

There is something new on team three this year: the first computer lab we have had at the school in a number of years. With the move of the entire fourth grade outside to the trailers, we finally had some space to use to create a lab for students and teachers. Our technology coordinator Nathan Wieand took one of our Apple mobile labs and moved it to team three along with a Smart Board. With some rearranging of furniture, presto change, we now have a lab.

One of its first uses has been to implement a web based math program called ST Math. Our fourth and fifth graders come to the lab one morning a week for 45 minutes to work on a variety of math skills. Then on another day in their classroom they spend some additional time using the program. I first saw the website last summer at a principals' workshop on new instructional technology. A few schools were asked if they wanted to pilot the program, so we signed up. Our fourth and fifth grade math teachers as well as our math resource teachers and Mr. Wieand have all attended a number of workshops learning how to implement the program and monitor student progress.

As part of the introduction to the program, students first set up individual passwords using pictures instead of numbers. I practiced along with one of the classes and finally learned my picture password. Then simple games were introduced to teach the students how to manipulate pictures on the screen and answer problems. The only instruction given is 'play the gray'. One area of the screen (it could be a box or a cone) is gray. When you click on it, the action begins.

The challenge for some students is that direction: just 'play the gray'. Everything else is figured out through trial and error. For some of the students this is just what they like. They make lots of errors at first but eventually figure out what is expected and just keep going. For other students this can be quite frustrating. Some of our students just like to be told what to do. They don't like the figuring out the aspects of the program. They don't want to 'play the gray' anymore. With a few hints from the teachers, they normally get back on track and finally figure out the solution to the problem. It has been interesting finding out which camp a child fits in.

We have the program for this year on a one year trial basis. As the year progresses we will be evaluating its effectiveness in raising student achievement in math. Other grades can be added if we find it useful. You can try it out for yourself and learn more about the academic standards it covers by checking out the website. Go to [www.mindresearch.net](http://www.mindresearch.net). Click on the programs link on the home page and it will take you to a description of ST Math. You can see the topics covered as well as try out a few games. You will also meet JiJi, that pesky little penguin that needs to cross the screen after each correct answer.

The Internet is being flooded with all kinds of educational software for children. Some programs are no more effective than old time flashcards. Shooting math facts to oblivion is more fun than flipping cards, but probably not really necessary. Other programs take real advantage of the new technology. I now see tiny children pointing and swiping at items on iPads just about everywhere I go. Lafayette is a part of this movement too. Mr. Wieand is constantly on the lookout for new activities that can be a part of the computer lab. But along with the touch screens and Smart Boards, we still have large wooden blocks and Legos. Housekeeping centers with dolls and kitchens. We have puppet theaters and puzzles. There are just so many ways to learn. New ways and old ones. The most cutting edge technology and the simplest piece of wood. And all can be seen in use at Lafayette because we have all kinds of learners at Lafayette. From the full steam ahead to the let's just wait and see. From the 'I know, I know' kids, to the 'show me' ones. And in the intermediate grades we'll just keep on playing the gray and see where that takes us. Just more and more ways to keep learning at Lafayette.