

# Integrating technology Moving forward with iPads

Genesee district says it will go ahead with online learning regardless of November election



**Geoff Crimmins/Daily News**

Third-grade teacher Donna Wommack, center, helps KyLee Tweedy, right, and a classmate look up the definition of a word on an iPad during a reading lesson at Genesee School on Sept. 20.

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By Estelle Gwinn, Daily News staff writer | [1 comment](#)

With online learning on the November ballot, schools across Idaho are waiting until after the election to bring in technology, but Genesee is staying ahead of the curve.

The Students Come First laws are intended to bring more technology advancements to schools by requiring students to take two online courses before graduating high school and providing a 1:1 ratio of students to laptops. Genesee School District was scheduled to be one of the first 30 districts receiving the laptops this fall, but so far they have not heard or seen anything.

"In the back of my mind I sort of wonder if we're just getting put on hold to see how the election plays out," Genesee Superintendent Wendy Moore said.

Proposition 3 on the November ballot challenges the push for online learning in Idaho. However, Genesee schools aren't sitting idly by, they are making their own progress.

In spring 2011, the district started applying for grants to fund their "iPad project" which eventually brought in \$17,500 to purchase 52 iPads for their elementary school. The idea was if students would have to use technology in high school the iPads would prepare them in their primary education years.

The long-term goal for the district is to have at least eight iPads in every elementary classroom, laptops for the middle school students and take-home laptops for high school students.

Regardless of the Nov. 6 election results, Moore said they will continue bringing more technology into classrooms and, if voters do pass the proposition, it will be because teacher salaries took a hit to provide funding for the technology.

"If the technology gets voted down it won't be because people are against technology, people will be against how it was funded," Moore said. "The shifting of the money is what has people upset, it's not about bringing technology into the classroom at all, it's an issue of where the money is coming from."

The fear that technology is replacing teachers isn't a concern for Genesee educators. In fact, the project was started by teachers who were coming back from technology conferences.

"They were really excited about the new technology, and that's what really got us into the discussion about what can be used in the classroom," Moore said. "That was the most exciting part to me, because I think a lot of these decisions come from top-down and that isn't always the best approach. If teachers are excited and ready to do things in the classroom and we can support them, I really think that's our job."

The district is also offering online learning independent from the state. While other schools are going through the state-sponsored Idaho Digital Learning Academy, Genesee is creating their own online learning environment.

"We want our students to take courses from highly effective teachers, and we know we have those in our building," Genesee Principal Kelly Caldwell said. "If we can find a way to make that work within our own walls and meet the integrity of the law, we will."

The school offers one class taught entirely online by one of their own teachers, as opposed to IDLA, which is taught by educators outside the districts. This is the first year the school has used it and they intend to add more classes next year with more teachers willing to try it.

The district also provides a service for other schools by distance teaching two dual-credit classes: calculus and history of rock 'n' roll. Kendrick and Nez Perce have both participated in the distance learning Genesee offers, and this year music educator Kristen McMullin is teaching the history class to a group in Hailey, Idaho. McMullin said she has run into few problems with the distance learning and the students seem to enjoy it.

"It's a pretty cool thing that we're able to offer this in our state now. It's a nice alternative to completely online classes," she said. "They seem like they're having a pretty good time, and so far they're doing well."

Caldwell said he anticipates more districts becoming interested in Genesee's classes if IDLA becomes more expensive but regardless of what other schools do, he expects Genesee to continue offering online learning.

"In our community, with the support that we have, we will make things happen regardless of the outcome," he said. "We already have a commitment from our school board, they want us to move forward with this, and it won't do any good to sit and stew about it."

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