Internet taking EBR schools into 21st century

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"Books, chalkboards and bulletin boards could be outdated by the year 2000, so teachers and students throughout East Baton Rouge Parish schools spend time these days surfing the Internet."

"Books were a great thing in the 1500s. Now it's time for us folks to expand our vision ... to deal with 21st century technology," said Ron Dupuis, who teaches computer science at Scotlandville Magnet High School.

Internet access was introduced into public schools in East Baton Rouge Parish late last month, and Dupuis said the worldwide computer network is changing the way people read, write and communicate.

Just ask Richard Chapman, a senior at Scotlandville who used Internet to find information about subjects for term papers and to "visit" prospective colleges.

Chapman also cross-referenced a number of Internet sites for the availability of scholarships and eventually got accepted into Top 100 college.

"It's helped me ahead in the job market," said Chapman, who first learned about Internet at Scotlandville a few years ago.

Teachers can use the system to find out about projects that the U.S. Department of Education is working on, or to research such things as earthquake activity across the world for a social studies class, said John Hargreaves, educational technical coordinator for the state Department of Education.

Students can also access virtual library, a program that literally offers a card catalog of materials from different libraries like the Library of Congress. The Southern University School of Engineering is the hub, or central connector site.

Scotlandville Magnet houses the Internet board and will serve as the hub through which other public school sites may connect, Dupuis said.

"Internet is nothing but electronic post offices connected to one another," Dupuis explained.

It takes four things to connect the Internet: a computer, a modem, a phone line and software, Dupuis said.

Think about the days or weeks it takes for a letter to arrive in another state or country, Dupuis said.

"You can send a letter to California by Internet and it will be there in five seconds," he said.

Students at Scotlandville already have a jumpstart on the system. They began accessing Internet electronic mail and electronic bulletin board systems about four years ago, Dupuis said.

With the full Internet system in place, Dupuis said students and teachers in all other public schools will be able to use the system, too.

And the possibilities are endless.

Just consider conducting a video teleconference with a professor from Cornell University.

That's exactly what Husam M. Yaghi demonstrated before teachers and students.

First he plugged a camera into the computer and, through the use of specific software and the appropriate connection, not only did he talk with the professor but he displayed a moving image of the professor.

For students interested in finding out information on NASA astronauts from Louisiana and their next scheduled space missions, they need only access the Mosaic program.

In that program, a listing of James Donald Halsell from Monroe appeared.

By scanning other news items in the program, the student could discover that Halsell is scheduled to fly on a space mission sometime this year.

Other programs like Uverse, a bulletin board-type news line; Listserve, an automated mailing list; or Telnet, which can log into computers around the world such as the Library of Congress, will be among the list of popular school-related computer programs, Dupuis said.

James Benham demonstrates the Internet to students and teachers last month.

The $27,000 grant for the project was provided by the Southern University School of Electrical Engineering, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. IBM Corp. provided the computers.