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Technology Changing the Teaching Trade

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Teaching and learning in the 21st century have dramatically changed due, in part, to new technologies. Blogs, wikis, web 2.0, podcasts, RSS feeds, texting, streaming, webinars, smart phones, smart boards, fiber networks, and digital imaging devices are just a few that are used today in Muskegon County schools and classrooms. Local teachers have embraced these tools as a critical part of preparing our students for college, technical training, and careers.

Teachers realize that technology is everywhere and that the digital generation comes to school everyday 'wired' to learn in their digital language. Knowing this, teachers are practicing what they preach. They attend "technology literacy" training at the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) facility on how to embed the state's technology standards into their daily lessons. Teachers take online courses to meet continuous education requirements. Along with other school leaders, they even train each other on new technology-based activities and equipment that will more deeply involve our students. Some say that the best teachers are the best learners, willing to keep improving themselves for the sake of preparing students for their future. Yes, technology is important, but it is the skilled educator that turns it into an optimal learning tool.

The main reason schools are spending time and money on the use of these teaching tools is to make learning more relevant. Schools used to teach "computers" in isolation. This is no longer the case. Technology is vital to all subjects at all grade levels. This is why schools are so grateful for the support of their communities to invest in equipping multiple classrooms with things like digital projectors, wireless keyboards, current educational software, scanners, printers, current computers, and smart carts. These are not tools for classrooms of the future. They are simply the modern tools teachers need to best prepare students for success as they continue their education and/or begin a career. The world has changed, and teachers need improved access to technology for the sake of their students.

Wondering how technology improves teaching and speeds-up learning? Here are a few real-life examples:

- Instead of reading about US Representatives' views and legislative agendas, students are speaking with them live via videoconference.
- Instead of taking reading or daily math assignments home to grade, teachers use computers to provide immediate feedback on missed questions. This allows the teacher more time to teach and connect with students.

- Instead of teaching physics solely from a textbook, teachers demonstrate real-time data collection, graphing, and analysis from computerized motion, light, and acidity sensors.
- Instead of performing the same old sugar dissolution rate experiment in water, teachers are using High-Pressure Liquid Chromatography machines (borrowed from the community's REAL Science partnership) to verify caffeine content of energy drinks students choose and discussing error analysis.
- Instead of asking one student a question during classroom discussions, teachers can engage 100% of the students in a class by having them respond via a wireless responder system.

All of these examples are already occurring in our local classrooms.