The success of a one-to-one tablet PC program recently implemented at West Elementary School has given some teachers at the Bryson City, N.C., institution cause to question their job security. The initiative, which placed tablet PCs into the hands of each of the school’s third-graders, is fostering such confidence among students that instructors have found themselves taking a back seat in the classroom.

“The students have become so independent, it’s like we don’t even need to be here,” third-grade teacher Jodi Marr says with a laugh. “They have it all under control!”

While West Elementary isn’t dismissing its teachers just yet, it is celebrating the positive effects the tablets are facilitating among students, most notably an increased focus and interest in learning.

“The tablets have transformed the classroom,” reports Jeff Fuller, technical specialist at the K-5 school, which serves a total of 407 students and is part of the Swain County School District. “It’s hard to walk into a classroom and not see someone using one. They are a huge part of the day-to-day curriculum.”

“They have absolutely enhanced learning,” echoes Marr. “The kids are more willing to take risks, and no task feels overwhelming to them.”

The school opted for the Acer TravelMate C300 series tablet, a convertible unit capable of functioning as either a conventional notebook or, with the simple flip of a screen, a tablet PC on which users can write using the included stylus. Measuring 1.6 inches tall, this model includes a CD-RW/DVD-ROM combo drive in its modular bay.

West Elementary’s 84 tablets were purchased with a $300,000 grant obtained through the state and funded by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In addition to the PCs, West Elementary used the funds to purchase NEC VT470 projectors, Sony camcorders, Sony CyberShot DSC-P200 digital cameras, HP 2410 Photosmart printers and a SmartBoard for each of its four third-grade classrooms.

Progress in Action

In order to monitor the success of the initiative over a three-year period, the school selected its 64 third-grade students to participate in the program. Educators hope that when this pilot group graduates from fifth grade at the commencement of the tablet trial, they will have increased their statewide test scores, which was one of the primary goals of the initiative.

“We believe that with technology infused into the curriculum, the students will be more interested in learning,” Fuller explains. “If they are more focused throughout the year on specific studies, that will help enhance learning.”

Furthermore, school officials theorize that the 6.1-pound tablets, which are transported between home and school each day, are increasing the level of interaction between students and their parents. “The family is more interested in the child’s homework when they are working on the tablet versus a piece of paper and a pencil,” says Fuller.

Adds Sam Pattillo, principal at West Elementary, “The very image of what homework is has changed by using the tablet. It is viewed more favorably, and the kids are more engaged in their projects.”

In addition to boosting overall interest in studying and homework, the devices have fostered an extremely positive climate within the classroom, reveals Marr, who attributes
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