

Belle Haven students using new interactive whiteboard technology

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It's Wednesday afternoon and Robert Pronovost's class of Belle Haven School second graders are jubilantly discussing their favorite foods.

"I like oranges, strawberries and mangos the best!" 8-year-old Yaira Cordova declares in a loud voice as Pronovost teaches the class about food groups using a special interactive whiteboard system.

Pronovost, a self-professed computer buff in his third year as a teacher at the Ravenswood City School District school in Menlo Park, has made getting technology into his classroom a priority. He even landed five brand-new MacBooks for his students after sending Apple a letter asking for a grant.

In August, Pronovost received a Luidia eBeam Projection system after learning about the San Carlos company through a friend of a friend. The system, which the company donated, uses the classroom projector to beam images onto a standard whiteboard and includes a stylus pen and receiver that make the board interactive.

Pronovost attached the receiver to his laptop with a USB cable, and the computer now receives data via infrared and ultrasound technology each time he or

a student touches the board with the stylus pen.

On Wednesday students walked up to the board and filled in their favorite food groups using the stylus. Pronovost then saved the file to the computer and will use it for future lessons.

"It can triangulate the position of the stylus," said Jody Forehand, Luidia's vice president of product planning. "There's one infrared receiver and that tells the system, 'Wake up,' and the two separate receivers that are on either end of the device are ultrasound."

Unlike traditional interactive whiteboards, Luidia's product works on any board or wall, making the product far more affordable, Forehand said.

She added that some schools have used the product so that children with long-term illnesses can watch their classes from home and see exactly what other students are writing on the board.

While the education market accounts for most of Luidia's business, Forehand predicts that corporations will increasingly employ the technology for remote meetings and other tasks. One fire department in Southern California uses the product at its control center during large fires, she said.

Pronovost said he primarily uses the eBeam for math and vocabulary lessons and has been impressed by his students' ability to stay focused on the board.

"Having it allows me to be up there and actively have everyone's attention on what I'm doing or have them be able to do it themselves," Pronovost said. In addition, the ability to incorporate images into his

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lessons more easily — he can just drop and drag the files using Luidia's software — has helped students absorb the material and become more engaged, particularly those who are visual learners, he said.

One special needs student who had trouble focusing last year becomes mesmerized and excited every time the eBeam goes on, Pronovost said.

Pronovost noted that before getting the system, he used his computer and the classroom projector to teach lessons, but students often became distracted because they focused on him rather than on the board.

The students said they enjoy using the board because it lets them participate in lessons and play educational games.

"I like it because we get to do it too, and I wish I could have one in my house," 8-year-old Diana Martinez said.

"It's the best thing to make Mr. P show us what to do," Maria Valencia, 7, said.

Other teachers at Belle Haven have been so eager to get their hands on the equipment that 10 of them applied for \$383 grants from the East Palo Alto Kids Foundation after Luidia offered the school eBeams at a reduced price. Six of those systems have already arrived, and teachers are starting to learn how they work, Pronovost said.

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