

MONTAUK

Taking a Look at ClassLink

By Janis Hewitt

The Montauk School Board is considering a pitch made on Jan. 26 to link students to their classroom computers “anywhere, anytime” through a server program provided by ClassLink. According to a representative from the company, it would provide around-the-clock access to instructional software from any computer in the school, at home, or at the public library.

The link would, in addition, help the Montauk School become more environmentally friendly by minimizing assignments on paper, Jonathan Kertesz told school board members last week. It would also allow board members to review minutes, the treasurer’s report, and enrollment reports online.

Mr. Kertesz told school board members that the link would allow students and teachers to work on a server through the school’s Web site. Students who take long winter vacations could access classwork through an Internet connection. Students who are out sick could follow class and homework assignments on the computer, he said.

Mr. Kertesz told the board that the program would end the “dog ate my homework” syndrome by having students save their work to the school’s server. “When the student goes home, it’s the same application as at the school,” he said.

At the presentation, Rachel Kleinberg, the school librarian, and Rick White, the school’s technology expert, said they supported the program. Mr. White said it would remove barriers for students who do not have computers at home.

“They would no longer need state-of-the-art service,” he said. “I’ve never encouraged a kid to take a junky computer, but now I will,” he said, since any student with Internet access could connect to ClassLink.

Often, when the school buys new computers it makes the older ones available to students who do not already have one. "It's a giant way to bridge the gap from the haves and the have-nots," Ms. Kleinberg said.

Teachers would be able to grade essays online and also edit classwork. A teacher could also share a screen with a student to make it easier for the student to see what they are doing.

"It's all on the system. There's no more need to print out. It gives teachers more capabilities," Mr. Kertesz said.

One aspect the board did not like was that the program documents each student's name and the time logged in. School officials could at any time pull up the program to see who had been using it and for how long. "That's kind of scary," Diane Hausman, the board president, said.

Although there are over 300 students enrolled in the school, the initial proposal calls for 120 "seats," meaning that only 120 students would have access to the program at one time. Mr. White and Ms. Kleinberg pointed out, however, that students in the lower grades, such as kindergarten and prekindergarten, would not be using it.

The cost to link 120 computers to the program would be about \$60,000, with another \$27,000 for recommended hardware and software tools. Any work not covered by the ClassLink protection plan agreement would be billed at \$125 to \$250 per hour, plus travel costs for server-related work.

Board members decided to table discussion about it until their first budget meeting on March 9. If the school agrees to purchase ClassLink, it would be the only one on the South Fork to do so, as the nearest one using the program is in Deer Park, Mr. Kertesz said.

"We'd be on the cutting edge," Ms. Hausman said.

In other school news, the board granted tenure to Laura Cutillo in art education. Ms. Cutillo was tenured in 2000 in elementary education.

At a meeting on Jan. 13, board members "reluctantly" accepted a notice of retirement from Ines Fox, a teaching assistant for 30 years who has helped to bring Hispanic children into the school community.

"She has been a major contributor to this school," said Jack Perna, the superintendent.