

Chalk bites the dust

Interactive whiteboards transform the classroom

By Dave Rosenberg

We experienced a revolution at The Rashi School last year— one that has changed the way we teachers teach and our students learn.

All the classrooms – kindergarten through eighth grade – at our new building on the NewBridge campus in Dedham have come equipped with interactive whiteboards.

With a special pen, we can write on an interactive board, just as we would on an ordinary whiteboard. We can also use the pen to click through Web sites and open video clips and other multimedia.

Fancier still, we can create “flipcharts” using text, pictures, embedded multimedia, and digitized worksheets and textbook pages from existing curricula.

Before the start of last school year, Rashi teachers received a day and a half training on the ActivClassrooms system, which uses Promethean’s ActivBoard and ActivInspire software. After that, we were set to go.

Now, instead of spending time in Jewish studies walking around to help individual students find a specific word or phrase from a page of Hebrew text, I can project a digital copy of the text – the same page that the students are looking at in their Tanakh – and use the highlighter tool to point out the words.

Rather than taking a few minutes to furiously copy down notes from the whiteboard before having to thoroughly erase it in preparation for my next class, I can save the notes in my computer and clear the board with a couple of clicks. The following day, I can project the previous day’s notes instantly. In addition, I can print out the notes for students who were absent or need copies because they have a learning disability.

The students love the technology and the way they can share their ideas with various colors and tools.



Jordyn Weiner and Shira Caplan, using the calculator on the interactive whiteboard during a sixth-grade class at Rashi last year.

Middle School math teacher Cindy Carter points out that “having an easy way to project an active mathematics workspace is invaluable. If someone makes a mistake on a coordinate grid, we can simply erase it and move on, instead of having to spend time redrawing the grid.”

This fall, Rashi will begin using Promethean’s Learning Response Systems. In grades K-2, students will be using ActiVotes, a handheld voting device that allows students to respond to prepared or spontaneous multiple choice, yes/no, or true false questions. In grades 3-8, students will be using ActivExpressions, a more sophisticated handheld device that allows students to provide more detailed answers; for example, they can indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a proposition or provide an open-ended text reply.

A big plus of the system is that teachers have the option of displaying responses on the white board with or without the student’s name. Students who may

be too shy to raise their hand will have an opportunity to participate in a way that keeps their name anonymous to all but the teacher.

Class results can also be shown in the form of graphs, charts or lists to show how many students selected each particular answer.

Meanwhile, teachers will be able to track how each student answers, allowing them to track their understanding of the material and download the information to a spreadsheet. Another feature will enable teachers to create self-paced assessments, where students will answer a series of questions directly on their own device. Teachers will no longer have to guess whether students are comprehending material during a lesson; hard data will be available instantly to help them plan and adjust instruction on the fly.

Dave Rosenberg is a third grade teacher and assistant to the head of school at Rashi.