Bridging the gap and connecting classrooms

Josh Dorsey conducts a calculus lesson with his students, using a SMART Board interactive whiteboard and Bridgit conferencing software for those who are joining remotely.

After completing the WALT DISNEY WORLD® Marathon in Florida, high school math teacher Josh Dorsey settles into his hotel room with his computer and an Internet connection to teach calculus III. Dorsey is more than 800 miles away from his high school students at South River High School in Maryland's Anne Arundel County school district. But, since his students use Bridgit™ conferencing software to connect to their calculus class, today is just like any other school day.

A few months later, it's winter. The Anne Arundel County school district is blanketed with snow, forcing school closures. Dorsey's calculus students e-mail him a request to conduct class anyway. One student, Benjamin Warner, says, "I really like Bridgit conferencing software because I can log on from home. Even if I have to be away from school, I can still log on and not miss a lecture." Thanks to the software, Dorsey's class is the only one that continues uninterrupted despite school closures.

Dorsey thinks back to a few years ago, when the Anne Arundel County school district was trying to find a way to offer advanced math classes to gifted students. With interested students scattered across the district, offering classes in a traditional setting was challenging. "I wanted to pursue other ways of offering instruction," explains Dorsey. "We needed to find a way to make the content available and to maximize the resources we had." This led the district to identify Bridgit software as a solution to their needs.

Bridgit software was created by SMART Technologies. It is a quick, effective way for teachers and students to share real-time video and data over the Internet. Participants can connect with one another instantly through any Internet browser. The software integrates seamlessly with all of SMART's hardware products, including the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard, proving to be a very effective collaboration tool for teaching and learning.

Now teaching from his South River classroom, Dorsey's lectures and annotations are relayed on a SMART Board interactive whiteboard, and broadcast to six other schools in the district using Bridgit software. "It helps to hear what other students are thinking, see other ways of approaching problems and explore different understandings. This can't happen for a student in a class of one," says Dorsey.

Joy Donlin, Anne Arundel County school district's coordinator of secondary mathematics, enjoys the value that Bridgit conferencing software adds to traditional classroom activity. Donlin says, "Bridgit software proves to be an excellent teaching tool when combined with the teacher's willingness to teach beyond the classroom." Donlin says the key to successful implementation requires collaborative spirit from various departments across the district. "The more teachers that are aware of the capabilities and variety of uses of Bridgit conferencing software, the more the students can benefit."

Anne Arundel County school district's instructional technology manager, Val Emrich, calculates that in its first year of implementing Bridgit software and other SMART products, the district realized a savings of more than $130,000 compared to the associated teaching and transportation costs of offering classes in traditional classrooms. Emrich believes the district will continue to save money as their initial investments in technology and software mature.

Emrich says that in the coming years, the district will expand its technology offerings to students, possibly implementing more SMART products for the instruction of complex language classes, such as Chinese, or using Bridgit software to help provide instruction to students who are unable to physically attend school. Educators at Anne Arundel County Public Schools have seen firsthand the success SMART products enable. Both students and teachers in the district are experiencing the benefits of Bridgit software and other interactive learning tools in the classroom.

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