

# Teachers plug in with Super Teaching classroom

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CALEDONIA — Students at Emmons Lake Elementary School are learning at the speed of thought with a new classroom that combines the best in audio, video and technology into a powerful teaching tool.

The classroom, known as a Super Teaching facility, was created and installed by Innovative Communications Inc. (ICI) of Byron Center. The state-of-the-art classroom provides video access to information and video conferencing/distance learning and presents it all in a multi-media format on three screens. Teachers and students can connect to the world via the Internet, compressed video, satellite and cable.

The goal of the Super Teaching facility is to stimulate and enhance learning and raise test scores by allowing for dual enrollment, by providing access to experts and by giving students the ability to solve real problems in the classroom and share information at accelerated speeds.

According to ICI President Rod Kuznicki, studies conducted over the last 30 years have shown that the brain waves of today's children have sped up and can process information much quicker than those of previous generations. He said the reason for this change has a lot to do with the ultra-stimulating entertainment industry — fast action video games that require split-second decisions and television shows with constantly changing plots and sub-plots. Kuznicki said

children have grown accustomed to a fast changing pace, and their attention span has responded. Teaching techniques, in turn, must respond accordingly.

"We maintain the students' attention by presenting the information in a multi-media fashion," Kuznicki said.

ICI Vice President Tom Spaude said the Emmons Lake facility is also geared at helping teachers be more effective by allowing them to teach all learning styles more efficiently by being able to capture the teachable moment, which is known as just-in-time learning.

High-tech facilities such as the one at Emmons Lake Elementary School are being used to present a multi-media learning experience to people of all ages across the globe. ICI will be traveling to Maui next to install a Super Teaching classroom in a middle school. The Byron Center firm also has set up facilities in Australia and Hong Kong as well as served most of the colleges and universities in Michigan. The global experience has been rewarding, said Kuznicki. "We're learning more about learning from different countries and different learning styles."

Education is ICI's main focus, with 85 percent of the firm's business coming from that area. That mix fits well with ICI's principals. Kuznicki worked for many years implementing technology into education and Spaude grew up with parents who worked to educate others. Both have a strong dedication to education, and Spaude said, to being good stewards of public monies.

"Education has lacked a good organization to benchmark for technology. Usually a school installs the technology and then wonders how to implement its curriculum. ICI takes the approach of first understanding the curriculum and wrapping the technology around it," Spaude told *MiBiz*.

ICI also provides technology installations for courtrooms, hospitals, health care providers and local and federal government entities.

The Emmons Lake Elementary teaching staff is taking advantage of the new Super Teaching classroom. Students have already taken virtual field trips to Ontario and Wisconsin, with many more planned. The classroom allows for 30 students to sit at desks for instruction or seats 50 comfortably for a

videoconference or field trip.

"I believe (the Super Teaching facility) will have a big impact on kids because it expands lessons by allowing them to engage in e-talking with experts in the field," said Emmons Lake Elementary Principal Gordie Nickels.

According to Nickels, the classroom is the "next best thing to being there" and will allow teachers to be more creative with their lesson plans. The multi-media presentation grabs the students' attention, relaxes their minds, and makes them forget problems that might otherwise distract, he added.

"It makes learning so much more solid," Nickels said. "It will have a positive impact on student achievement."

Funds for the Caledonia project were provided by the International Learning Trust of Madison, Ala., a nonprofit educational service organization. The group selected ICI to work on the project after receiving a recommendation from the vice president of Sony Corp.'s education division. ICI is known as one of the largest installers of distance learning and related technology for education. ■