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Technologically Advanced

Author(s): EMILY SHARRER **Date:** January 31, 2012
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HARRISONBURG- An audible gasp and whispers of disbelief filled the halls of Harrisonburg High School Monday as Diana Flick, the school's instructional technology resource teacher, told a group of visiting international teachers that HHS has 25 computer labs. "Of course, I [am] impressed to hear about all the computers," said Entesar Sarhan of Egypt, who said her school has a computer lab, but it is filled with old personal computers that are prone to breaking down.

"If I can just copy and paste [the program] to my own computer, I'd be very happy," said Sarhan with a laugh as she watched students use Rosetta Stone language-learning software in one computer lab.

Sarhan and 15 other teachers from eight countries visited HHS as part of a semester-long program called International Leaders in Education Program that James Madison University is hosting for a second year.

A \$175,000 U.S. State Department grant makes it possible for middle and high school educators from across the globe to learn new teaching methods. IREX, a nonprofit organization that creates international education and research projects, runs the program.

During their stay in the States, program participants will visit nine schools and create a workshop about teaching methods to take back to their home countries.

"The main focus of the whole project is to enhance multicultural understanding," said Lorie Merrow, program manager for the teacher leadership program. "These are all some of the best teachers in their home country. [The point is to] share methods and pedagogies."

'Constructive' Use

The 16 teachers went classroom to classroom Monday, peeking over students' shoulders as they used iPads and observing the use of Smart Boards and projectors.

"Rather than [technology] being a distraction, they're at a level now where it's part of the classroom and it's constructively used," said Dania Hadid, who works in Lebanon for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, which provides education, health, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees.

Hadid and other teachers said computers at their schools are used strictly for computer education.

"We have pieces of technology, but we don't employ it in the teaching," she said.

When Agustine, a teacher from Indonesia, must charge her laptop battery, she runs an extension cord from her school, which has no electricity, to a house across the street.

While it's not ideal, Agustine, who does not have a surname, said it's the only way she can incorporate technology in her classroom.

Though her technology situation is more extreme than that of many of her fellow educators, the access HHS enjoys is still a far cry from what most say is available at their schools.

"Their challenge is to find ways to see what we're doing and adapt it [and] share with teachers at home," Merrow said.

Rather than being discouraged, Hadid said seeing Harrisonburg's capabilities has inspired her to use every bit of technology that's available.

"I'm encouraged more," she said. "With less, I can do more. If I had [this technology] I could do miracles."

Contact Emily Sharrer at 574-6286 or esharrer@dnronline.com

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