Schools try to stay abreast of technological advances

By Bettina Thiel

Editor

ORANGE — The Orange Board of Education Technology Committee met at the Racebrook Elementary School library to start a discussion about technology issues facing the elementary schools.

They began by taking a look at the educational outcome the elementary schools would be striving for, and to address that question they invited middle school Principal Kathleen Cutler.

In her presentation, Cutler touched on three areas where middle school teachers would like to see improvements.

Not all students who start middle school in seventh grade are able to perform basic functions, such as saving a document properly, manipulating e-mail or digital pictures, and other skills students need to successfully use computers during the school day. Cutler said students come with varying degrees of exposure to technology outside of school, and that leads to inconsistency in the computer skills they bring to the classroom.

She also touched on teaching children good citizenship and extending it to online behavior. Creating "an awareness of their personal digital footprints" is essential in this day and age, she said.

"People think when you erase something it's gone," she said, but that is not necessarily so.

Citizenship education would include an acceptable use policy as well as teaching respect for the technology and for other users, and caring for the installation itself.

Another of Cutler's concerns was the need for students to learn proper research and

Technology—

Continued from page one

citation techniques early on. If they do not, students are more likely to resort to online plagiarism and forgery. She said basic research skills need to be taught with more consistency across the schools. Students need to learn how to evaluate a Web site, how to make an electronic bibliography, and how to cite sources.

The Technology Committee, consisting of board members Jeff Cap and Scott Massey, thought to address these issues by creating standards of technology skills for students that would reduce or eliminate this inconsistency. Adaptive technology skills would also be taught to students who have difficulty with technology.

Technology is beginning to embed itself in the educational process, Cutler said in a telephone interview after the meeting. Students use Moodle to check up on assignments, and paper report cards soon will be a thing of the past. Cutler, like many other elementary school principals, is sending out weekly notices to parents and teachers.

Superintendent Tim James said the board is trying to look at all aspects of the technology program, including professional development and the equipment itself.

The logistical problem they are now facing is that the district does not have a full-time IT person in the elementary schools. It is up to library-media specialists or the classroom teachers to introduce children to the appropriate use of computers. But there is no formal program or curriculum.

Maxwell Antonucci contributed to this report