



## 5,400 Students Get Computers

### HIGH TECH BOOST TO LEARNING

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Warren students see quick results from \$28.5 M grant

The math just hadn't clicked yet for Jasmine Coe.

Not just any math, but advanced college algebra and trigonometry. Coe, who graduated this week from Warren Central, remembers earlier in the school year being on the cusp of grasping the concepts but needing a few extra sparks for it all to come together.

So Coe fired up her Chromebook, the kind of laptop computer she and more than 5,400 other Warren middle and high school students were assigned last year as part of a district-wide technology upgrade and a new philosophy designed to shake up traditional learning.

The computers are a slice of the \$28.5 million awarded to the Far Eastside school district last year from the federal Race to the Top program.

From the comfort of home, Coe used her Chromebook to turn to YouTube and email her teacher questions. The math began to gel.

"The videos I watched were from college students and professors who wrote out the problems and explained them step by step," said the incoming University of Indianapolis freshman. "They went into detail and recapped what my teacher had talked about in class, just in a slower way."

Finally, the trig clicked.

A year ago, Coe says, this blend of learning — classroom instruction, communicating electronically with teachers and searching the Web for supplements — wouldn't have been possible for her. Then, she traveled to the Warren library to use a computer and the Internet, or waited for an open seat at the school computer lab. Now, it was all at her fingertips.

It wasn't just the infusion of cash from Race to the Top that brought success to her and other students, Coe said, but how Warren administrators envisioned it could be spent.

"Race to the Top is having an impact already," she said.

### **The next step**

In late 2012, Warren was the only district in Indiana to win a piece of the \$400 million in funding from U.S. Department of Education.

Warren's application to the program — driven by Superintendent Dena Cushenberry's question of what will the kindergarten student of 2012 need to succeed by 2025 — was one of 16 picked from more than 370 district applicants throughout the country.

Warren's graduating class of 2014 was the first to experience a full year of school under Race to the Top. The district is in the midst of rolling out a far-reaching, finely tuned plan to enhance student learning and pump up support for faculty for years to come.

Results of its success are small and anecdotal so far, but Warren's 12,000 students, 72 percent of which receive free or reduce meals, have momentum to build on.

In past years, Warren's test scores have been inching up yet still lag behind the state averages.

Warren's pass rates for the ISTEP hit 65.3 percent last year — a 11.1 percentage point gain since 2009 when the exam for third-eighth graders was first given in the spring. Scores for the end of course assessments, high school exams, rose 15.8 percentage points since 2009-10. But graduation rates have fallen by nearly 7 percentage points to 83.4 last year from 2011.

Lou Anne Schwenn, who oversees 7th-grade to adult education at the district, is hopeful when ISTEP scores are publicly released next month there will be another increase and also expects this week's graduation rate to surpass last year.

So far, the grant has been focused on personalized learning opportunities and alternative paths to graduation. This fall a new "positive behavior" approach toward student discipline begins.

Seventy-five classrooms have been revamped with writable walls or turned into hi-tech labs. Students wearing ear-buds and listening to music while studying is no longer a no-no in some classes.

Eighteen new positions have been funded, including 13 instructional specialists to aid teachers and a full-time "extended-learning" coordinator. That position has already resulted in hundreds of credits earned by students in short or long term internship-like opportunities. For instance, psychology students have job shadowed at St. Vincent's Sports Performance or worked internships in Mayor Greg Ballard's office — all for class credits.

Teachers say positive results are being seen in the classroom even as old ways have been flipped on their head, says Alison Baldwin, a college prep research and writing teacher.

"You are no longer tied down to a text book because everyone has a computer," she said, adding how classes have connected with others around the world. "Literally, what you can do as a teacher, it has been revolutionized."

"It has broken down a lot of walls between teachers and students because there is a lot more dialogue with emails. Kids reach out for help me. If the students are absent, for myself and other teachers, I can let them know what we are doing for the day."

A few of the other projects under the grant include, growing catalog of online classes available all year for high school students, extended-day classroom instruction, and placing iPads and laptops in the hands of kindergarten and elementary students.

Schwenn says everything Race to Top is allowing boils down to this: "First, it's pass the grad exam and walk across the stage and graduate," she said. "And don't stop there, but be prepared for that next step."

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