



Netbooks expected in Pownal

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POWNAL -- Technology was the topic of much of the conversation at a recent Pownal school board meeting, at which an update on new student netbooks was given, as well as information about an afterschool computer club.

The club, which has already begun to meet one afternoon a week, has 10 students in it and is advised by Jim Boutin, former technical director for Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union who retired this summer.

Boutin said among other things, students will learn to edit music and video, and to use e-mail, Google maps, Google Earth and other programs.

"I really do want it to be a fun exercise for the kids. We're going to do some music editing where they can record different tracks over the top of one another," Boutin told the board.

Students in the club have monitored e-mail accounts with which they will learn about e-mail -- which will eventually lead to forming electronic pen pals with students in other schools, Boutin said.

Learning new programs

Boutin said the children already signed up for the afterschool program have all been excited to learn new computer programs -- making the club fun for

everyone involved.

"It's exciting to be around those eager minds," Boutin said.

The club is sponsored by the 21st Century Grant in addition to a grant from Comcast, which will allow for the purchase of supplies and field trips, Boutin said.

There is also money to pay either a high

school or college student an hourly rate to help out, which could potentially create a second computer club with different students to meet on a different afternoon if there is enough student interest.

Now, students are using a computer lab in the school, although once new netbooks are acquired for students in fourth and fifth grade, students in the club will use them.

The school expects to receive 75 new netbook computers and printers in a couple of weeks, 53 of which were purchased through the e-Vermont grant the town of Pownal was awarded. The other 22 were purchased through the local budget.

The touch-screen netbooks will then be configured with school district software and are expected to be distributed for school use by mid-November.

Teachers and students who will be using the netbooks will receive training on them, and Boutin said parents will be required to come in and go over a contract they must sign for their child to take the netbook and printer home during the school year. If parents do not sign the form, the students will only be able to use the netbook in school, Boutin said.

Boutin said giving students the opportunity to



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access computer programs and the Internet to coincide with classroom lessons, and expand upon them out of school, should be a great benefit to the kids.

"A lot of education is leaning toward what they call project-based learning. Project-based learning is focused on students doing problem solving exercises and collaborative learning exercises and when they have such a tool as a netbook or a computer they can reach out and do so much more of those exercises in the classroom," he said.

The netbooks also generate a lot of excitement in school for the students, he said.

"It gets more students motivated and keeps their interest ... and they can even expand on what the teacher is doing by taking them home and exploring more options," he said.

The district will have an insurance policy on the computers and each has a three-year warranty. Boutin said he expects them to be in use for about five years.

At the end of the school year, students must return the computers to the district.

Pownal is one of 12 communities statewide selected by e-Vermont, which is funded with federal stimulus money through the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

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