The High School of Commerce

Technology Tips

Big Brother is watching???

There have been many advances in the field of surveillance and the ways that we monitor the safety of the halls in our schools. Reading through many of the technology journals these days, at least one of the articles that's making the headlines is an in-depth examination of these emerging technologies. Now, I can hear you saying, "What's he telling us about this for? We'll never see any of that here at Commerce". Don't bet on it. Many of the advances that are coming in the form of video surveillance are actually very applicable to quite a few of the situations happening here at Commerce and around the city.

With larger schools like we have here in Springfield, especially at the middle and high school levels,

video surveillance is almost certain to be a first step in the monitoring of entrances and exits from the buildings. Considering also the nature of "smart" technology that's being developed to **actually interpret** the images that are being filmed, it wouldn't be beyond the realm of possibility to expect these sorts of systems being deployed in buildings like Commerce or other schools.

According to "**Surveillance cameras get smarter** . *New 'intelligent' video technology could alert school officials to potential threats before they occur* From eSchool News staff and wire service reports", some of the equipment could be used for the express purpose of monitoring the doorways, hallways, and other areas where illegal activity is occurring. Using specific software packages they

could then alert administration and the proper authorities as incidents are happening the same way that surveillance teams in Iraq are being helped with identifying suspicious individuals and habitual offenders with facial recognition tools. And here you thought those ID badge pictures were just for the plastic thing hanging around on your lanyard didn't you?
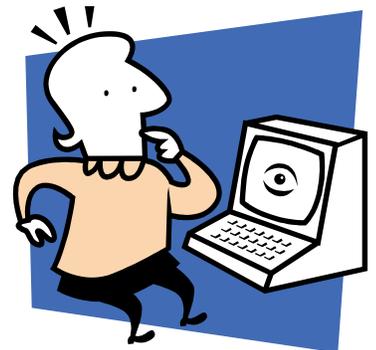
Citation Resources...

Since this is the time of the year when most of our kids are running around trying to scramble and throw things together for that final research paper, we have to think about their sources cited and what method they're using. Do they use APA in Medical Science and MLA in English? That's enough to make some of them crazy (if they aren't already).

But there's help! While they still have to come up with the references, putting them together in the proper format is a whole lot easier considering we have a handy-dandy technological type aid.

Citation Machine

Our resident ELA ILS Mrs. Begley-Musiak gave me that one. On the site that's linked above, you can find all the variations of the cita-

tion method your students might want to use are there. It's a good way to make certain that the proper credit for material is given in the research papers that are a natural requirement in all of the content areas.

In addition to the link here, you can find it on the High School of Commerce's Links page under

General Teacher Resources

Plagiarism...

I'm not sure about how every individual feels about someone taking their work and claiming it as their own, but I can say I get just a bit miffed if I'm not given the credit I'm due. I have absolutely no problem at all if someone uses my stuff, but give me a little shout out as it were.

This is a very large problem we're running into here. Our students are using the Internet and taking things directly from there and doing the old "cut

> *"It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."*
>
> **Mark Twain**

and paste", then claiming the work is theirs. According to the folks at **Plagiarism.org**

"74% of students admitted that at least once during the past school year they had engaged in "serious" cheating"

This is unacceptable. both from an academic standpoint and a moral one. It shows a lack of ethical behavior that is astoundingly jaded and bleak. While there are a few things the nuns used to cure with a ruler and a few good whacks across the knuckles, this problem is well beyond that I think.

The first thing you can do is type a sentence into Google and hit enter. You'll get back anything that looks even remotely like what you've typed in (generally the whole document).

Of course, that's just one step in an ever expanding arsenal of programs that are being developed to combat what is becoming an epidemic of massive proportions. There are

many software solutions (EVE2, GPTeach, among others) that will certainly help with finding out who is cheating (that's really what it is, so why not call a rose a rose?). The thing is, the problem will still exist. We will have only controlled the symptom of a larger problem.

While technology can help control many of the problems we have with unethical behavior, it is still left up to us, the fallible creatures that we are, to deal with the causes of the issues. The only answers that we can come up with then have to be based on common sense and what our own moral compass points us to.

Electronic Devices...

This one's a no-brainer folks. There are some people who had the great idea to propose a ban on things like cell phones. This might seem like an odd bit for the Technology Tips newsletter here, but ...I swear I'll bring it all around.

Originally **all** electronic devices were banned. Then, when some folks realized the importance of having devices like cell phones, they re-made the rule to reflect the times. You could have a cell phone if you registered it with the office and kept it off and away during school hours. A pretty fair compromise I'd say. Kids wanted it, families wanted it, the votes

were tallied and the motion passed as it were. There wasn't actually a vote, or even a public forum. Someone had an idea, talked about it with a few other someones and made a decision. That wasn't really all that hard except for the fact that some folks weren't pleased with the call the "someones" made. You can't please everyone I suppose.

Fast forward a bit to where the rule is implemented. It was and wasn't all at the same time. Again, not all that surprising considering the aforementioned displeasure of some individuals. But, that being said, none of this matters. A rule is a rule. If you don't like it, get the rule changed if you can, but follow it until you do.

The School Committee recently voted to re-instate the ban on electronic devices. People were screaming for it. Kids are using cells for purposes other than emergencies with a casual disregard. That's a fact. The privilege to have the cells has been abused not by a misunderstood minority of students, but by a majority of the students that carry them. The consequence of that disregard is the loss of the privilege. If there were no phones in classrooms and offices the safety issues raised would be valid. But there are phones available in schools for true emergencies, that argument is, and should be, a non-issue, like the ban of devices that cause distractions to the educational process in schools.

StarQuiz!!!

This program is awesome! I'm going to suspend my normal rule of not really jumping the gun and recommending something the district hasn't piloted yet and give you folks a full blown 10 out of 10 recommendation for this program from Cosmicsoft. For a complete description of the sorts of things you can do, go to their site by clicking

StarQuiz

I've used the program for about 4 years now, but the newest version of the software is really cool and **very** user friendly. The improvements have given it a better look and feel, not to mention made it much easier to manipulate in terms of adding stuff to the quizzes (if you go to the site above, you'll find out all about the nifty features that you can use to make the testing process more of a multimedia experience).

One of the things I love about this program, even more so than the stuff I've already mentioned, is its interface with the Gradekeeper program so that grades are just a point and click away from being recorded and averaged. No writing it in and having to apply some arcane formula to get my students grades to the office before I rip my hair out in disgust after realizing I should have paid more attention in my math classes in high school. Doesn't get much better than that does it? Yes. It does get better.

Another of the really cool features of the program is the fact that you can break down the results for the class on a question by question basis. This is particularly important considering the current nature of our data driven profession. Essentially you can use the types of question you assess to follow up on the information based on MCAS results. Knowing what to focus on, you can give the students an advantage by working on their weaknesses and strengths in practical ways without all the (ahem) rubbish that's not tailored to meet your kid's needs.

All in all, I'd say this one is well within the "something to check out" area.

> *"Grief can take care of itself, but to get the full value of a joy you must have somebody to divide it with."*
>
> **Mark Twain**

And so gentle readers...

Generally in this section of the Tech Tips, I go off on a bit of a rant that's kind of fun to do and funny to read because the sarcasm generally flows pretty well. I don't feel like that today though. Last night we had to say goodbye to a member of our family. She had been declining over the last couple of years due to bad hips, eyes, and other issues I can only guess at.

As you've probably guessed by the picture at the right of this article, the member of our family (Terry and mine) was our Chocolate Labrador, Breighty. It wasn't unexpected or anything like that, because we knew the day was coming for some time now. That doesn't make the loss any less painful even though we'll try to get by without too many tears or sadness (yeah right).
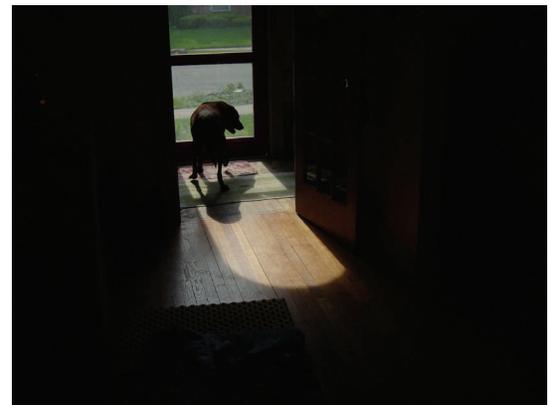
I'll be remembering a thousand little things for a while I suppose. Not seeing her on the loveseat looking out the window when I come downstairs in the morning, not wondering whether to let her or Odie (our other Chocolate Lab) out first in the morning, hearing her bark as I came in the door from work (kinda like Dino on the Flintstones) or having her come and nudge me when it was time to feed her in the morning, giving her Scooby Snacks at Christmastime, getting into bed at night and finding her already there and not willing at all to move over (although when she did, it was nice and warm), drooling on me whenever she got a drink from her water bowl no matter where I was sitting at the kitchen table, it was all Breighty

Terry and Andrea (Terry's daughter) were talking about the day they brought her home from the puppy mill of a store in the Holyoke Mall and how she climbed right into the back window of the car and continued to ride there until she got stuck and couldn't ride there anymore because she got too big.

This was the same dog (along with her co-partner in crime Magee) that I was told didn't like men. She was a little skittish, but she came right up to me, sniffed me a couple times, then allowed me to scratch her right above her tail and behind the ears (in that or-

der). That done, as my new best friend, the greeting was always the same.

Woof!

Ed Musiak

Life Lessons in Comics

For Breighty