

# STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

## Technology Helps Struggling Students

As told by Wayne Hartschuh, Delaware Center for Educational Technology to Suzie Boss

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When student demographics change suddenly, a school can find itself facing unexpected challenges. That was the case for Warner Elementary School in urban Wilmington, Delaware. When a new elementary school opened in the suburbs, Warner Elementary saw its population change almost overnight. Enrollment shifted from 35 percent minority to 98 percent minority, and low socioeconomic status rose from 40 percent to 70 percent of the student body. Faculty changes resulted in an 80 percent turnover of the teaching staff. The school's academic performance suffered, and a drop in test scores landed Warner on a list of Delaware schools needing improvement.

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As part of a rigorous school improvement plan, Warner developed a program to integrate technology into teaching and learning. Principal Irene Hills realized that, unlike more affluent students in the suburbs, Warner's new students did not have ready access to technology. To close this digital divide, the school has greatly expanded technology access, both at home and at school, so that students, teachers, and parents are now working together to improve academic achievement.

WEB-IT, for Warner Elementary Basic Integrated Technology, began as a pilot in just one fifth-grade classroom but has expanded to include 110 students in four fifth-grade classes. Veteran teacher Meg Hoefer directs the project, which is financed by a Title I grant, support from the Red Clay School District, and additional foundation funding. Partners in Technology, a statewide program of the Delaware Center for Educational Technology, provides refurbished computers that are loaned for home use.

The result is a comprehensive approach to improving achievement. During the school day, students use laptops equipped with software for core academic subjects and research. Keychain-sized disk drives allow students to save school work and continue studying at home, using the refurbished computers. Parents learn basic computer skills at evening workshops so they are better prepared to support their students at home. Teachers use email, Web pages, and electronic newsletters to communicate with families.

The program is producing dramatic gains in academic achievement, with 78 percent of fifth-graders participating in WEB-IT earning at least a passing score on state tests in reading, and 65 percent passing both math and writing. In addition, discipline issues have dropped among students using the laptops for learning.

The program continues to evolve, with new partnerships for after-school programming expanding computer access—and creating more learning opportunities—for students and parents alike.

### **Focus on Funding**

*WEB-IT was able to expand from one classroom to four classrooms thanks to a Beaumont Foundation grant.*

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