

Richmond Register

No Child Left Offline

Model receives computer donations

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September 25, 2007

Bryan Marshall

Model Laboratory School received a technology upgrade Monday as American Electric Power Foundation donated 20 computers for special education instruction.

The donation was through ConnectKentucky's No Child Left Offline, a project that brings together public and private partners to help Kentuckians join the Information Age and overcome obstacles associated with the digital divide.

"Through American Electric's visionary and generous commitment to education, Model Laboratory School students will have increased access to classroom technology while at the same time demonstrating and giving hands-on experience to preservice teachers who will go on to serve in classrooms throughout our commonwealth," said Model Lab High School Principal James Dantic.

With computer access in the classrooms, special education students will be have a variety of helpful programs, including Read and Write Gold, available with the click of a mouse, said Ellen Rini, Model's school psychologist.

"We can take any textbook, take the spine off, send it through a machine and it pits the book on a CD," she said about the Read and Write Gold program. "The student can then put it on the computer on a Text Reader where it will highlight the text as they read. It has an online dictionary."

"Technology like that is what really benefits the kids in the classroom," Rini said.

With the No Child Left Offline program, the goal is to refurbish and recycle surplus government computers and deliver them to underprivileged Kentucky middle school students.

However, the donation to Model Lab marks a slight change in how the computers usually are utilized, said Andrew McNeill, vice president of program development for ConnectKentucky.

"What you're seeing today represents an evolution in the program," he said during a presentation in Model's library. "This is the first time that we have purchased new computers and actually placed them within the facility so the children can have access to them during the school day. Prior to that, the program was designed to refurbish state computers that were being retired. We had distributed 1,300 computers into the homes of individual disadvantaged students in the state."

“We’re hoping and certainly expecting that the children will be able to utilize the promise of this technology to give themselves a real opportunity to enhance their education and learning opportunities to compete in a world that’s going to continue to require access to technology,” McNeill said.

When ConnectKentucky approached American Electric Power about No Child Left Offline, the company received the project warmly and without hesitation, said Ronn Robinson, corporate communications manager for Kentucky Power, a wholly owned subsidiary of American Electric Power.

“We view this not so much as an investment in computers or printers, but more as an investment in students and the future of Kentucky,” he said.

No Child Left Offline is connected to Kentucky’s Prescription for Innovation, a comprehensive technology initiative to accelerate technology in Kentucky through full broadband deployment, encouraging citizen use of computers and the Internet and calling for more meaningful online services delivered by government.

“Gov. (Ernie) Fletcher’s Prescription for Innovation initiative has been a huge success — bringing the commonwealth to the national forefront as a leader in broadband deployment and technology advancement,” said Robbie Rudolph, secretary of the governor’s Executive Cabinet. “The No Child Left Offline program is working to make certain Kentuckians have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits associated with living in a state with unprecedented high-speed Internet availability.”

Legislators are working to invest back into schools and communities to create opportunities for all children, said Rudolph, who credited state Rep. Harry Moberly, D-Richmond, with an increase in funding for technology in schools.

“We put in about \$29 million into literally opening the pipes of the Internet,” he said. “We were hearing from teachers that all this information was going through a real small pipe and it was real slow. They would push a button to download something at the end of the day, and they wouldn’t have it until the next morning. Now, we have immediate responses for remedial responses.”

In dealing with state education funding, sometimes there is not enough money to go around, said state Sen. Ed Worley, D-Richmond, who attended the presentation with Moberly.

“Kentucky is a small state with many needs,” he said. “When you try to find the resources to address all of the needs, sometimes we just fall a little short. So, when we have corporate partners who step up to meet some of those deficiencies, it’s a huge help.”

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