



How Hatch Technology Is Helping Special Education Students—And Teachers—Achieve Success

in one West Virginia School District

Mercer County, West Virginia is largely a rural county serving over 9,500 students from pre-K through 12th grade at 25 different schools.

A history with Hatch

Located at the southernmost tip of the state, nestled deep in the heart of Appalachia, Joyce Tedder is the Special Education Instructional Supervisor for Mercer County. It's up to her to see that the needs of the Special Education students at those 25 schools are being met. For years, she has helped accomplish that with Hatch technology.

"We've had Hatch in the county for as long as I can remember," she said.



In the 2009-10 school year alone, ARRA funds were used to buy six new Hatch computers for pre-K and elementary school classrooms for children with special needs. They augment the many Hatch technology products that are already in every special needs classroom in the county, pre-K through high school.

Why this commitment to Hatch? Over the years, Tedder and the teachers she supports have found Hatch technology to be the best choice for their classrooms. The school purchased Hatch's Touch 'n Play desktop computers several years ago and the computers are still in use today. Touch 'n Play has since been replaced by iStartSmart®, and most recently, the school system has added Hatch's TeachSmart® software to many of its classrooms.

TeachSmart is a whiteboard-based system that offers over 1,100 research-based, Hatch-developed activities.

The quality of the equipment and the teaching activities is not the only advantage Hatch offers.

"The technical support offered by Hatch is definitely top notch," Tedder said. "I have not experienced any better from any other company. They have been here to do training numerous times, and if there is a problem with Hatch technology, no matter how old it is, they are still willing to offer support. They have proved their service to be outstanding through the years."

This level of technical support is important because the Hatch equipment itself has proven to be an essential tool in the classrooms for children with special needs.

"Our main goal is to help the special needs students have more access to the general education curriculum, more interaction and high engagement in the classroom. We have certainly found that for our preschool, autistic and moderate students, Hatch has helped bring that to pass, especially the high engagement.



TeachSmart has opened up the world of technology

Individual teachers agree, and cite the accessibility that the TeachSmart software provides a key advantage. Because it has a touch screen that can be used with virtually any object, the TeachSmart whiteboard allows children who lack necessary motor skills to use whatever they are able to manipulate, such as a tennis ball, to write on the screen. It is also accessible for children who are limited to using switches.

"For me, the TeachSmart software especially has opened up the world of technology for children who otherwise wouldn't have that opportunity because of the severity of their special needs," said Donna Pennington, a special needs teacher at the Mercer County Early Learning Center. "Before, we had to do more hand-over-hand manipulation where the teacher literally had to guide these children. Now, even a child in a wheelchair can go up to the big screen on my wall and if they have any motor movement at all, if they just touch the screen something happens."



Pennington finds this accessibility is especially important to children with visual impairments. "I had a visually impaired child in my classroom and I used the writing part of the TeachSmart software a lot with him," she said. "He could draw pictures on it and write his name because it enlarges everything. And with the touch screen he was able to see what he was doing as far as moving objects, being able to touch the object and move it to where it needed to be. On a smaller screen it would have been more difficult for him."

Hatch helps to meet the IEPs

Another advantage of using Hatch technology is the planning that goes into the lessons and activities included in the equipment.

Hatch makes certain that the work the children do matches up with actual goals set forth by the state. Joyce Tedder said this is an invaluable resource.

"This helps to meet the IEPs," she said. "At the middle school a lot of the students have speech problems and communication problems, and the children use the electronic speech devices and work with them. Hatch just does a fantastic job of making all their equipment co-relate together to meet the needs of the students."

Wanda Vaught, a special education teacher at Bluefield Middle School, echoes that sentiment.

"IEPs are set with the state Content Standards and Objectives in mind," she said. "You have to look at those CSOs when you're doing your planning to make sure you're giving the students what they are supposed to have according to the state defined standards. And the Hatch programs are designed so that we're meeting those needs. Whether we're working on vocabulary skills, overall reading skills or comprehension skills, the programs are designed so that you can target a special skill. And that helps a lot. We've improved their scores a good bit."

The teacher can make the lesson individualized

It also helps that the Hatch TeachSmart and desktop technologies offer a wide variety of activities. "There are just so many different programs that the teacher can really make the lessons individualized to meet the student's needs," Tedder said.



Vaught finds that having an easy-to-use computer allows her to step back and let the students work with each other. "Sometimes on the computer we'll do peers tutoring," she said. "Students have to work together, taking turns, and sharing their thoughts on the subjects they're working on. Then they come up with one answer for the two people. So there's no teacher involved – it's all peer oriented. And that's a good thing because it's not teacher-centered, it's student-centered; they're the ones having to help each other. I always try to pair a student who is a little higher functioning with one who is a little lower functioning; that way they both get something from the experience."

The kids love it!



As for the children themselves, the teachers say they really enjoy working with the Hatch technology. Pennington has TeachSmart in her classroom.

"As a matter of fact, I've had to teach them to listen for a timer because they all want to use it," she said. "And you know when you've got 19 kids in a classroom, they can't all be there using it at the same time. So they learn to take turns and share. They learn to work together, where one child will start a picture and another child will ask if they can join in and draw something as well on the screen."

Vaught said she had the same experience. "The kids get real excited when they know we're going to use it," she said. "And then they enjoy taking turns. We put things up on the board and each person gets their turn to answer a question or choose what they're going to do. It allows students to make choices for themselves, which makes them very excited."

The parents are amazed

The advantages of Hatch technology also extends to the teachers. TeachSmart allows teachers to digitally save work done on the whiteboard into a file for each student.

"When my children draw pictures or write their names, I can save their work to show the parents," Donna Pennington said. She states the parents are often surprised at what their children can

accomplish using the Hatch technology. "The days we have special activities going on in the school, the parents come down to my classroom and the kids use the Hatch computer with their parents in the room. The parents are amazed at how these three-, four- and five-year-olds are able to navigate on that computer."

Pennington isn't the only teacher who'd seen parents surprised by what their children can do using Hatch. Linda Harmon, a teacher at Princeton High School, had one student far exceed his parents' expectations, thanks to Hatch technology.

"Sometimes our parents don't realize and they limit their own children," she said. "One of my students graduated two years ago and didn't have a lot of fine motor skills. It just so happened that his sister, who was in a general education program, was here stuck in the classroom with



us during a snowstorm. Her mom had called to see how they were and how they were progressing. I had her brother on the Hatch computer doing the activities and she had told their mother. It allowed the parent to know that he could interact with a computer, first by using the touch screen and then the mouse! This was just great timing that the sister happened to be over here because I don't think the parents had really exposed him to their own home computer, not realizing that he had the potential to do certain things. So that in itself was a success story that was pretty amazing!"

You have to give the students opportunities

Vaught has a similar story to Harmon's.

"One student that I had couldn't speak, but he could get on the Hatch computer and navigate through almost any program. It was just amazing to watch him. Had he not had that opportunity that allowed him to use the computer, he may never have learned the skills. Sometimes you may have a student who is either physically handicapped or mentally challenged to the degree that everybody thinks they just sit there. But you know, you have to give them opportunities, and Hatch has allowed those students to have just that."

Giving their students the opportunity to succeed is important to these teachers. Wanda Vaught points out that having accessible computers and well-thought-out programs that allow the students to develop new skills like reading "gives them self esteem, so that when they go out and are with other [general ed] students, they don't feel quite as bad about themselves and their inability to do things."

Success is the name of the game

For Linda Harmon, being able to use the technology to show students print outs and digital copies of their work is key to showing them the progress they have made and giving them that sense of accomplishment. "Success is the name of the game," she said, "and I'm always telling my students at the beginning of the year, 'Success means to do well.' At the end of the school year my students can see their progress and they're saying 'We had a successful year.'"

As for Joyce Tedder, she sums up her feelings about Hatch technology this way: "A lot of positive things have come out of using the Hatch with these students."



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