The Road to Independence: With Vision, Middle School Teacher Fosters Self-Reliance and Success Among Her Students

Learn how one teacher uses chat and remote control tools to engage students and improve academic performance in this case study of classroom management software used in teaching technology to all grade levels at Ockerman Middle School.

Ockerman Middle School is located in Boone County, Ky., near the Ohio border. One of four middle schools, Ockerman has 775 students in grades 6-8, while the entire Boone County School District has a total enrollment of more than 17,000.

Middle school students present unique teaching and classroom control challenges. They combine fierce independence with an equally fierce desire to be helped and protected. Teachers who face the daily push-me-pull-you of middle school must find a balance between creating a nurturing environment and fostering self-sufficiency. At Ockerman Middle School in Boone County, Ky., technology teacher and coordinator Amanda Girvin relies on Vision™ classroom management software to help her students without hovering.

Boone County is the northernmost county of Kentucky, southwest of Cincinnati, Ohio. The county has experienced tremendous growth and development over the last 10 years but retains its rural flavor. Ockerman Middle School has approximately 775 students in grades 6-8, while the entire Boone County School District has a total enrollment of more than 17,000.

Balancing Hands-On and Hands-Off Teaching
Girvin gets to know most of the students at Ockerman – in addition to being the school's technology coordinator she teaches technology

classes at all grade levels. Her basic curriculum covers computer use, applications, and Microsoft Office; she also teaches video creation and PhotoImpact. Using Vision in her classroom enables her to offer student support from a distance, fostering self-reliance. With her monitor showing each student's work, Girvin can use a light touch in providing guidance on a task.

Girvin makes a point of introducing her students to the classroom management capabilities of Vision. She uses a projector with Vision to show the students' computer monitors, driving home the fact that she witnesses their work from her desk.

"I usually introduce the remote control option first, so students understand that I can help them anytime," she said. "I'm able to establish from the start that the student is responsible and that I am there as a help desk." The remote control option has delighted her students, who respond with lightning speed when she chats with them about their work.

How to be Everywhere at Once
Since integrating Vision into her classroom, Girvin has seen improvement in student performance. More students remain in their seats, on-task, since they no longer have to wait to get her assistance. "I've found that if I travel around the

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room the students ask me more questions instead of investigating the answers themselves," she observed. "If one kid gets my attention no one else will, but everybody deserves to get their questions answered. With Vision, I get messages and I can immediately respond. If I see they're off-task I can chat with them remotely." The chat function has engaged even the most recalcitrant students. "A student who was constantly off-task was mesmerized by the chat function," Girvin said. "He asked me questions that he would never have asked without that feature and remained on-task for the entire hour, asking at the end of class to 'talk with me again tomorrow.' That was really powerful to me."

The remote control option allows her to help students subtly, without embarrassing them in front of their classmates. This is especially beneficial when dealing with special education students,

who are mainstreamed in all of her classes. "I see my special education students sometimes get discouraged when they can't read directions or a Web site. I remote in to help them out, then chat a moment about how they can ask me for help," she said. "This way I don't have to stand over them and they feel better about their ability to use the computer and its software."

Pointing the Way to Achievement
Teaching students to feel proud of their work is the motivating force behind Girvin's classroom approach. "Self-sufficiency fosters self-esteem, self-exploration and the possibilities of what you can do," she noted. "When students are required to perform tasks on their own they take ownership of their learning. In that respect they truly earn their grades."

A big believer in positive reinforcement, Girvin also uses the Virtual Teacher function in Vision and a projector to spotlight good work. "I like being able to showcase to the class what other students can do, especially if it's that kid that everyone thinks can do nothing right. This gives that student the chance to shine without saying a word. It shows what they've learned, in a different way."

Benefits of Using Vision

- Allows remote supervision of student activity
- Promotes self-reliance and problem-solving skills in students
- Assists teacher in providing support to all students
- Keeps students on-task and engaged
- Creates a collaborative environment where student work is easily spotlighted and shared

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