

Technology Tools Extend KDT Learning

By Randi Beckman
and Mya Thompson

This is the latest in a series of articles about Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca in recognition of the organization's 10th anniversary.

Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca (KDT) is a unique program that brings all pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade children in the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) on educational field trips to one of the eight Discovery Trail sites each school year. Teachers regularly use technology tools to extend KDT's place-based learning in powerful ways.

One of strengths of the KDT model is its power to connect students from across the district before they get to middle school. For each field trip, classrooms from different schools pair up, ride the same bus, and spend the day learning together.

The goal is for students to get to know children from other geographic and cultural parts of the community so when they meet in ICSD middle schools there is more understanding, respect and connection. For example, students from the rural Caroline Elementary School often go on trips with students from downtown's Beverly J. Martin Elementary School.

Social sharing software is helping spark these connections even before the students line up for the bus on field trip day. "It's fun to do something like iChat, Skype, or use video messaging so the kids actually get to see and hear each other before meeting in person for the first time," says Ryan Harrington, a

first-grade teacher at Cayuga Heights Elementary School.

Belle Sherman Elementary kindergarten teacher Jill Hellerman videotaped her students introducing themselves to their buddy class using a program called Voicethread. For some students these sessions are their first introduction to video technology. Hellerman's buddy class not only delighted in seeing their buddies before the shared field trip, but were able to get a glimpse of their classroom including toys, a typical class snack, and the field filled with deer behind the school.

All pre-K students visit the Johnson Art Museum at Cornell—and for many this is their first visit to any museum. To help students hone in on what to look for when there, classroom teachers and museum educators give the students previews to familiarize them with artifacts and the museum itself. Susan Zehnder, one of the educators at the Johnson, says, "Size matters! During visits to Pre-K classrooms, docents use a digital tablet to share images of their upcoming KDT trip including images of school busses, the museum building, museum guards, and art."

In addition, Zehnder says, "Seeing the actual art has an immediate and powerful impact on the students as it can be larger or smaller than imagined or even three-dimensional. Technology helps us link their imagined field trip experience to their actual experience."

Teachers also use technology to ensure that special needs students have access to new learning oppor-



First-grade students at Belle Sherman Elementary School research dinosaurs on PebbleGo.com before their KDT trip to the Museum of the Earth.

tunities on KDT trips. Kathleen Downes, apPre-K teacher at Caroline Elementary School, describes one way she has helped young students with autism better participate in museum activities. "One three-year-old child uses an iPad specifically for communication. We have been able to add museum images and vocabulary to his 'talker' and he is able to join in classroom discussions about our trip using the iPad." These students are now more actively engaged in projects because the technology tools are a seamless part of their learning process.

The ICSD has made iPads and smartboards readily available to

students and teachers. Many teachers make use of interactive games on their classroom smart boards. Mihal Ronen, a second grade teacher at Fall Creek Elementary, created a game to help students find carbon, hydrogen and oxygen molecules to reinforce concepts taught at the Sciencenter.

Teachers also use technology tools to expand on field trip experiences. Fourth-grade students spend a day at the Eight Square Schoolhouse. They dress up in clothes from the late 1800s and spend the day being taught by a strict school marm, practicing penmanship using ink pens, and

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City

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have in the city, and is one of the biggest tourist attractions within city limits.”

Martell notes that the city is taking steps to improve the Lake Street park near Ithaca Falls. “So it’s very timely to also protect that whole ring around the gorge. If you look at the map, the natural area goes beyond city limits, through county-owned and Cornell-owned natural area land. If we do retain these parcels, there’s the opportunity to connect that land to a much wider natural area,” she says.

Martell supports designating the parcel in question as park land. “Even though our natural areas legislation is good and would give it some protection, that is something that could be revoked by council at any time,” she says. “And there’s no requirement for offering substitute or replacement of that land. Because this is such a sensitive and high-profile area, if it were designated park land, that’s something that can only be revoked by the state legislature, so it is certainly a much more protective long-term designation.”

The issue will be discussed at Common Council’s Planning and Development Committee meeting on Wednesday, May 13, at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, and by Common Council at its meeting on Wednesday, June 3, at 6 p.m. at City Hall. Comments may also be sent via email to all 10 council members, and the mayor, at council@city-ofithaca.org.

“This is an opportunity for the city to think about ways to enhance the attractiveness of that area. This all needs some thought, and rush-

ing to a decision on whether or not to sell to the highest bidder is not the best way to approach it. We need to take the time for the public to comment and get engaged in the process of thinking about this,” Hoffman says.

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playing traditional games of the time period.

Tara Caiza, a fourth-grade teacher at Belle Sherman, invites her students to write blog entries about their predictions of how the day will go and then reflect after the experience. “In the past we have also taken photos from the day and made them into a book. This year we will be making an e-book using Book Creator because we now have iPads,” she says.

KDT has prompted teachers to develop new applications of technology to strengthen student learning. In turn new opportunities are now available for ICSD students to use technology. ICSD Director of Technology Dominick Lissi notes, “Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca is a fantastic opportunity for our students, providing them with both an immersive and transformative, hands-on experience. I’m thrilled that KDT has been a springboard for innovative uses of technology.”

Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca is a partnership of the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), Ithaca City School District (ICSD), and the Discovery Trail. Every one of the 2,900 students in the ICSD’s eight elementary schools has experiences each year that coordinate with their grade level learning goals with one of the eight world-class venues of the Discovery Trail: Cayuga Nature Center, Cornell Lab

of Ornithology, Cornell Plantations, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Museum of the Earth at PRI (Paleontological Research Institute), Sciencenter, The History Center in Tompkins County, and Tompkins County Public Library. For more information, visit www.ipei.org.

Randi Beckmann, is KDT Teacher Liaison and a Belle Sherman Elementary School first-grade teacher. Mya Thompson is a KDT Parent Liaison and eLearning Specialist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Legislature

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sparkling devices in restricted periods during the year. The action did not approve a local option to allow the devices to be excluded from the “Dangerous Fireworks” definition under New York State Penal Law. Voting against the proposed law were Glenn Morey, Robertson, Nate Shinagawa, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, Burbank and Dan Klein.

Emergency services officials, including Ithaca Fire Chief Tom Parsons and County Director of Emergency Response Lee Shurtleff, have expressed their concern about the safety of the devices, both from their use and to responders related to their storage. Parsons urged opposition to the measure prior to the vote, and Stein, Robertson and Burbank all spoke out against it, referencing the potential safety concerns. Dennis pointed out that sparklers re already available locally, and Chairman Mike Lane, who voted in favor, said he is particularly concerned about confusion created by the county-by-county approach required by the state.

Tribute to Stuart Stein

The legislature passed a resolution in honor of former County Board of Representatives member Stuart Stein, who died last June and was remembered at a memorial service on May 3. The measure pays tribute to Stein and his many contributions to the community through public service, including nearly two decades on the Board of Representative (now the County Legislature), including as chairman from 1994-1996.

The resolution notes that Stein served the entire county through recommendations and guidance leading to development of the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit and creation of a Tompkins County Poet Laureate. The resolution acknowledges Stein’s “selfless dedication, commitment, and foresight” to the residents of Tompkins County.

In other business, lawmakers approved a resolution supporting establishment of a vessel waste no-discharge zone for Cayuga Lake, Seneca Lake and the Seneca River, and related determination of adequate pumpout facilities.

It supports a state petition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a determination that adequate facilities for safe and sanitary removal and treatment of sewage from all vessels are reasonably available so that the state may completely prohibit discharge of sewage from all vessels into those waters.

The EPA has determined pumpout facilities adequate, including at least six on Cayuga Lake, and has invited public comment on its proposed determination by May 18.



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