

Student engagement was the impetus behind Sandy Simms' PDAF project, *Tech Up @ Oceanview*. Through the use of technology in conjunction with conventional instruction and electronic media, "I wanted to increase student engagement throughout the learning process, to better meet students' needs by motivating learning, fostering independence and simplifying communication for students," says Simms.

Through the project, junior high students at Oceanview Education Centre in Glace Bay are getting hands-on technology access to acquire learning outcomes in the Grade 8 math and science curriculum. Through a grant of \$4,475, Simms purchased 27 Android tablets, Bell Aliant Learning Centre access for 560 students, external drives for storage, surge protected power bars and other storage drives. The Grade 8 science and math teacher has enabled students in each of his five classes to be engaged with texts and video content relevant to the curriculum using the tablets and supporting materials. "The materials have been infused throughout the math and science curriculum, but will become a natural extension of any in-class exploration of all study areas," he says.

Simms, a former coal miner, now in his 12th year of teaching has been integrating technology into his core

subjects on a regular basis, and with the PDAF grant he has been able to make it an integral part of his teaching and learning environment. "Using technology to deliver, manage and guide students through the learning process is no longer an optional approach in educating students but an essential element for all students, regardless of their abilities."

What he loves about using the tablets and associated materials in his teaching is an added element in meeting all students' needs. "The beauty of this system is the ability to differentiate instruction in a confidential and non-threatening manner," he comments.

The use of tablets, software and Internet assets in his classroom has also helped to further create a working environment that encourages working together. "It also encourages the exchange of ideas on the student to student and student to teacher level," he adds. He has allowed students to explore a variety of electronic texts, written, visual and video connected to the curriculum that not only connect with science and math, but also outcomes in English Language Arts and Communication Technology. "This project also helps parents communicate and participate more in their child's education."

Simms has already seen success with this project. "If students seek out opportunities to integrate technology to assist with their learning, I've been



Oceanview Education Centre teacher Sandy Simms is shown with students in his Grade 8 Science class.

successful," he comments. "Thus far, the interactive learning process for both my math and science classes has been excellent due to the increased interest on the part of the students."

He says the learning curve was very fast and his students rose to the challenge. "They like it, it motivates them." Each Monday, students can livestream assignments and homework that is due at the end of each week. Students can do this at home as well, and have a better opportunity to catch up, if they've missed class time.

Not only is Simms thrilled with the increase in student engagement and students taking more charge of their own learning, but he's also greatly reduced paper in his classroom through

the *Tech Up @ Oceanview* project. "I've virtually done away with paper in my science classes."

The PDAF program encourages innovative program development in Nova Scotia's public schools. Co-sponsored by the NSTU and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with an annual sum of \$200,000, it provides financial support for projects directly related to the Public School Program. For more information visit the Professional Development portal of the NSTU website at www.nstu.ca or contact NSTU executive staff officer Betty-Jean Aucoin at 1-800-565-6788 or 477-5621 or bjaucoin@nstu.ca or pd@nstu.ca.

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