

Techno Artists

Music students use a pilot touch-screen technology

by HALLEY JOHNSON



Six students sit facing a large projector screen in Ridgeway Middle School's music room with djembes, or African drums, at their feet. Teacher Ken Greene fiddles with the controls of the computer that sits at his desk, and a classroom in Fairfax, Virginia, materializes on the screen. These students are wielding violins, and their teacher gives the Ridgeway students a thumbs up. Greene leans forward and asks, "Do you mind if we jam with you?"

Promethean's ActivBoard, the 78-inch computer screen/chalkboard hybrid recently installed in several Memphis City Schools music labs, has connected Ridgeway students to classes in France, Belgium, and, last week, Virginia.

"Technology is such an integral part of most students' lives," Greene says. "It seems logical that we'd bring that familiarity into the classroom and make the experience not only more enjoyable but I think, overall, more effective."

The students use ActivBoard for activities usually restricted to individual assignments, such as taking quizzes and practicing musical notation. ActivBoard also helps students to collaborate and create their own music while learning technology.

Greene can supply his own questions for games created specifically for ActivBoard, and the system tracks the progress of each student and the class as a whole.

"We get that immediate response and feedback," Greene says. "It really serves us well in the classroom." He also uploads student progress to the class website, where students can find music they've made, as well as homework assignments.

"When the students go home, they have a connection to our classroom and to our material," Greene says.

Though the current labs were financed by a grant from Yamaha, the city schools are hoping to put ActivBoards in more Memphis classrooms.

"We're going to keep on developing great relationships and using technology for all kinds of education," Greene says.