



# Spotlight

Acton Public Schools & Acton-Boxborough Regional School District    Technology Integration & Instruction Newsletter    Volume 1 November 2007

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## AlphaSmart Neos

AlphaSmart devices have been used throughout the district for many years. A favorite with teachers and students alike, this compact keyboard has proven to be a powerful tool for engaging students and enhancing their writing skills.



An upgraded version of the Alphasmart keyboard, called the Neo, represents a versatile, cost-effective way for students to have more advanced one-to-one computing time across several grade levels.

Over the past two years APS has acquired nine Neo Carts. Each cart contains 30 Neo machines, a hub, and a simple laptop computer which allows a teacher to

## MassCue

We attended Massachusetts Computer Using Educators Conference November 14th and 15th. The conference offers an opportunity to find out how educators are implementing technology in their schools.

Wednesday's keynote speaker, [Alan November](#), an international expert in technology in education, spoke of *Cultivating a World-Class Work Ethic*. Mr. November's enthusiasm and belief in student abilities was evident as he outlined ways to help students become independent learners that will be prepared for the next century.

Thursday's keynote speaker, [Marco Torres](#), a social studies teacher in San Fernando, CA., spoke of using multimedia for *Making Meaning of the World*. Mr. Torres shared some of the amazing work his students are producing as he spoke of ways to help *all* students become more vested in their education.

There were many interesting sessions, of particular note:

- "The Brookline"Book Review Podcasting Project" encompassed the major themes of the conference and those emphasized by the keynote speakers, Alan November and Marco

communicate simultaneously with all of the Neos in the cart. The Tii department has been working with teachers and students to introduce some of the features of these "laptops:"

**Touch Typing:** Each Neo comes loaded with Keywords software, a self-paced touch-typing program. Students work independently to complete the Keywords typing lessons, and the classroom teacher can gather reports for all students and monitor how each student is progressing.

**Writing:** The Neos come loaded with writing templates, writing prompts, and other writing exercises, as well as assessment rubrics and quizzes. The TII department is training teachers on how to utilize these features, as well as how to create and give custom tests, such as spelling or vocabulary quizzes. Teachers can create a quiz on the laptop and download it to all Neos; after students take the quiz, the Neo management software will automatically grade the quiz and generate reports.

We are just beginning to scratch the surface of how these machines can be of use within the curriculum but the response from the teachers and the students has been very positive, as evidenced by the comments below:

- "We're typing and writing memoirs on the Neos. The kids love them and they are really helping us to move more quickly through writing projects. Having one per student helps a great deal."  
Kate Fitzmaurice, Grade 5 teacher, McT
- "I like that they can be used in the classroom (as opposed to the lab) and that each student can have one." Jean

Torres: critical thinking, contributing to the wealth of information-leaving a legacy, and the need for an authentic audience.

Marco Torres' statement that (student) "Work must have wings" also illustrates the importance of using students' social (technology) abilities to address the themes of the conference and the skills necessary for the twenty-first century.

We are in the "Conceptual age" and the big question now is what are we going to do with all of the information readily available at our fingertips? One idea put forth was to, "Create, Collaborate, Celebrate."

"- Deborah Bookis

- "This is my second year attending the MassCUE Conference and I have really gained so many different ideas about the use of technology in the classroom. I am amazed and excited about the technology tools that support learning and I now know it is vital to be teaching students, as young as possible, the proper skills for utilizing technology in their learning and lives."  
-Karen Sonner, Grade 2 teacher, Merriam
- " I enjoyed the Podcasting and Book Review seminar. I liked the idea of taking a broad innovative technology and linking it directly to a specific curriculum idea. Deborah also participated in this seminar and maybe she has some additional ideas. "  
-Robyn Harding, Grade 5 teacher, Conant

Oviatt, Grade 4 teacher, McT

- “Having the Neos has alleviated some incredible writing stress for two of my students and has been a real blessing to us all. We LOVE them.
- I like the ease of having one per child. I like being able to access the files with the laptop or external drive.
- My kids love them; they ask for them when they are not in our room. One student in particular who has had a very serious problem getting his words on paper has had tremendous success and relief by using the Neo; less anxiety about revising or committing a thought to paper.” Karen Shiebler, Grade 5 teacher, McT
- “We, the fifth grade team, use the Neo's for writer's workshop and to support other writing activities and curriculum areas like social studies and science. Sometimes the Neo's open with an applet, without telling it to, and it can take a while to figure out how to get a "file" to open instead. Overall, the kids AND the teachers really love them and we use them often.” Robyn Harding, Grade 5 teacher, Conant

## Professional Development

Professional Development Day 2007:  
Promoting School Safety within a Positive  
School Culture and Climate

Promoting safe schools and responding to cyberbullying were the topics covered during keynote addresses during November's Professional Development Day. Richard W. Cole, a nationally known civil rights attorney and former Civil Rights Division Chief in Massachusetts, discussed the issues of harassment, bullying, and hate crimes in schools. [Dr. Elizabeth Englander](#), a nationally recognized expert in the field of cyberbullying, spoke to the staff about how online life has impacted the social life and social problems of today's children.

Both presentations generated thoughtful discussions and gave staff a better understanding of the importance of these timely topics.

The TII department has started an [on-line discussion group](#) (blog) where staff can continue these conversations.

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