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Iowa recognizes importance of assistive technology

Not every student with a disability needs to be placed in a special-education environment. In fact, many don't. Often, just having a few simple and relatively inexpensive technological aids available in the classroom erases learning disadvantages and simplifies teaching.

The challenge becomes teaching the teachers how to use and implement assistive technology effectively. To train these educators, Iowa subscribed to Atomic Learning's Assistive Technology Collection (www.atomic learning.com). This program brings short show-and-tell video tutorials to teachers, allowing them to learn exactly what they need and as time permits. When a teacher finds a need to implement a new assistive technology resource, a one- or two-minute training solution is instantly at hand.

Iowa's consortium of Area Education Agencies has made Atomic Learning available to all teachers, students, and family members in the state of Iowa, 24 hours a day, every day. Access is available through the navigation menu on the Iowa AEA Web site, iowaaeaonline.org, or by going directly to atomiclearning.com.

Top 100 schools for safe searches
The 2008-2009 Safe Search Awards Index, a top 100 national ranking of school districts, was released in September. The award recognizes those school districts that keep students safest when searching online.

For the third year in a row, Forsyth County Schools in suburban Atlanta finished first for the large districts, with over 7.3 million safe searches for the 2008- 2009 school year. For the mid-sized districts, Tangipahoa Parish School System in Louisiana led with 1,875,328 searches, and Austin Public Schools in Minnesota came in first with 675,485 searches among small districts.

The Safe Search Awards Index was administered by netTrekker, provider of digital K-12 educational resources. Each of the top districts will be awarded the equivalent of a $5,000 prize package specifically designed to provide a new 21st-century-learning solution.

Colorado school sees achievement gains with RTI program
In 2004, the Weld RE-9 School District's middle school was placed on Improvement status. Later that year the entire district moved to this status. Sue Ann Highland, a director of federal programs, curriculum, and instruction for the district, evaluated the structure of instruction in the district and found that they needed a deeper focus on data-driven instruction to support their RTI program.

As they searched for a diagnostic assessment tool, they heard about and reviewed Curriculum Associates' DORA—Diagnostic Online Reading Program. DORA met their needs, and they now use DORA to initially diagnose student difficulties in learning and to determine how to change instructional practices to meet these students' needs. They also use DORA as a post-test assessment and use the reporting within the program to track the academic progress of students on an individual, grade, and district level.

Since the implementation of DORA in 2004, the Weld RE-9 School District has seen significant gains in student achievement. By 2007, the district had improved by 114 percentage points on the reading areas of state tests. In addition, both the middle school and the district were removed from Improvement status. Highland credits the district turnaround in large part to DORA.

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