey Pines High School students in Abby Brown's class get together with their teacher to talk math.

They ask questions, solve equations, work through high-level concepts and draw figures ---- all from the comfort of their own homes.

That's because the review sessions take place in Internet chat rooms that Brown links to her extensive Web site.

"It is an interactive learning environment," the math teacher said last week.

Brown is one of hundreds of San Dieguito Union High School District teachers who have harnessed the Internet to supplement classroom instruction. While most teachers' sites aren't as interactive as Brown's, nearly all of them provide some type of scholastic resources.

Some sites are strictly academic, and act as a sort of online syllabus that include assignments, due dates, grading rubrics, class policies and lecture notes.

Other sites go a step farther, and boast practice tests, math games, instructional videos, and links to news and government Web sites.

Some educators go beyond the classroom, and post brief biographies, daily quotations or pictures of pets, children and grandchildren.

La Costa Canyon teacher Doug Heflin's site has links to several live Webcams that keep a constant vigil on world landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben and the Taj Mahal.

San Dieguito Academy science teacher Leslie Gushwa's site features family recipes for a variety of tasty treats, including pumpkin pie, sugar cookies, coffee cake and spinach feta cheese dip.

Though some teachers still haven't stepped into the digital age ---- there are several Web pages that are blank or under construction ---- officials said about 80 percent of the district's more than 600 teachers provide some type of Web content.

"The teachers really want that presence so students and parents know what's going on," said Mike Coy, San Dieguito's director of educational technology.

### Staying informed

Several teachers post student grades on their sites, which teens and parents can access using two secret numbers.

"They can follow it 24-7," said La Costa Canyon teacher Bruce Dillon, who updates progress reports for his U.S. history students every seven to 10 days.

Dillon's grade report is a detailed catalogue of a student's performance on every assignment to date, broken down into easy-to-understand categories such as group work, quizzes and oral presentations.

Dillon said the online reports improve communication with parents, and allow them to track their child's academic progress. Dillon estimated that one-third of his students' parents monitor their children's grades.

"The parents love it," Coy said, adding that more than 90 percent of district homes are connected to the internet.

### **Logging on**

Every teacher in the district has access to a Web site, and is offered a tutorial on how to set up and manage "their own little piece of real estate," Coy said.

New teachers receive training from Coy during an intensive week-long orientation program in August, with other workshops available to all teachers throughout the school year.

Coy said the number one thing that teachers request of him is more Web-development training.

"It's really popular," he said.

Most teachers build and maintain their Web sites with do-it-yourself programs such as FrontPage, Dreamweaver and Contribute, though some elect to write the code to their site themselves, Coy said.

"That's not easy, but I have some folks that love to do it," he said.

Staff Web sites cost the district next to nothing, Coy said. The data for every teacher's Web site is stored in the district office, on a small \$6,000 server that Coy said is about two feet by four inches.

Software products are purchased in bulk and licensed to every school and employee for a few hundred dollars each year, Coy said.

The Web-authoring tools allow teachers to access and update their sites from anywhere at anytime, Coy said.

Dillon said that though there is a steep learning curve for Web design, once a teacher is set up, routine maintenance isn't too time-consuming.

"It's like tending a garden," he said.

Dillon said his Web site has brought him unexpected rewards ---- such as when a teacher from Washington sent Dillon an e-mail thanking him for the wealth of U.S. history information on his site. The Washington teacher had used Dillon's site to help imprisoned juveniles convicted of adult felonies work toward passing their high school equivalency exam.

"It just came from out of the blue," Dillon said, adding that it was "a real affirmation for me."

A directory of teacher Web sites is available at <http://teachers.sduhsd.k12.ca.us>.

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