

Internet helps to teach kids

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Over the past years, many of the nation's schools have been severely hamstrung. Massive federal and state budget cuts have made vital education resources hard to come by in the classroom.

But in an odd twist of fate, many of today's students already may be equipped to deal with this education shortfall.

Today's students facing the schooling budget crisis happen to be the most tech-savvy generation in history. With the Internet constantly changing the way students learn and interact, there are a number of ways in which going online may actually prepare young people for the real world—in ways that many schools can't replicate.

By focusing on character-building offerings, today's children are becoming more adept at dealing with real-world issues they soon will face in the workplace.

—It's who you know: Many parents and teachers have worked hard to impress upon young people the importance of networking. But what used to be a trusty Rolodex now takes the form of online social networking on sites like Facebook and MySpace. And considering that more children, including 38 percent between ages 12 and 14, are getting involved with these social networks to interact with old friends while making new ones, the future workforce should be flooded with online profiles and connections.

—Online education: Even at schools not experiencing budget crunches, there are areas of study that aren't provided, especially when it comes to computers, software and technology. Online classes can bridge that gap by offering engaging technology training programs to students no matter where they live.

—See the world: While some schools can't even afford a field trip to the local plastics factory, young people now have opportunities to pay virtual visits to some of the world's foremost cultural centers. Museums ranging from the Louvre to the American Museum of Natural History offer online tours of their exhibits. It might not be the same as visiting in person, but it's a great way to start learning about culture and history.

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“Although the Internet is frequently used for non-educational reasons, it’s obvious it also can help students learn critical skills outside the classroom and beyond the curriculum variety most schools offer. You just need to know what to look for,” says Pete Findley, CEO of Giant Campus.

Overall, parents are disappointed with the technology skills being taught in schools, according to new research by the nonprofit Project Tomorrow and Blackboard Inc. According to survey data, just one-third of parents and 40 percent of children in grades six through 12 believe schools are doing a good job of preparing students for the 21st century. That’s where online courses and camps can help.

“Students aren’t getting technology training they need in school due to budget cuts and lack of expertise, so they’re turning elsewhere for the tools needed for 21st century preparedness,” stresses Findley.