

Middle school to be technology leader

Grant will make Walkertown one of five schools statewide to get equipment, help

By Wesley Young

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Julia Greenstine works with students at Walkertown Middle School.

(Journal Photo by Kelly Bennett)

WALKERTOWN

Walkertown Middle School will become one of the county's leading schools in computer technology with the help of a state grant, a school official said this week.

The N.C. State Board of Education has awarded the school a \$295,000 grant to boost its technology program and try out model ways of incorporating technology into all areas of the curriculum, local school officials said in a statement.

Walkertown was one of five middle schools across the state to get the grant.

"Every classroom will be equipped with certain equipment," said Gina Webster, the schools' media coordinator. "This program is designed to infuse this technology at every school, every grade level and every subject.

"The point is to use the technology and equip (students) for the 21st century: to learn the content of the various disciplines as well as to learn the technology to effectively learn," she said.

The grant will pay for personnel, technology access, professional development and student instruction, the statement said. The school will work with several groups to carry out its model program, including NASA, Wake Forest University, Walkertown Public Library, the Junior League of Winston-Salem and Broad Creek Middle School in Carteret County.

The school will buy wireless laptop carts, presentation equipment for all classrooms, a videoconferencing lab, a broadcasting package, MP3 players for audio books, interactive slates, digital cameras and other teaching tools.

Webster said that the grant will come from a state effort to devise a model for using media technology. Walkertown's program will be carried out as the state tries to discover the best way to use technology to improve student achievement and learning.

"We picked our own partners and decided how to implement the program," Webster said. "We are given latitude to talk about what we would focus on and how we would develop 21st-century learning in our school."

The school is taking advantage of programs already in place, Webster said. "We were already one of the 2003 NASA Explorer schools," Webster said. "We are using that partnership to further implement the model."

Working with Broad Creek Middle School in Carteret, students will communicate with monitored e-mail accounts. They can write on blogs and have "safe and monitored chat rooms and study groups," Webster said.

The schools will make a presentation at a state conference.

Webster said that many county schools have PTAs that can buy more advanced technology for

the students at those schools. But Walkertown hasn't been able to benefit from that.

"We were considered a school that needed technology," she said. "It was a competitive grant, and we were eligible for it because we needed more technology in the first place."

Walkertown is an excellent school that teaches students despite the absence of a lot of new technology, Webster said. The grant will enable the school "to expose our students to the most innovative technology" and become competitive with other schools that have had more.

Piper Hendrix, the school's principal, said in a statement that "students will ultimately be the biggest winners" because of the grant.

"We are excited to transform our school into a technology-rich learning environment that provides students and teachers with state-of-the-art technology tools," she said.

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