Jessica Selby • Daily Times

Jacob Conklin, a junior from the electronics and computer technology program at the Coventry Regional Career and Technical School, helps to set up the computers at the new joint computer and science lab at Blackrock Elementary School.

Less is more at new computer lab

JESSICA SELBY
jselby@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Step into the science lab at Blackrock Elementary School and you might think you're at a state-of-the-art college level computer lab.

Thanks to a recent Feinstein grant award, Blackrock Elementary School was able to transform their science lab into a joint computer lab. They recently purchased 25 brand new flat screen computer monitors. They only have six towers though.

It may sound strange, but the purchase was strategic. It is part of a new concept called NComputing that Jim Murphy, network administrator for the Coventry School District, stumbled upon recently.

How it works, he said, is that each of the 25 monitors are furnished with a small square box that is fixated to the backside of the screen. He said the boxes allow for the towers to service six different users through six different monitors at the same time.

"This is fairly new, but it is a great concept and it is wonderful for us, because of this we are able to allow for an entire classroom to come in here and use the computers, but we only had to actually purchase six computers," Murphy said. "If

See LAB, Page A-3

A GOOD BUY

Murphy said the total for all the components necessary for the project, computers, monitors, keyboards and mice and the nComputing kits came to $8346.58, roughly $321 per seat.

"If we had purchased a refurbished computer for each seat, they would have run around $360," he said, and, he clarified, that would have been refurbished, not brand new flat screen monitors.

Students excited for new lab

Continued from Page A-1

we had to purchase more than that, we never would have been able to afford it, but this new system allows each student to work at the same time. It is a great concept."

Murphy said the system also allows for energy savings because the box on the back of the monitors that powers the system does not require any electrical power to operate.

"The real savings with the project comes from the reduction in electrical costs and the reduced management costs as only six stations will need updates, etc. rather than 26," he said. "And energy savings in these older school buildings are really important and with the energy savings alone that these systems will allow for, these computers will pay for themselves in no time."

The junior students from the electronics and computer technology program from the Coventry Regional Career and Technical School visited the school last week to help Murphy assemble the systems in the classroom at Blackrock.

Michael Norberg, a junior from the career center helping with the set up, said the program was simple to install, but formatting the systems with the network was a bit more challenging. He said the goal was to have all of the computers up and running by the end of the afternoon and he said, despite any hurdles that they may have encountered, he was confident that the task would be completed.

Jackie Barnes, the instructor for the electronics and computer technology program from the Coventry Regional Career and Technical School, said she was thrilled the students from Blackrock Elementary were going to have access to such wonderfully advanced and modern technology, but she was even more excited for her own students. She said her students typically work on computer repair jobs, but having the opportunity to bring them into a real life setting to complete a job like this is a rare, but extremely educationally beneficial occasion and she said she was grateful to Murphy for offering it up to her and her students.

Murphy said anytime he can get the electronics and computer technology students involved in real life task-oriented jobs he tries to because the hands-on education in the field is irreplaceable. Their experience working with this new equipment will be especially beneficial for them.

"This is a great concept and I am sure that it is really going to take off once people begin to hear more about it, but I am certain that these students wouldn't really have much exposure to it," he said. "It is most beneficial in a big setting, so if these students were working on their home computers it really wouldn't apply, but if they were working in the field, on computer labs, if would be a great resource for them to have knowledge about."

The students at Blackrock Elementary were anxiously awaiting use of the new computers. Sam Thomas, Michael DePrete, Kaleigh Caruso and Carlie Rivera, all fifth graders at the school, said they "can't wait to use them."

Murphy said the new system will also be a great in-school tool for the students to use to achieve the superintendent's vision for all fifth graders to complete a PowerPoint presentation.

Alicia Reniere-Castle, the principal at the school, said as soon as the lab is up and running she is going to open it up to her students and teachers for their use. This new lab, she said, is a wonderful resource and she is thrilled to be able to offer it to her students.

"This project helps us move in a direction that is better for the environment and is also good for the district's bottom line in reduced electrical costs," Murphy said.