

Digital from 1A

connection is fed by fiber optic cables, which can download at speeds of 100Mbps (megabits per second). And to ensure constant, uninterrupted service throughout the day, wireless connection points have been installed in every elementary school classroom and across the middle and high school campuses.

Mapleton's technological advances may seem starkly different from the childhood classrooms in the memories of many, but this sort of digital induction is hardly the exception, with most schools around Mapleton positioned somewhere on this spectrum.

Downriver, the larger Siuslaw School District also benefits from fiber connections in each school, though much of its infrastructure is older and nearing its limits. A small number of tablets are dispersed among kindergarten, first and second grade, but Chromebook laptops make up the bulk of high-tech handouts for grades three and up.

Around 400 Chromebooks shared district-wide supply a student body of nearly 1,400 in addition to roughly 250 older laptops, the latter of which Siuslaw School District Superintendent Andy Grzeskowiak would like to phase out.

"You can take a Chromebook and put it on a desk and it'll go all day long," he said. "You're only going get four hours out a traditional laptop."

Chromebook laptops, which are simpler, lighter versions of their bulky predecessors and primarily perform functions with the Chrome browser, give students instant access to their assignments and records on the school's servers, boosting the convenience and efficiency of the average school experience.

THE DIGITAL CLASSROOM

Mapleton and Siuslaw are reflective of a national trend toward "digital classrooms," a harmonious immersion of teacher and student school life

into educational technology. Software, hardware, cloud drives, internet access and other high-tech components make up these classrooms as educators work to develop student experiences that increase engagement and adaptability in a digital generation.

The abundance of devices and digital tools at a teacher's disposal can make for creative applications in any class.

Indeed, Mapleton schools find uses for their technology in language arts, social studies and even their farm-to-table class. The access to digital books in itself makes the technology use applicable nearly across the board.

"Basically any reading curriculum has a big online component to it," said O'Mara. "A lot of middle school and high school textbooks are now online. Some districts aren't even purchasing new textbooks because you can purchase them online."

Sarah Timpe, who teaches third and fourth grade in Mapleton Elementary School, finds regular use for devices in her classes. "I've used iPads for the kids recording each other doing projects like writing songs and making commercials to show what they've learned," she said.

Even outside of school, the impact of a digitally integrated classroom becomes apparent. "My sons don't bring textbooks home," Timpe said. "They can get online and get the textbook at home."

A key benefit to integrating modern technology into classrooms is the adaptability it affords various learning methods. In Mapleton, interactive whiteboards at the front of classes augment learning by offering audio, visual and even tactile stimulus — in which objects can be touched and interacted with on the board. Adaptive online programs such as DreamBox boost math skills by tailoring instructions and interactives games to each student's personal progress.

These immersive experiences are an acute contrast to passive learning models of old, which

rightfully bore criticism for their stale, rote-memorization style of education. Newer models present a logical engagement point for a generation that has grown up using smartphones and tablets.

"The kids are definitely interested in the technology," said Timpe. "It's definitely a draw for them. I think especially with the DreamBox math app we have, I've seen a lot of improvement in math skills from use of that."

Some classes are even offered online. Though mainly used for credit recovery and electives rather than primary instruction, they open the door for more case-by-case adaptability. Because smaller districts like Siuslaw and Mapleton don't always have a teacher on staff that specializes in particular electives, online classes can provide students with a wider class selection in subjects such as German or psychology.

Online classes typically consist of two teachers: one in the classroom, who helps facilitate the online lesson and answer questions; and one on the screen, who may be a professor or specialist in the desired field. While some online video lessons can be live depending on the program and online instructor's time zone, most are pre-recorded. Grzeskowiak cites the asynchronous nature of living on the West Coast as the main limitation.

"To time it and do it live is very, very difficult," he said. Even attempts to synchronize Siuslaw and Mapleton lesson hours proved unworkable.

Regardless, the individualization afforded by the lessons makes them valuable tools. In addition to expanding elective choices, students who need extra attention can benefit from these classes.

"Online classes are a great option when you have a kid who transfers into your school," said O'Mara. If a student from another district enrolls with credits that don't map on to their new school's system, online classes can fill gaps and effectively put the new student on track.

MAKING DIGITAL CITIZENS
While both school districts

have embraced the evolution of technology in the classroom, they are also keenly aware that allowing access and exposure to this landscape comes with its caveats.

Overuse of online classes, for example, is a concern for O'Mara.

"For some kids, that works," she said. "And if that's the avenue that they're going to go down in their job skill set when they graduate, I think that's perfect." The danger lies, she says, in swinging the curriculum too heavily in favor of this method in sacrifice of interpersonal interaction.

The troubling overlap of the digital world and social life finds a nesting ground in the increased use of social media, such as Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter, becoming everyday forms of interaction. "It's opened up the number of people that kids can interact with," said O'Mara. "However, I also think it has lessened personal interaction and how kids interact with people in person and the skills that they have to do that."

Understanding body language, social cues and conflict resolution notably all play in to a child becoming a productive member of society and there are concerns the narrow scope of internet interactions may break down social deftness.

How one interacts with the click of a button has a vastly less personal touch to it than face-to-face interaction, but equally significant potential consequences.

According to Grzeskowiak, it needs to be stressed to students that "you can be horrible to somebody at the speed of light and not get that back."

Impressing upon students the ideals of social responsibility goes hand-in-hand with warning them about online dangers. In no uncertain terms, some notoriety of the internet has been earned in cases of unwanted solicitation of

minors and predation. Both school districts recognize the need for educating youths to navigate the internet safely and use their technology responsibly.

In Siuslaw School District, for example, middle school students are treated to an annual "digital citizenship" class, which teaches not only how to use their technology, but how to use it responsibly. Students walk away with a necessary awareness of how to interact with peers and how to spot red flags in internet chatrooms.

Despite these obstacles and potential drawbacks, both superintendents agree it's worth investing in classroom technology.

Grzeskowiak recalls his own advantages as a student in the '70s. "I had a set of encyclopedias at home," he said. "And I had a typewriter. And so I was able to do certain things at home that other kids couldn't."

The peaks and valleys of the educational landscape have long been shaped by the "haves" and "have-nots," and as technology and access to information have scaled through the decades, a singular rule of thumb has remained constant: "If you have access to materials — and it doesn't really matter what that's been over time — you have an advantage," said Grzeskowiak.

Today, the advantage of having a school with up-to-date technology quickly becomes evident when considering the extent to which education is offered online, through devices and on computers.

Convenience, flexibility and speed of access are integral components to both a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to deliver meaningful lessons.

O'Mara agrees that the integration of more digital classrooms is an advantage. "I think the job market is going more technology-based, which allows for more freedom at home and

what your job is," she said. "For Mapleton, that's why we try to give them the exposure at school."

MODERNIZING MAPLETON

The efforts of schools to keep pace with the demands of modernity have long been thematic to the education arena, and Mapleton School District was no exception to this struggle.

Before renovations and upgrades began last year, the district's schools had suffered from a limited, sub-par internet connection.

"Three years ago we had 10 megabytes (per second). Two years ago we upgraded to 20 megabytes," said O'Mara. "And it was slow."

In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission defined "broadband" as a minimum download speed of 25Mbps. A nation-wide policy was thus established, stating that all Americans should have access to this as a minimum standard. Failing to meet this standard in Mapleton schools bore frustrations in the classroom.

With 40 notebook laptops shared between the middle and high schools and another 40 iPads for the elementary school to complement lesson plans, bandwidth became a glaring issue as the schools' internet capabilities often struggled to meet the demands of the classroom technology.

For example, "If all of our iPads were on at the elementary and connected to the internet and a classroom set of [notebooks] tried to connect, it would boot people off," said O'Mara. "It was almost not worth using the technology."

But in May 2016, Mapleton School District's luck began to change.

"We hit the jackpot. We really did," O'Mara said. "It all started

See **DIGITAL 9A**



It's Possible to Own a Home Even with a Modest Income!

Florence Habitat for Humanity

Invites You to Apply!

Information and home ownership applications will be available at each of the listed public meetings. Eligible applicants are those who have lived or worked within the Siuslaw Fire District for at least one year and are legal U. S. residents. For additional information call Florence Habitat for Humanity at 541-902-9227.

Please attend one of the following meetings.


First Meeting
Date and Time:
Tuesday, January 30, 1:30 p.m.

Second Meeting
Date and Time:
Thursday, February 1, 7:00 p.m.

Third Meeting
Date and Time:
Saturday, February 3, 10:00 a.m.


All meetings will be held at the Florence Habitat for Humanity office, 2004 Highway 101, Florence, Oregon






BOYS & GIRLS CLUB
of Western Lane County

1601 15th Street • Florence, OR 97439
541-902-0304
Great Futures Start Here




Volunteer



Florence Food Share provides food to those who are hungry in our community. If you have four hours a week available, we are in need of volunteers to staff our Front Desk and also act as Guides as clients walk through the pantry. Please call our volunteer coordinator, Ivy Medow, @ 541-997-9110 (Monday - Friday, before noon) to learn more about volunteering. info@florence-foodshare.org 2190 Spruce Street.

Get involved


Donate



Florence Habitat for Humanity®

Volunteers needed for new home construction, home repairs, general office work, public relations and program administration. Join an operating committee and help Habitat help others!
Call 541-902-9227 or e-mail to florencehabitat@gmail.com
Office located at 2004 HWY 101, Florence


Do your part and volunteer today to help support these local non-profit organizations in our community!



Volunteer

Assisting those in need in our Community.
Free Hot Meals Mon-Wed-Fri
12:30 AM - 1:30 PM

HELPING HANDS COALITION
New Life Lutheran Church,
2100 Spruce St, next to Foodshare,
Call 541-997-5057 to Volunteer




Get involved

Donate

Join the Peace Harbor Hospital Volunteers. You will find an area of interest in a caring organization.

Peace Harbor Volunteers
400 9th Street, Florence, OR 97439
541-997-8412 ext. 2218




Meals on Wheels are available to people over the age of 60 who cannot get out much due to illness or advanced age and who are not eating properly, regardless of income. Cafe 60 is available for those who prefer to make new friends in a dining room setting.

SENIOR MEALS PROGRAM
Offering Café 60 & Meals On Wheels

1570 Kingwood • PO Box 2313, Florence
541-997-5673
lanesenior-meals.org
Operating Monday, Wednesday and Friday

To include your organization in this directory, please call us @ 541-997-3441



Saving men one PSA test at a time.
541-997-6626
maribob@oregonfast.net
Someone to talk to... who understands!