

# Teachers cutting paper usage; kids loving it

March 30 2009, By Hannah Sampson

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In some school classrooms, paper is becoming more of a relic than an educational staple.

The result: homework done online. Paperless term papers. Math problems completed on an interactive whiteboard. An entire course of physics problems contained on a single compact disc. And, schools hope, savings in an ever-tightening budget crunch.

"It's budget, it's green, it's best educational practices," said Mark Strauss, principal of Virginia Shuman Young Elementary in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Educators are trying to trim the reams of [paper](#) they use to save money, spare trees and keep [kids](#) engaged in ways that old-fashioned writing just doesn't allow.

While schools would be hard-pressed to eliminate paper altogether, technologies like interactive whiteboards and document projectors have proven to be popular substitutes.

Strauss keeps track of how many copies teachers are making and sends a note (e-mail, of course) to those who have fewer than 500 per month with "a thank you for thinking green and helping the budget," he said.

Those who exceed 2,000 copies in a month get a note urging them to reconsider their paper-dependent ways.

"If they can get more engaged in active learning and less reliant on

worksheets, they'll learn more," Strauss said.

Christopher Stella, who teaches a fourth- and fifth-grade class at the school, posts to his class Web site all the information he might have otherwise sent home with kids on paper. Documents for homework are scanned and posted as PDF files.

Kids can write book reports on a book-themed Web site and submit them to the teacher there.

"The interest level for anything that's technology-related is much higher," Stella said.

At South Miami Middle, seventh-grade civics teacher Sofia Padilla prefers to have her students learn on computers or through games like "Jeopardy!"

"That's what those kids are used to," she said. "So we kind of have to move with the times and keep their interest piqued."

While today's students were born into an age of technology, some parents haven't quite adapted.

"Some parents ask: 'Where's the paper?'" said Dawn Huckestein, who assigns homework online and has her second- and third-graders at Virginia Shuman Young use the interactive whiteboard. "It's what they're used to."

She explains to them that her method is "not just being friendly to the earth, but being friendly to the budget."

MAST Academy in Key Biscayne, Fla., a school known for its focus on green innovation, tries to conserve paper -- and recycles what gets used.

One way they cut down on paper: "E-mail, e-mail, e-mail, e-mail," said principal Thomas Fisher. "Everyone's favorite communication initiative."

Teachers get one case of paper, which contains 5,000 sheets, each semester, Fisher said.

"We say, 'Look, this is your allocation. Use it as wisely as possible,'" he said.

Erica Kane, a fifth-grade teacher at North Lauderdale Elementary, said she tries to be as frugal as possible in her classes because paper is not easy to get.

"We would use the fronts and backs and wouldn't miss any spaces," she said.

Kane said she's also printed reports on the backs of fliers, used paper brought in by students and even used old pin-feed printer paper, the kind with sides that need to be ripped off.

Some administrators and teachers say students are allowed to print materials at school but are urged to print out only what is needed.

Many Broward teachers say they use a document camera and projector and have students copy from the board in their own composition books instead of giving handouts.

Some post their materials online. Others simply buy their own paper if it is scarce at school.

Robert Rosen, who teaches Advanced Placement physics at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Fla., grew weary of wondering if

his paper supply was going to be cut off from year to year.

So, about six years ago, he scanned all of the information he hands out -- which would amount to something like 200,000 copies for all of his classes -- and put it on compact discs.

"The kids just loved the CD," he said. "They just warmed up to the idea immediately."

If there's something Rosen wants to distribute to students during the school year that wasn't included in the initial disc, he puts it on his Web site as a PDF.

Rosen has been trying to spread the paperless word among fellow teachers. He thinks it might be an easier sell as schools continue to cut spending.

"It might be that necessity is the mother of invention in this case," he said.

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