



## Videoconferencing: Going beyond the classroom without leaving school

By Larry Nagengast

March 29, 2012

Cape Henlopen High School students have visited the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland and the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Va., this year.

William Penn High School journalism students interviewed a former Fox News producer who made her mark professionally while embedded with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne in Iraq.

Smyrna Middle School students got a behind-the-scenes look at operations at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Students at elementary schools in Smyrna and New Castle broadened their horizons by dropping in on classrooms in Texas and Mississippi.

On the map, these trips covered hundreds of miles, but the students never had to leave their buildings. Each of these field trips was of the virtual variety, made possible through videoconferencing.

The technology, no longer magical in the corporate world, is still something of a novelty in Delaware public schools.

Cape Henlopen High School, in a building that opened in August 2010, is considered the leader among the state's public schools in using videoconferencing to enhance instruction, according to Randy Reynolds, customer relationship specialist in the state Department of Technology and Information, and Wayne Hartschuh, director of the Delaware Center for Educational Technology, a branch of the state Department of Education.

At one end of the school's library are two screens set up for videoconferencing. One screen shows a webcam view of the students, about 50 this morning in mid-March, seated in a semicircle, their eyes fixed on the second screen, linked to the [Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame](#).

Students listened intently to the museum's presentation, a program on rock music from the 1960s and early 1970s that reflected the social issues of the era — civil rights, women's rights, the war in Vietnam. Studying the music of the era "is a beautiful way to show what was going on in the '60s," teacher Gail Mack said.

After each video clip — music by the Temptations, Jefferson Airplane, Aretha Franklin and Buffalo Springfield — presenter Stephanie Heriger questioned the students on the social issues referred to in each selection. Most of the time, she was able to recognize students raising their hands to answer. When she could not, the teachers helped out. The audio connection was consistently crisp and clear.

Student Michele Bahtiarian pronounced the videoconferencing "cool." She said she liked the idea that she could "go on a field trip and not leave the comfort of our school."

Videoconferencing should make teaching easier, she said, because teachers can now connect their classes with experts in the topics covered in the curriculum.

"It has enhanced our program tremendously," said Mack, who used a videoconference with the [Mariners' Museum](#) in November to supplement a social studies unit on exploration.

Having the videoconferencing equipment has energized the teaching staff, said Lori Roe, instructional technology specialist for the Cape Henlopen School District. "A lot of these teachers had been in a routine teaching mode. [With videoconferencing,] they became excited about teaching again," she said. Enthusiastic teachers are now "looking for forward-thinking, enriching learning experiences that take students beyond classroom walls."

Social studies and science classes are the most frequent users of the videoconferencing system, but the school is working to make teachers in all subjects aware of the possibilities, Cape Henlopen Principal Brian Donahue said.

He is especially intrigued by the possibility of using videoconferencing to offer additional foreign language options, especially for languages that might not draw enough student interest to justify hiring a fulltime teacher. Videoconferencing may eventually allow students access to college-level classes, he said.

Unlike Cape Henlopen, with its own videoconferencing unit at the high school, most districts make only occasional use of videoconferencing, and they do so by borrowing portable units from their state offices, Reynolds and Hartschuh said.

After frequently borrowing the state's videoconferencing units, the Colonial School District is now buying its own, said Phil Smallwood, the district's information technology manager. "We've bought one [for about \$7,000] and might get two or three more."

Lisa Mims, a fifth-grade teacher at Pleasantville Elementary School, has used videoconferencing in multiple ways. Through a program called [Global Read Aloud](#), she connected her class with one in Hattiesburg, Miss., that was reading the same book as a class assignment. On another occasion, after the class read a story about a marine biologist, she used Skype to conduct a conversation with a marine biology student.

"It gives me another way to get messages to my students, and it opens up the world to them," she said.

She also does "mystery Skypes," when a class in another part of the country calls in and gives clues and students have to guess where the callers are located. Through this program, her class has connected with schools in Mississippi, Arizona and Nevada, she said.

After her journalism students read a textbook profile of former Fox News producer Maya Zumwalt, William Penn High School journalism teacher Debbie Lindeke assigned her students to write questions they would ask if they could interview Zumwalt. Rather than merely grade the homework assignment, Lindeke tracked down Zumwalt at her current job and arranged for the students to interview her via videoconference.

Zumwalt's own story is fascinating, going beyond her experiences as a war correspondent in Iraq. Her grandfather, Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt, was chief of naval operations, during the Vietnam War and ordered the use of the defoliant Agent Orange. Her father, Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., was exposed to Agent Orange while serving in Vietnam, contracted a form of cancer from the exposure and died when she was 13.

"It was a great experience. I'd do it again," Lindeke said.

Experiences like those prompted Colonial to buy the videoconferencing equipment, Smallwood said. "If we have the equipment in-house and advertise its availability to teachers, they will search for people they can reach out to" and enhance their lessons, he said.

Like Donahue at Cape Henlopen, Smallwood said videoconferencing could be used to offer high school students access to classes at the University of Delaware and Delaware Technical Community College.

Colonial has also used videoconferencing for staff development programs, saving the expense of bringing in consultants from out of state to train teachers and administrators, he said.

The Smyrna School District has a portable videoconferencing unit that Katie Wood, the district's instructional technology specialist, moves from school to school as lessons are scheduled. The middle school recently used a state unit to enable students to talk to scientists at the Philadelphia Zoo in advance of a field trip there. First-grade classes that had read the popular "Flat Stanley" book used videoconferencing to talk about the book with students in other states. "They learned about geography, climate and social interaction," Wood said.

The Red Clay Consolidated School District has [outpaced most of its peers, opening distance learning classrooms in two high schools last fall](#), with plans to add more in the next two years. "Red Clay has done a really nice job. That seems to have gone over well," said Hartschuh.

He said Delaware probably ranks "somewhere in the middle" among states using videoconferencing in schools. Iowa and Alabama, both with vast rural areas, have extensive telecommunications networks to deliver diverse course offerings to smaller communities, he said.

Advocates like Roe and Wood would like to see one videoconferencing unit in each school, but Hartschuh said there has been no broad push in that direction, nor has there been any discussion of how much it might cost. “If it’s something we decide we really need to do, then you find a way to get the money,” he said.

Such inspiration might not be far down the road. The state is starting to use videoconferencing for some meetings of superintendents and other top school officials, saving travel time and expense, Hartschuh said.

“If superintendents start to look at it, and they like it,” he said, “it has a better chance of getting into the classrooms.”

- See more at: <http://www.wdde.org/24578-videoconference-beyond-classroom-without-leaving-school#sthash.KrasbqJ7.dpuf>



## Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame sees growing interest in virtual field trips

By Larry Nagengast

March 29, 2012

As more schools turn to videoconferencing to enhance lesson plans and replace field trips, more museums and other institutions around the country are offering programs and classes for students through live video.

The Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame started videoconferencing in 2005, education coordinator John Goehrke said. On-site lessons have been a staple at the Cleveland museum since it opened in 1995. Recognizing that its programs might be of interest beyond northeast Ohio, the hall of fame used video technology to expand its reach.

Since 2005, the hall of fame has made about 1,600 video connections, reaching about 45,000 students in 46 states and countries. Goehrke said the current programming mix, about 500 offerings a year, is almost equally divided between on site and videoconferencing.

“Many of the students we connect with have never visited— and will never visit — the museum,” Goehrke said.

“Video numbers are growing rapidly. That’s consistent with school budget cuts. It’s easier to do a one-hour videoconference with us,” he said. “There’s no travel, you don’t lose any instructional time.”

And, he added, classes are developed to align with national, regional and state education standards.

The Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame is hardly alone in offering educational content through videoconferencing. The [Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration](#), a nonprofit clearinghouse used by the Cape Henlopen School District and others, has a catalog of lessons from about 225 sources, including the Smithsonian, the National Archives, Mount Vernon, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Baseball Hall of Fame, and two smaller venues close to Delaware, Fort

Mifflin on the Delaware, scene of a Revolutionary War battle, and Pennsbury Manor, a reconstruction of William Penn's home north of Philadelphia.

With videoconferencing, "we can go places we couldn't afford to go to, or have the time to go to," said Katie Wood, instructional technology specialist in the Smyrna School District. "And we save the cost involved in field trips, not to mention all the background time in planning the trip," including collecting permission slips and trip fees, she said.

**- See more at: <http://www.wdde.org/24613-rock-and-roll-hall-virtual-field-trips#sthash.EnLoEB7x.dpuf>**