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Hillside School

Kettle & Stony Point First Nation

*Embracing
technology
to ensure
student
success*

Kettle & Stony Point Hillside School knows that the binoojiinyag (children) are the future and each child is a unique individual with unlimited potential. The goal of the school is to achieve a high standard of educational excellence and inspire a desire for knowledge in all of its students. As such, Hillside School has embraced technology and has armed its students with advanced tools for success.



“Our children are so connected these days... We feel very strongly that because our children are going to be connected, we need to teach them how to be connected appropriately and in a manner that supports their learning.”

Cathy Hampshire, Hillside School Principal

“Our population is the fastest growing segment across Canada,” said Hillside School Principal of seven years, Cathy Hampshire. “If we give our children the tools to succeed, then they can go out and make a big difference in the world – not just their own communities, but the general population as well.”

Hillside School is a community-based, Kindergarten to grade 8 elementary school located in the Kettle & Stony Point First Nation – between Sarnia and Grand Bend, ON. In addition to providing the essential tools to ensure success for its 139 students, the school also proudly preserves its cultural identity and inherent rights.

Overseen by an appointed, community-based education committee, under the direction of Chief and Council, the school also maintains a working relationship with its provincial counterparts in the Lambton-Kent area through Tuition Agreements.

According to Hampshire, in the Lambton-Kent provincial school system, each grade 7 student is equipped with their own, dedicated iPad which they may use through high school. Since Hillside School students feed into the Lambton-Kent secondary school system, “it naturally made sense for us to also be promoting technology,” she said.

“Our children are so connected these days,” Hampshire said. “We feel very strongly that because our children are going to be connected, we need to teach them how to be connected appropriately and in a manner that supports their learning.”

Through the Kuhkenah Network (K-Net), which is a First Nations owned and operated service provider who is leading the way for rural and remote First Nations communities to gain access to the every-growing world of information communication technologies (ICT), Hillside School was fortunate to have a dedicated fibre-optic line installed within the school.

“Connectivity is a huge issue with many rural schools,” Hampshire said. “Bringing in a fibre-optic line is extremely expensive. Through K-Net, a few years ago, our community was very lucky to achieve that connectivity for our school.”

Hampshire explained that over the past five years the community has dedicated a good portion of its New Path and First Nations Student Success (FNSS) funding towards technology, including the purchase of new hardware and software, as well as staff training.

With that funding, the school has been able to purchase Smart Boards and Apple televisions for every classroom, as well as over 100 iPads for every student from grade 5 to 8. According to Hampshire, the primary students also have access to computer equipment however, the school feels strongly

that, “we still have to teach the fundamentals, the basics.”

“Our focus on technology is grade 5 and up,” she said. “It’s not that we aren’t using technology to some degree in the younger grades, but young children still need to learn the basics. They still need to know how to hold a pencil.”

Currently, Hillside School is in the process of establishing Google Classroom and setting students up with their own, individual Google accounts. Google Classroom is a free, web-based platform that integrates Google Docs, Google Calendar

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and Gmail into one “suite.” This cloud technology saves time and resources, and makes it easy for teachers to create classes, distribute assignments and stay organized. Additionally, students are kept abreast of upcoming deadlines and are able to receive real-time feedback from their teachers on various assignments.

In addition to Google Classroom, technology has also been utilized in other areas as well, such as in the Music department. According to Hampshire, Hillside’s Music Instructor Leslie Skolly, utilizes specific apps and video programs to translate student creativity into tangible results, which are then shared with the community through the school’s web site.

“In our music program the students

sing songs and the music teacher processes these songs through an app, so they can later jive to their own music,” Hampshire said. “The students also create mini-movies of their musical talents utilizing video technology.”

“The technology within the school has greatly improved the quality of education for every student,” said Intermediate teacher Mark Denomy. “If children are absent from school, they are able to stay in constant communication with their classmates. As a result, they return to school without the sense of being behind.”

By embracing technology, Hampshire has noticed a positive change in the way students learn.

“We see the technology as part and parcel of our overall school philosophy for student success,” she said. “We see

it as part of the tools of learning, as opposed to being something that is isolated. You’re not going to have student success with one, little component. You have to have the big picture.”

Not only are the students accelerating in learning, but the staff has also developed methods to assist them in various areas. For example, technology has been adopted by administrative and teaching staff to assist the school’s special needs students.

“We use technology to help our special needs students demonstrate what they know,” Hampshire explained. “Many students can barely write a sentence, but if they can communicate through the computer, they can truly express what they know. This technology has been so beneficial to these students because it has given them the confidence to express themselves.”

Although technology touches many aspects of teaching within the school and communication within the community, there are still many areas where its use is still being developed.

“I see more and more students wanting to delve even deeper into the realm of technology,” Hampshire said. “We haven’t even started to explore things such as 3-D imaging. I think technology is a great mechanism for that enquiry base. It is helping inquisitive students solve problems and excel in learning.”

Hillside School is also working on incorporating the Chipewyan culture into its Heritage classes through the use of technology. Currently, the school utilizes video presentations on its web site – www.hillsideschool.ca – to highlight various cultural activities undertaken by the students.

“Last week we were out receiving teachings on the land,” Hampshire explained. “We took many pictures with our digital camera and compiled the images in a video presentation for our community to see.”

As the digital age unfolds, staff and students at Hillside School continue to embrace the technology and implement it in a fashion that is destined to lead to student success while preserving cultural identity. 🌸



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