

# Chalkboard

By

Joni Wilson, Technology Coordinator, Gentry Public Schools

Educators have been continually faced with change driven by new technology. Change is truly on going, and we can expect it to continue and accelerate as we move into the future. We will continue to be challenged to deal with change just as all educators have throughout the industrial age and into the information age.

The challenges facing education in the past are much the same as today; to prepare graduates to enter the workforce, to think critically, to solve problems and to encourage lifelong learning. The information age has led to the use of computers in the classroom, computers in lab settings, as an aid to teaching. The new technology has changed the way our students learn and the way our teachers teach.

Students throughout our district are using Accelerated Reader to take weekly tests on books they have read. Students at the Intermediate school were among the first this year to try the new web version. This allows students to log on to any computer that has Internet connection at the school and take an AR test.

This is the second year for the distance-learning lab at the high school. Classes that are offered for high school credit include French, Fashion Merchandising, Sports Marketing and Travel and Tourism. College Classes include English Comp I and II, College Algebra, Finite Math, U.S. History I and II. The high school classes are open to any of the high school students and the college classes are open to juniors and seniors. This lab is booked full this year with classes being received live from Maumelle for high school credit and from NWACC in Bentonville for college Credit. Sheila Still is the lab manager who oversees these four high school classes and 19 hours of college credit. High School Students taking college courses are required to take the Compass test before being allowed to enroll at NWACC. In the past they had to go to NWACC to complete that. We are pleased that we have completed the necessary steps to offer that at GHS now. This is done electronically though their website.

In the last year we have installed a new lab at the primary school, middle school and high school. The school has purchased some software packages that have proven to be very effective. The primary school was trained on Successmaker. This is an integrated learning package that allows students to advance at an individual rate.

Another software package that is available to all students K-12 is Jedi. Jedi may be used at school or at home. It is web based so students can log on to the Internet at home and work on it. All they need is their username and password. Jedi is a program that gives students extra help and practice in any of the content areas. Many classroom teachers are using this program for their entire class. Some teachers are using it on an individual basis. The high school athletics/activities programs are using it for students that are in the SIP program. Students that are not meeting the required GPA for these activities have to spend 90 minutes a week on remediation. Coaches have been trained and are using the Jedi program with students to help raise their grades and meet the SIP requirements. If you would like for your child to have extra help and assignments in any area please contact their campus to see how you can get assignments made for your child or to receive their logon and password.

The high school has implemented CPS (Classroom Performance Systems) in the math and history departments. Each student has a keypad in which they can press a button to respond to a lesson or test. The teacher immediately gets feedback as to how many got the correct answer and knows whether or not they can continue on or if material needs to be re-taught.

If you have not ever visited the school's website, please take time to visit it at [www.gentrypioneers.com](http://www.gentrypioneers.com). Daily announcements, sporting events, calendars, schedules, lunch menus, teacher contacts, etc. can all be found there. This has proven to be an effective way to communicate with parents and students as the site has had over 135,000 hits in the past year. A couple of the newest things available to parents and students include viewing the balance of your lunch account and checking grades on-line (for middle and high school students). You can view your child's balance on their lunch account for free of charge. You may also make payment through the Internet for a 6% charge. Many are taking advantage of this as they don't have to worry about their child losing money and they can put a larger amount on the account if they chose. If you have not set this up, please contact your school to get your student or teacher id. The directions for this program may be found on the school website under the cafeteria section. The program is called EZ School Pay. The middle and high school are now set up for parents and students to view grades on-line. If you have not set your account up and would like to, please contact the middle or high school office to get your "code" to view your child's account.

Technology has definitely changed over the years. The Internet has a lot to offer and has changed our lifestyles. Some of us from the school will be attending an Internet safety forum in a couple of weeks that is sponsored by Senator John Boozman. I think this will be beneficial as this is an ongoing problem everywhere. We hope to continue to provide a safe environment at Gentry Schools not only in the classrooms but in the computer lab as well. I encourage you to be aware of what your child is doing on the computer at home. Technology is everywhere and it has changed the way your child is learning. Be active in your child's education when it comes to technology. Just because you don't understand something on the computer doesn't mean you can't supervise them. Together we can all help prepare our students for the new information age.