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AlphaSmart eNEWSLETTER



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September 2007



FEATURE STORIES

[A Back-to-School Surprise from AlphaSmart](#)

Introducing NEO 2...We've taken the NEO and added new capabilities that you're going to love! [Read more...](#)

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The Texas school district uses AlphaSmart units across the curriculum. [Read more...](#)

[The Durability of a NEO](#)

A student tells the tale of how her NEO survived a fall off a moving vehicle. [Read more...](#)

Schools nationwide are catching on to why the NEO is the "Better Laptop for Schools".

[NEO in the News](#)

Oakland Elementary School used AlphaSmart laptops to help raise writing scores on their state test. [Click here to read their story.](#)

[NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program](#)

Get access to 25 NEO laptops for your classroom writing project this November. The National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) Young Writers Program is accepting a brief essay from teachers who wish to participate in NaNoWriMo with the help of 25 loaner NEOs. [Find out more.](#)

[AlphaSmarties Best Practice Tip](#)

Have you ever been faced with a writing assignment and been unsure just how to get started? Then you know the frustration of "blank page syndrome." In today's busy classroom, it's sometimes difficult to find the time to guide a student through the writing process. With **WriteOn! Lessons**, you now have an assistant to help you. [Click here](#) to find out more!

Help students get their work published!



Attend a **FREE** half-day writing seminar in **Atlanta, Dallas, or Orange County, CA.**

Product News



[Introducing the all New NEO 2™](#)

What do you get when you cross a clicker with a laptop? You get NEO 2! [Learn More...](#)

[New Pricing on the Original NEO](#)

The original NEO, already a favorite in many writing and keyboarding classrooms, is now available at a lower price. [Learn More...](#)

Submit your students' stories and poetry, written on an AlphaSmart laptop, for possible publication in an upcoming issue of this newsletter! Those children whose work gets published here will get to choose from a variety of fabulous prizes!

Send the entries to successtories@renlearn.com.

Conference Appearances

Click here to see where we're going to be. Stop by and visit our AlphaSmart booth.

If you like this eNewsletter, please forward it along to a friend or colleague.

If you are interested in contributing ideas, photographs or articles for use in future issues, please contact us at info@alphasmart.com.

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Dear Valued Customer and Friend,

It's September once again, and for all of us who are educators, former educators, students, or former students that time of year always reminds us that it's 'back-to-school' time. The ads in the newspaper share with us the bargains stores are offering on school supplies letting us know our summer is over and it time to refocus on another year of learning.

You can't imagine how exciting it is for the hardware division of Renaissance Learning to have a new tool to share with you! NEO 2 by AlphaSmart was announced in June at NECC, and we are now taking orders and shipping our first units out the door this month. I've always believed NEO was the perfect tool for the classroom—but now it has gotten even better!



When I first heard what the product development team had planned for the NEO 2, I immediately thought of the time my husband asked me for a Leatherman for Christmas. I had no idea what that was, so I went to the Internet for more information. Wow—what a tool! At first glance, it looked like a pair of needle-nosed pliers, but upon further examination, it was clear to see it had many, many uses! Of course, he could still use it just as a pair of pliers, but he could also pull out one of the many other tools hidden in the handles and get a ruler, bottle opener, screwdriver, metal file, crimper, wire stripper, and so much more! I was not surprised that they called it the Leatherman Multi-Tool. My husband loves it because he can do so many things with such a simple device.

That's what NEO 2 can do for you in the classroom! You can use NEO 2 as a word processor for your writing activities. But, as you delve deeper, you will find many other uses for this wonderful laptop. It has all the functionality of our [NEO](#) with additional features you're going to love. And the good news is, the price is only \$40 more than our favorite NEO.

- NEW – Wireless Printing so students print documents without leaving their desks
- NEW – Responder SmartApplet for instant classroom response to teacher questions.
- NEW – 2Know!Toolbar allows teachers to graph responses to on-the-fly, specific-answer, and short-answer quizzes (Short-answer quiz functionality available March 2008)
- NEW – Integration with Accelerated Reader™ – allows students to use NEO 2 to answer AR quiz questions and submit responses to Renaissance Place for evaluation. (Available March 2008 with Accelerated Reader Renaissance Place version 7.5)

Now you know why we're excited! If you are ready to hear more or place an order, please give us a call at 888-274-0680. We can register you for an informative webinar, send you product literature, answer your questions, and deliver you a quote. NEO 2, and all its applications, is going to be great for your students, so we look forward to helping you get them into your classrooms and accelerate learning!

Sincerely,

Jan Mills
 Vice-President, Hardware Sales
 AlphaSmart, a Renaissance Learning Brand
<http://www.alphasmart.com>



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AlphaSmart laptops used throughout the curriculum at North East ISD

Today's students have grown up around technology, and are extremely comfortable using these devices. It's no surprise, then, with the use of AlphaSmart 3000 and NEO laptops, the students of the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, feel uninhibited to write.

"My students have been motivated to write partly because they learned to type their writing on AlphaSmarts," said Nolan Martinez, fourth-grade teacher at Windcrest Elementary. "Today's students are so into technology that AlphaSmarts are a perfect fit for them. They are a welcome change from the traditional writing method."

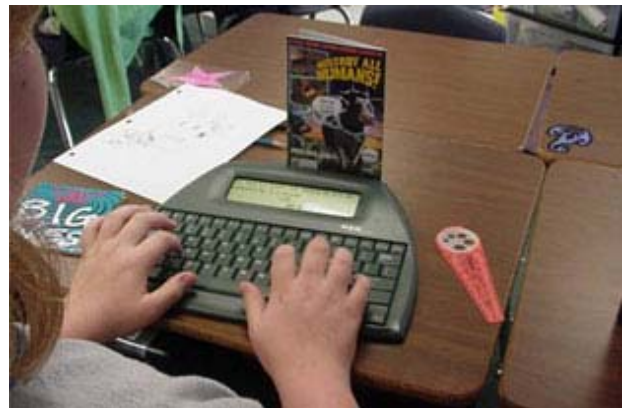
AlphaSmart laptops were implemented for the 2001-2002 school year, originally intended to help the district's third- through fifth-grade students learn keyboarding by using the laptop's KeyWords application, and to provide mobile word-processing labs. But not long after the classes were using them, it became clear that the durable, portable laptops could be used for far more than they had expected.

"We use the AlphaSmarts for many areas of our curriculum," says Pamela Berry, an Instructional Technology Specialist for the district. "We use them for writing projects, writing improvement, keyboarding instruction, spelling tests, answering questions for content area lessons, writing summaries, reading activities, and brainstorming lists for inspiration files."

And the list doesn't stop there. Many of the classes are also using the laptops for science, social studies, and math. Berry said they're often used to create Know, Want to Know, and Learn charts (KWL) to help teachers plan their lessons. Students will write what they know about a certain topic in File 1, and what they want to know about that topic in File 2. Then teachers can beam the information from each student into one document, review it, and then plan the lesson accordingly. The laptops can be used to write up lab reports, or to explain the strategies used to solve math problems.

Not only did they discover the many uses for the AlphaSmart laptops, they also found them useful for students of all ages. Kindergarten students use the AlphaSmarts to write predictable sentences, then print and illustrate them. First-grade students have used them to write about field trip experiences, and second graders learn valuable editing skills. At the middle schools, the laptops are used for keyboarding and word processing.

"Using the AlphaSmarts in the classroom alleviates some of the problems we're faced with in the writing block. With each child working at different levels and stages of the writing process, it was hard to have slow keyboarders monopolizing the two classroom computers," says Marcy Hildebrand, fifth-grade teacher at Northwood Elementary. "By using AlphaSmarts, technology is used more often and each child can apply his or her tech skills more regularly."



A student writes a book review using her NEO. The schools of North East ISD have found the AlphaSmart laptops useful in all subject areas.

Berry and the other Instructional Technology Specialists ensure that educators know how to use the technology by modeling and team teaching with the AlphaSmarts in the classrooms. Not only do they teach them how to operate and charge the units, but they also model lessons on integration of the laptops in nearly every subject area.

Teachers have been pleased with the effects of having AlphaSmart laptops as a valuable teaching and learning tool. It's not only saved them time in the classroom and computer lab, it has motivated scores of students to write.

"Enthusiasm and motivation is clearly evident from students as they use the AlphaSmarts," Berry says. "Middle school teachers report that they spend less time helping students use the computer labs and students produce longer and better writing samples, while elementary teachers report that their students write and edit more when using the AlphaSmarts."

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The Durability of a NEO: Can it survive a fall off a moving vehicle?

Sierra, an eleventh-grade student from a tiny town in Northern California, always loved her NEO because it could go everywhere she went. One day, she took it with her in the car—or rather, ON the car—accidentally leaving it on the hood as her mother drove about 30 mph into traffic.

To her horror, her NEO flew off and landed in the middle of the road. Her mom pulled over, and Sierra ran to retrieve it. It had managed to avoid being run over, but it had gotten pretty beaten up: its batteries had been bent beyond recognition, nine keys were missing, and a wire came unhooked.

Sierra didn't have much hope for her beloved NEO, the one she had saved up her own money to purchase a few months prior. She pulled off the back panel to try to reattach the wire, but found nowhere to hook it to. About ready to give up, she put new batteries in it. To her surprise, it worked—and all of her stories were still on it!

"I have to say, it was called 'durable', but this was much more than I ever hoped or dreamed of!" Sierra says. "It was amazing. The NEO is VERY durable, and I just wanted to put it out there that I am very, very impressed."

Sierra's first encounter with an AlphaSmart laptop was as a seventh-grade student when her school was loaning an earlier model for students to type stories and assignments. "I thought they were the best thing in the world," she recalls. "You could type on the bus or wherever you went." As a tenth grader, she went to the AlphaSmart website and was quickly sold on the NEO's features. She saved her money and purchased one of her very own, even though she already had a traditional laptop.

Besides its portability and unfathomable durability, she prefers the NEO to her laptop because its design prevents people from looking over her shoulder as she writes, and she can proofread as she watches the words come up on the screen when she transfers her work to her laptop. In a nutshell, she says, "It's just easier!"

Just in time for school to resume again, Sierra's NEO was repaired under warranty, and is operating as good as new.

"To anyone who is as absent-minded as I am—if your AlphaSmart falls off a car, try just putting batteries in first!" Sierra, who is thinking of becoming an elementary school teacher, jokes. "It might actually work, as out-of-this-world as that seems!"

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Tip-type students

Word processors help Oakland students improve their typing, writing ability

Teresa Williams

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Tuesday, December 12, 2006

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[ENLARGE](#)

Oakland Elementary School third-grader Jesse Young practices keyboarding on an AlphaSmart laptop word processor while in Dena Morosin's class at the school last week.

MICHELLE ALAIMO/N-R staff photo



[ENLARGE](#)

Oakland Elementary School fourth-grader Gage Saunders types out words the computer displays during keyboarding practice in Anne Pichette's class at the school last week.

MICHELLE ALAIMO/ N-R staff photo

said. "They weren't in alignment with our reading."

During the 2004-05 school year, just 30 percent of the students met the writing standard. The state average wasn't much better, at 32 percent.

Carson asked the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians for a grant to buy AlphaSmarts, small wireless laptop word processors that allow students to write and learn to keyboard, but don't connect to the Internet.

The tribe responded with a grant of \$9,000 to buy 30 AlphaSmarts.

In addition to changes in instruction, Carson thinks the word processors have helped. Last school year, 53 percent of Oakland's fourth-graders met the state writing standards, 11 percent more than the state

OAKLAND — For Oakland Elementary School, being called "exceptional" wasn't enough.

The school was rated "exceptional" on its 2005-06 state report card for the fourth straight year.

"It's extremely unusual for anyone to be exceptional two years in a row," said Oregon Department of Education spokesman Gene Evans.

For the last two years, nearly all of Oakland's third-graders have met the state standards in math and reading.

The fourth-grade writing scores, however, bothered Principal Julie Carson.

"Our writing scores weren't very good," Carson

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average. Carson expects to see more improvement this year.

Every third- and fourth-grader spends a half hour each day using the word processors. The third-graders work mostly on keyboarding, and the fourth-graders compose writing assignments.

Teacher Kara Powell has used the AlphaSmarts extensively in her classroom.

“One of the main things ... is their excitement for writing,” she said. “One thing is it’s new for them. The other thing is when they see adults writing, they’re typing.”

Powell said her students know they need to learn to use computers.

“It’s easier for them to see their mistakes, too,” Powell said.

Children are used to reading words in print, and they recognize misspelled words better when they are printed, she said. The AlphaSmarts can spell check documents, but the teacher can turn that function off so students have to correct their own work.

“I think they really take ownership of what they write,” Powell said.

Students can “beam” their work to the teacher’s computer electronically, and the teacher can use a projector to show the whole class what the student has done. The teacher can also make changes to the document.

The fourth-graders seem to like using the AlphaSmarts.

“I like them because you kind of challenge yourself to get better and better,” Patrick Byrd said.

“The AlphaSmart goes faster than writing,” Shantina Rust added, referring to handwriting.

Patrick said he doesn’t like having to erase on paper, and he likes writing stories on the keyboard.

“I like that they’re more compact than normal computers,” said Austin Miller, who was working on a piece of writing about football. “You don’t have to get up and sharpen your pencil if it breaks. You can just keep writing. Teachers can read it better if you have bad handwriting, like I do.”

Xenya Fernandez was writing a story about a horse and a unicorn.

“It’s easier to type than pick up your pencil because it hurts between your fingers,” she said. “And it’s faster.”

Carson said because students are keyboarding in elementary school, in middle school they are ahead and can spend more time learning to use the computer instead of typing.

“With the direction that we’re moving in technology, it’s necessary to learn and be exposed to it at an earlier age,” Powell said.

- You can reach reporter Teresa Williams at 957-4230 or via e-mail at twilliams@newsreview.info.

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Get access to 25 NEO laptops for your classroom writing project this November

The National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) Young Writers Program is accepting a brief essay from teachers who wish to participate in NaNoWriMo with the help of 25 loaner NEOs.

NaNoWriMo's Young Writers Program is a fun, free writing adventure for both teacher-lead student groups and young solo scribes. On the YWP site at <http://ywp.nanowrimo.org>, these brave young writers and their teachers will find all the resources they need for an unforgettable month of novel-writing and creative exploration.

New for 2007, online curricula for teachers and virtual workbooks for kids are available for participation in NaNoWriMo. You'll find extensive creative-writing curricula in three tracks—elementary, middle school, and high school—to help kids through this seat-of-your-pants, fiction-writing adventure. The curriculum includes tips, lesson plans, and worksheets to prepare students for NaNoWriMo, to keep them writing during November, and to make sure that their novels aren't forgotten after the event is over.

If you believe that your class of novelists could benefit from the use of these 25 loaner NEOs, please send a request directly to Tavia@nanowrimo.org. In the email, please include your name, the name of your school or library, and an explanation of why the NEOs would be helpful to your classroom.



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AlphaSmarties Best Practices Tip

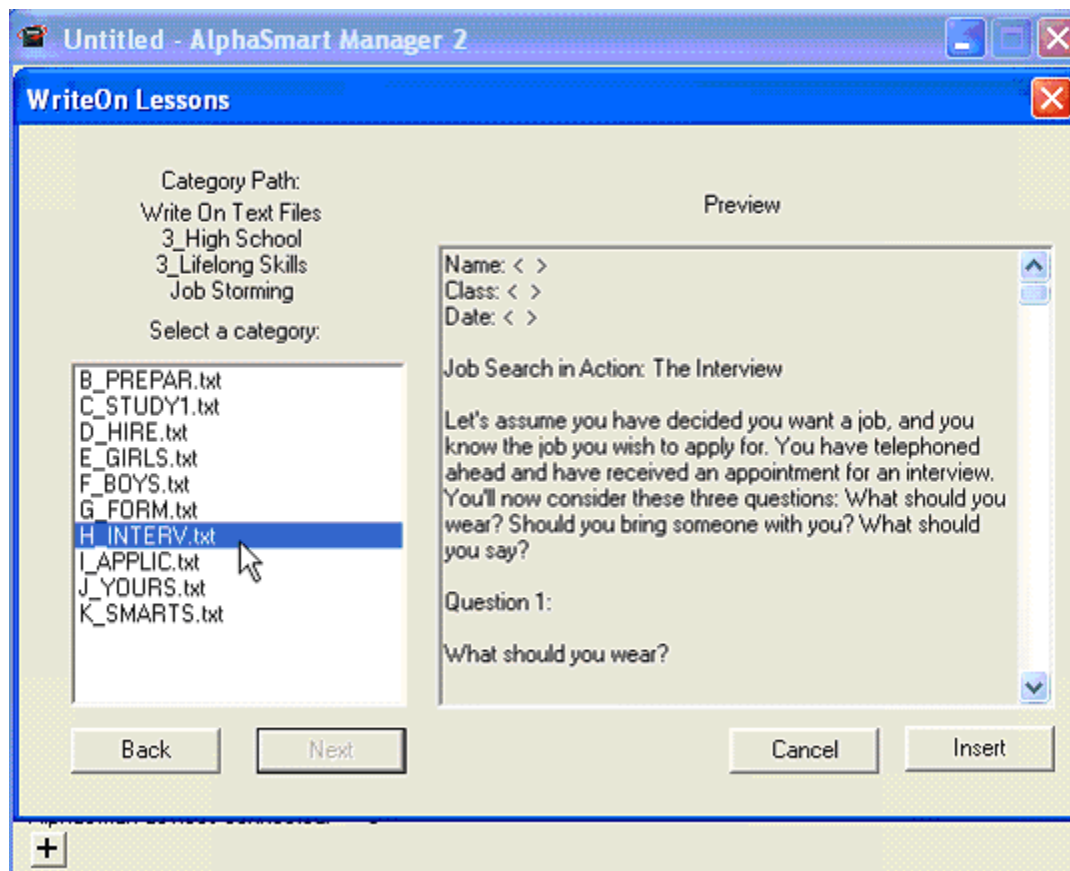
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WriteOn! Writing Lessons

Have you ever been faced with a writing assignment but unsure just how to get started? Then you know the frustration of “blank page syndrome.” Budding writers need all the encouragement they can get. But in today’s busy classroom it’s sometimes difficult to find the time to guide a student through the writing process. With WriteOn! Lessons, you now have an assistant to help you.

AlphaSmart Manager v2.7 now has 387 writing lessons built into it that you can easily assign and send to your students. The lessons are organized first by grade level and then by process or genre.

As you can see in the image below, they’re easy to access through a wizard built into AlphaSmart Manager. More than just a writing prompt, WriteOn! Lessons guide students through the writing process through a series of thought provoking questions.



[Download](#) the latest version of AlphaSmart Manager v2.7 and put an end to blank page syndrome for your students!

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Product News

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Product News

Introducing the all new NEO 2™

What do you get when you cross a clicker with a laptop? You get NEO 2!

If you attended NECC this year in Atlanta, you may have been one of the very first people to see the all-new NEO 2 in action. NEO 2 is an indispensable education tool for those needing an innovative and cost effective way to integrate technology into the K-12 classroom. NEO 2 may look like a simple keyboard – but don't let its simplicity fool you. NEO 2 can be used to teach writing, build keyboarding skills, take Accelerated Reader quizzes, instantly assess student understanding using its classroom response functionality, encourage student collaboration, wirelessly print documents to a printer, and much, much more. But most importantly, NEO 2 engages students in the learning process and truly builds excitement for learning.

NEO 2 includes all of the features and functions of the original NEO that have been proven to increase student motivation and achievement. In addition, NEO 2 also offers true two-way communication capability using Radio Frequency (RF) technology. With RF, teachers and students can:

- Engage in instantaneous classroom response activities for on-the-fly assessment of student understanding.
- Take Accelerated Reader quizzes to help motivate students to read more.
- Print documents without leaving their seats.
- Complete more formal assessments using quizzes or tests built by the teacher in AccelTest.

What can you do with NEO 2?

Assess student understanding and inform instruction.

- Students can use NEO 2 to respond to multiple choice, true/false, yes/no, numeric and short answer questions.
- Teachers can use the 2Know! Toolbar to quickly gather student responses from NEO 2s, graph them, and adjust their teaching to better meet the immediate needs of their classroom.
- Teachers can create more formal assessments using AccelTest and send them to students for completion on their NEO 2s.

Fight the fade

- Preliminary results from the Carnegie Foundation indicate that classroom response systems like that used in the NEO 2 positively impact student engagement and learning.
- NEO 2's classroom response functionality will keep your students engaged in the learning process.

Facilitate more reading; build literacy skills faster

- Students can build their reading skills faster because they will no longer have to wait to use a computer in the classroom or make trips to the computer lab.
- Students can read their book and use their NEO 2 to take their AR quiz immediately from the comfort of their own desk.

Pricing Information

NEO 2 Single Units

1-29 units: \$239

30+ units: \$219

NEO 2 SmartOption Mobile Lab: \$7,750

New Pricing on the Original NEO

The original NEO, already a favorite in many writing and keyboarding classrooms is now available at a lower price. As of July 2007 the original NEO is priced at just \$199, or \$179 in quantities of 30 or more. NEO SmartOption Mobile Labs have also been reduced to \$6,450 for a lab containing 30 NEOs, software, lockable, mobile cart, and more.

For more details on NEO by AlphaSmart, call 800-656-6740.

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Conference Appearances

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Name	Dates	City	State
NSBA Technology & Learning Conference	October 17-18, 2007	Nashville	TN
25th Annual Closing the Gap Conference	October 17-20, 2007	Minneapolis	MN
American Association of School Librarians National Conference & Exhibition	October 25-27, 2007	Reno	NV
National Middle School Association Conference	November 8-10, 2007	Houston	TX
National Council of Teachers of English Conference	November 16-18, 2007	New York	NY

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