

Heights Bits and Bytes

Colonial Heights Schools' Office of Technology and Learning

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New Internet Content Filter System and Mobile Filter

By Mark Webster, Director of Technology and Learning

Managing the filtering of inappropriate Internet content is always a challenge. Because of the ever changing nature of the Internet, it's a moving target. Accountability and the safety of our students remain paramount concerns, while making sure that educationally appropriate Internet content remains accessible.

Implementing our new system from 8e6 Technologies is an important accomplishment for several reasons. Our former system, called "SmartFilter" was getting to the point where it was not really as smart as it should be. It was difficult to manage. When it would block sites that should not be blocked, it was sometimes difficult to determine why a good site was being blocked. The reporting capabilities of the old system were problematic, which impeded efforts related to accountability. Finally, it offered no capabilities for filtering on laptop computers taken outside our firewall. Because of this limitation, we previously had to install an additional software application on student laptops, but this application provided no way to centrally manage it, and it was a major headache to do any updating of the software or settings on the laptops used by our students. This third party content filter also caused some problems and headaches with preparing for online SOL testing.

Mobile Client for Laptop Computers

Our new system from 8e6 Technologies has many advantages. It provides a mechanism for more effective Internet content filtering on laptop computers that are taken home outside our firewall, through the use of a specialized "mobile client" that works from anywhere, anytime the laptop accesses the Internet. Because Henrico County Public Schools had done the beta testing for this system, we knew the mobile client had gone through exhaustive testing.

New Internet Content Filter System and Mobile Filter

Improved Reporting and Accountability

Another advantage of the new system concerns improved reporting and accountability. Going through logs to monitor student Internet usage is a very time consuming process. By programming and scheduling summary reports on a regular basis, this enables school administrators to use due diligence and exercise accountability, while doing so in a reasonable time frame.

Free Hardware and a Team Effort to Implement the System

After doing research and contacting vendors, the Director did some wheeling and dealing last school year, and the vendor 8e6 Technologies gave us about \$12,000 of free hardware in order to get our business. Technology and Learning staff worked together to implement the new system. Mark Webster setup the physical server hardware in the racks, configured a new Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on our firewall, and later worked with the reporting system. Doug Adams spent many hours configuring and setting up the new filter system, and integrating this into our network accounts. Doug also works on an ongoing basis to manage the filter settings. Jose Morales spearheaded the installation and testing of the mobile client software on our laptop computers.

Internet content filtering is never exact science. However, with our new system from 8e6 Technologies, we get much improved mission critical filtering, plus an effective mobile client for laptop computers, and better reporting and accountability. The new system has proved stable and capable of the high demand Internet access that is typical in Colonial Heights Schools.

Note: Faculty, staff, or administrators may submit a request to have websites blocked or unblocked. Please email your request to Doug Adams, Network Administrator, with the complete address of the website, and your reason for the change.

WEB PICKS

By Debbie Walwer, Instructional Integration Technology Specialist

MarcoPolo is now Thinkfinity

The site formerly know as MarcoPolo has become Thinkfinity, but still includes fabulous resources, including lesson plans, interactive activities, Web links, and tons of information for teachers of all subjects and grade levels. Sponsored by Verizon, there are exciting, new resources available on this web site.

Bring rich, exciting and relevant ideas to your classroom this fall with new resources from Thinkfinity. They include an interactive graphic organizer for outlining comparative essays, Pearl S. Buck's views on immigration in the 1930s, and research on lying-what it is, why we do it and how we do it. In addition you'll find great lesson plans about the benefits of recycling and the symmetry and transformation behind Archimedes' Puzzle.

<http://www.marcopolo-education.org/home.aspx>

Virginia 2003 SOL Aligned Physical Science Activities by UVA Physics Department

<http://galileo.phys.virginia.edu/Education/outreach/8thgradesol/ActivitiesList.htm>

Interactive Quizzes by Tami Maloney

<http://ushistory.pwnet.org/links/index.php>

United States History: Connecting the Past to the Present:Virginia Standards of Learning

<http://ushistory.pwnet.org/links/index.php>

Science Sites

<http://www.techtrekers.com/science.htm>

Web Links for Elementary students and teachers

<http://www.portaportal.com/>

This site can be used to catalog web sites that you want to save and have students access them. Two have been created by our elementary school staff members. To use Gayle Millers', Media Center Specialist at Lakeview Elementary, go to the portaportal web address listed above and in the guest box put in **gmiller**

To use Debbie Walwer's portaportal go to this web site and in the guest box put in

dwalwer

Ready Technology Resources for Elementary Teachers

By Debbie Walwer

PowerPoints

PowerPoints have been made and are listed by subject and grade level on MOODLE. Go to MOODLE , open and download to your computer or your files. These have been developed for your use.

Log on to Moodle

<http://moodle.colonialhts.org>

User name is your last name first initial

Password is assigned by Buddy Palatiere or Debbie Walwer, contact one of us if you need a password.

Go to Resources and PowerPoints for Elementary School Teachers

Harcourt Math Center

This software program is on all computers in the school labs.

Activities are correlated to the Standards of Learning

Each lesson in our math book provides the technology lesson that goes with that math lesson so there is a connection between the technology activity and the computer lab activity.

All students are enrolled, activities must be assigned by the homeroom teacher.

This program provides opportunities for assessment, reports, and prescription of reinforcement activities.

Portaportal

My Portaportal is a list of sites by subjects area. I have screened these sites for your use with your students. These Internet sites can be used in the classroom or the computer lab. To access my Portaportal:

Go to : www.Portaportal.com

Guest access password is: [dwalwer](#)

New sites are added frequently, the newest category is one for English Language Learners.

Digital Photography and editing was one of the most popular classes held this past summer during the second Technology Institute for staff members. Betsy Johnson (left) and Martina Smith enjoyed a session on digital photography. Participants took pictures and used Picasa, a free Google download to edit them.



Picasa is a free download available from Google. This free software will allow you to edit and store your digital pictures.

You can download Picasa from this web site:

Picasa.google.com/download/

Paint.NET is free image and **photo manipulation software** designed to be used on computers that run Windows. It supports layers, unlimited undo, special effects, and a wide variety of useful and powerful tools. Download paint.net from this web link.

<http://www.getpaint.net/>

Educational Blogging with Moodle

By Mark Webster, Director of Technology and Learning

Last school year, we began maintaining a Moodle server, which is a web-based course management system (similar to Blackboard). Moodle has become very popular with many of our teachers, who enjoy how it provides a powerful vehicle for technology integration. I really admire the innovative work of our teachers, who have used Moodle to post content online for their students, and create engaging and creative “eLearning” opportunities for kids.

In September, I realized that while Moodle has the capabilities for blogging, we had never used it for this purpose in Colonial Heights, and the blogging functionality had never been enabled and configured on our server. In examining some different options for blogging, I was wondering how Moodle would stack up against some other third party blogging services. So one night while working from home, I enabled and configured blogging on our Moodle server, and setup the site policies and blog visibility settings in order to experiment with Moodle blogging.

I discovered that posting blog entries in Moodle is easy. The main topic for my Moodle blog is educational blogging itself. On my weblog, I posted some information to explain blogging, and added hyperlinks to some relevant websites and articles related to educational blogging. You can checkout my Moodle blog (you can use “Guest” access to login):

<http://moodle.colonialhts.org/blog/index.php?userid=1211>

While it is easy to add text to a blog entry, adding pictures is another story. I was disappointed to discover that in the current version of Moodle, you cannot upload the picture at the same time that you add the image to your blog entry. When working with other Moodle content in a course, it is an easy matter to use the file utility to upload images and other content, but the current implementation of blogging in Moodle only allows you to reference the hyperlink for where your picture is available. I had to upload my images to a folder on our main web server, and then reference the hyperlink from within my blog.

Another limitation is that finding blogs within the current version of Moodle is a little complicated. This is because the blog is tied to the user, rather than to a course. If you configure your blog for “Anyone in the world” to see, it is a simple matter of letting people know what the address is, and they can access it using Guest access and just going directly to the page. But it would make more sense for the blog to be associated with a Moodle course.

In conclusion, offering blogging within Moodle is something that provides us a measure of safety and control over who is posting blog content, and what type of content is posted and available for students to see. Moodle has some advantages for blogging but it is not quite ready for primetime (at least not yet). The good news is that the beta version of Moodle has some truly outstanding blogging capabilities. Once the stable version is released, it will have some improved blogging features, including the all important feature of associating a blog to a course, rather than just the user. So looking to the future, we will stay tuned as Moodle’s blogging features are improved, because this will provide blogging capabilities within the framework of our own IT systems, helping to insure better security and safety for our students.

By Mark Webster, Director of Technology and Learning

Open Letter to Comcast

Years ago, the cable company that owned the cable franchise rights here in Colonial Heights installed fiber optic cable in proximity to our schools. However, after school division staff engaged in discussions with cable company representatives, the previous cable company, Adelphia, would not allow Colonial Heights Public Schools to utilize this resource to upgrade our Wide Area Network. Now that Comcast, a preeminent, national company, has taken over the management of the cable operation in this area, we are requesting that Comcast support our schools by authorizing the use of this unused, dark fiber to benefit the children of this city.

Mark Webster, Director of Technology and Learning, has communicated an Open Letter to Comcast:

http://www.colonialhts.net/comcast_letter.pdf

He hopes that Comcast will agree that this currently unused, dark fiber would greatly benefit the school children of this city, if their company will allow us to network our school together using this resource. The letter includes photographs that show the proximity of this fiber optic cable to some of our schools. This dark fiber optic cable is so close at hand in the middle school's teacher parking lot that you can reach out and grab it. Drive by the school and see for yourself!