

Tech Knowledge

Site
of the
Month



ZOOM Out the Vote

pbskids.org/zoom/fromyou/elections/index.html

ZOOM, the popular PBS television series, wants kids to help get out the vote. Thanks to the series' new Web page, ZOOM Out the Vote, youngsters can learn about the democratic process, while encouraging the adults in their lives to go forth and cast their ballots come Election Day.

ZOOM Wants You: The site makes the case that every vote counts and shows kids how they can increase voter turnout in their community by hosting a voter registration drive. To support their efforts, the site provides PDF-format printouts, such as voter registration forms; details on state registration; and "Vote!" banners, signs, stickers, and bookmarks. (Parents are forewarned: the site urges kids to post these reminders all over the house.) Kids can then submit the number of grown-ups they got to register to vote on the site's registration tally.

There's also information on how students can become involved in politics locally and nationally, with additional resources to help them learn more about the U.S. political system.

And, on November 2, students can exercise the right of franchise by casting their own votes in ZOOM's kid's presidential election.—K. I.

Teachers Get a Tech Lesson

Peers help turn tech-challenged educators into wizards

Most teachers view computers as powerful learning tools, according to a recent survey, but few have enough training to use them effectively in the classroom. But that may soon change, if Microsoft has its way. The Seattle-

based software giant has adopted a unique professional development model that aims to help K-12 educators better prepare their students for an increasingly digital world.

The Peer Coaching Program—part of Microsoft's new \$35 million U.S. Partners in Learning project—will provide a national model for training teachers as "coaches" to help their colleagues use technology to strengthen classroom curricula and improve student learning.

In addition to peer coaching, the recently announced Partners in Learning program will establish an ed-tech framework to help educators foster 21st-century information skills and raise student achievement and graduation rates among at-risk kids. Partners in Learning will work with select states during the next five years to develop sustainable plans for digital learning, which can then be replicated in schools across the country.

Microsoft's first state partner, Washington, will help create a national



Pat Matsuzawa, teacher librarian

blueprint for the Peer Coaching program. Based on the idea that most teachers look first to their colleagues when they need assistance with technology, Peer Coaching was inspired by the successful Washington-based Teaching + Technology Coaching Initiative (T2CI). Created by the Puget Sound Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (PSC) (www.puget-soundcenter.org), a nonprofit education organization, T2CI was launched, in 2001, at four Washington school dis-

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tricts (Seattle, Shoreline, Edmonds, and Mukilteo), which sent about 150 teachers, including several library media specialists, to train as peer coaches. After receiving lessons in improving digital skills and devising tech-rich learning activities, the coaches returned to their schools, ready to assist their peers.

Pat Matsuzawa, a teacher librarian at Kamiak High School in Mukilteo, trained as a peer coach in 2002 and returned to her campus to help teachers integrate technology into their lessons. "I absolutely loved it because it was so perfect for librarians," she says. "[Peer coaching] brought the library and the classroom together and made the lessons so much richer and more engaging for the stu-



Teacher Faith Beatty (left) and T2CI peer coach Rebbecah Emanuel

dents." T2CI was so successful that the Mukilteo district signed up all 17 of its media specialists to become coaches this past summer, she says. T2CI is now being offered statewide.

Les Foltos, PSC's K-12 director, agrees that peer coaching is a good fit with the role and responsibilities of

school librarians, who are "natural leaders in this area," he says. So Foltos, who will oversee Microsoft's Peer Coaching, says a library media specialist model has been written into the program to encourage librarians' participation.

Foltos says they're in the final stages of creating online and print support materials for Peer Coaching, which Microsoft will post on its Web site by January 2005.

The need for professional development in technology was underscored in a June survey, sponsored by education technology provider CDW-G. While 93 percent of teachers surveyed believe computers are valuable to instruction, only 22 percent say they have had adequate training in how to best use computer technology in their classroom. —Kathy Ishizuka

**Test
DRIVE**

BY JEFFREY HASTINGS

Epson Stylus C86 Color Printer

Epson America, 3840 Kilroy Airport Way, Long Beach, CA 90806 (800) GO-EPSON www.epson.com Windows 98 and up, Mac OS 9.1 and up. \$99.

Every week it seems someone walks into my office and breathlessly asks how they can get some quick photos taken. While I can easily set up my colleagues with a digital camera, one thing I've never been able to supply them with is a decent print. Problem is, even our best color printers can't reproduce digital pictures very well.

Enter the Epson Stylus C86. This little printer knocks off printouts of routine text jobs lickety-split, but can also turn out surprisingly high-quality photographs on a variety of paper-stock formats. The best part is it retails for around a hundred bucks.

The printer comes with a software suite that's easy to install on machines running Windows 98 or later versions, or Macs running OS 9.1 and up. The image-handling heart of the software package is called Film Factory, which allowed me to import pictures from

my digital camera, then gave me all of the basic photo-editing and enhancement tools needed to tweak the shots for printing. Film Factory has a few artistic extras, too, but is simple enough that even occasional users can intuitively import, doctor up, and crank out great looking pictures.

The unit uses a matched line of ink-and-photo paper stocks known as DURABrite, which insure quality, long-lasting prints. Fifty sheets of 4" x 6" DURABrite paper costs about \$9, and 20 sheets of 8.5" x 11" paper retail for about \$12, but better deals are easily found on the net. The same goes for DURABrite ink cartridges: you can replace any of the three-color cartridges individually for about \$12, or buy them as a trio for \$36. The standard black cartridges go for around \$23. I'd recommend spending at least \$99 to stockpile an ample supply of cartridges and paper. Why? Once your colleagues discover your little "digital darkroom," the demand for prints is sure to go way up.

The affordable Epson Stylus C86 makes quick work of routine printing and also delivers quality photo prints that look like they just came back from the lab.

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