



AlphaSmart eNEWSLETTER



Your source for news, product upgrades, and more for AlphaSmart products for the K-12 Education market.

December 2007



FEATURE STORIES



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

Informed Instruction: Is it possible in the time-crunched classroom?

Time in today's classrooms is often too tight to focus on individualized instruction, but there are ways to squeeze it in. [Read more...](#)

Access to assistive technology sparks academic success for Virginia teen

Zach's use of the DANA inspires students with more significant disabilities to overcome academic challenges. [Read more...](#)

NEO laptop use leads to writing test score growth at Creek View Elementary

Students write more and write better when the frustration level associated with writing by hand is removed. [Read more...](#)

AlphaSmarts for Africa

Find out how your old AlphaSmart laptops can be donated to children in Northern Kenya to receive a discount toward brand-new ones! [Read more.](#)

National Conference on Accelerating Learning

A definite "must-attend" for writing instructors and AlphaSmart-using educators. [Learn more.](#)

Announcing AlphaSmart's 21st Century Writing Grant

Starting January 3rd, you can apply to receive one of two grants for a NEO 2 SmartOption Mobile Lab package worth more than \$10,000 each. [Learn more.](#)

AlphaSmarties Best Practice Tip

Procedures prevent problems! Establishing procedures to distribute and collect the NEOs or DANAs from students can help maximize efficiency. Here are some tips to keep things moving smoothly. [Read more...](#)

NOT USING NEO 2 YET?

**Sign up for our
FREE WEBINAR!**

Discover how all-new NEO 2
can transform your school!

Product News



NEO 2 in action

How the classroom response functionality works in a typical scenario. [Learn More...](#)

Help students get their work published!

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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Informed Instruction: Is it possible in the time-crunched classroom?

By Beth Bergmans, Product Line Manager for NEO 2



All too often, policymakers look at the classroom as if it's a magic box. They push in some inputs—like standards, technology, and stated expectations—and wait for some magic to happen. Later, they wonder why they aren't seeing the expected outputs of increased student engagement, meaningful student achievement, satisfied teachers, and of course, better test scores.

As educators, you know that it isn't magic at all; rather, it is the hard work that comes from preparation, personality and practice—and the ability to know on a dime how well students know the content.

Informed instruction helps you tailor your teaching to meet the individual needs of each student. That's when the magic happens...when students become engaged in the learning process and authentic student achievement occurs.

But informed instruction takes time, and time is precious, especially in the classroom. With so many standards to teach and other demands on teachers' time, it is often difficult to provide each student with the instruction he or she needs.

The good news is, tools like the brand-new NEO 2 can help teachers with informed instruction. Teachers can conduct on-the-fly assessments through NEO 2's interactive classroom response system to learn instantly how well their lesson is being understood, and if it's necessary to reteach a concept. Teachers can know—at a glance—exactly which students need a little more assistance, and which students are ready to move on to more challenging material.

NEO 2 provides time-crunched educators with an invaluable classroom tool, which combines the best features of a laptop with a classroom response system, and adds keyboarding, writing and assessment software—everything an educator needs in a single, low-cost device.

I invite you to check out the classroom scenario in the Product Spotlight feature for more on how this feature of the NEO 2 can help you provide informed instruction.

To learn more about how NEO 2 can change your classroom, [click here](#) or call 888-274-0680.

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Access to assistive technology sparks academic success for Virginia teen

How Zach inspires other students with use of DANA

For many students with disabilities, assistive technology really can make all the difference in achieving success. Just ask Zach, a senior attending Stuarts Draft High School in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, whose AlphaSmart DANA laptop has helped him excel academically.

When he was very young, Zach was diagnosed with severe Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD-NOS) and dysgraphia, an impairment in the ability to write.

"I got interested in the AlphaSmart products in elementary school when I was determined to be eligible for services based on my I.E.P. I have learned from them ever since!" said Zach, now a National Honor Society member. "I progressed from an AlphaSmart straight to a DANA in ninth grade. Now that I use a DANA, I'm not going back!"

Because of his experience and interests, Zach is planning for a technology-based career. He's been accepted to Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia next fall, and plans to take part in a mentoring program in the IT Department of a regional wireless telephone company.

"Zach is extremely tech savvy. The majority of what he knows about the device has been self-taught," said Joan Wingfield, the district's Assistive Technology Coordinator. "As with most high schools, the special education teachers do not have much time to learn technology, and we have found the solution to this is to teach the students instead!"

The school developed a DANA User's Club in 2006, bringing together the 10 students who were using DANAs or NEOs. The purpose was to help those using the laptops to learn from each other, and most specifically, from Zach.

He enthusiastically jumped right in as a leader of the group, and encouraged other DANA or NEO-using students to attend. Today, each monthly club meeting is an exchange of ideas, focusing on the benefits of the laptops and the how-tos of the DANA's features, such as beaming and hot syncing. It's also a venue to discuss the issues students are having in class as a group.

"Zach's successful demonstration and integration of the DANA in his classes has inspired students with more significant disabilities to believe they can achieve success in academic areas," Wingfield said. "His love of the DANA and technology is



Zach's love of technology drives him to teach other students the usefulness of the Dana.

contagious, and he encourages the students to take advantage of the tools that are available and not to be self conscious about using them."

Zach's expertise has now spread outside his school and into the district. "Last year, he went with me to another middle school and high school in the district and did a presentation," Wingfield said. "We are now initiating DANA Clubs at the other high schools and some middle schools."

As a result of his efforts, the district has more requests for DANAs and NEOs than they have units to give.

"Zach is encouraging us to start early with getting students to use technology, as that is when kids buy in," Wingfield said. "When the students are invested in the DANAs at the middle school and high school level, it becomes a much more powerful and beneficial tool when students demonstrate their usefulness, than when teachers try to convince the students to use them."

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NEO laptop use leads to writing growth Creek View students easily overcome writing frustration

At Creek View Elementary School, technology is woven throughout the curriculum, with students as young as kindergarten embarking regularly on a digital learning adventure.

Early on, the K-5 school in Alpharetta, Georgia, circulated 32 computer laptops for use in classes. While they got plenty of use, teachers and students were routinely frustrated with them.

"It seemed every time you went to use a lab of 16 regular laptops, maybe only two of them had a complete battery charge, and maybe half even worked correctly," recalled first-grade teacher Heidi Holcomb. "When you factor in the amount of time to boot up, login and get the kids set up to use the laptops, it was extremely time-consuming, and almost not worth it to use them."

In 2004, Creek View was one of only four elementary schools in Georgia to be awarded a 21st Century Model School Grant for technology. The grant provided funds for technology enhancements to suit their instructional needs.

"I wanted something that would be durable enough to use in kindergarten to teach typing and writing skills," said Holcomb, who is also the school's 21st Century Project Manager. "The AlphaSmart salesperson came and showed us the NEO. I watched the salesperson throw the NEO laptop on the ground, pick it up and turn it on. I said, 'These are perfect for kindergartners!'" The school first purchased 10 NEOs to complement their technology mix. "We passed around those 10 NEOs so many times!" she said. "A few weeks ago, we purchased two SmartOption Mobile Labs of 30 NEOs each and two carts of Danas. But before they came, those first 10 NEOs definitely got their use!"

Nationwide, AlphaSmart laptops are quickly gaining ground as an indispensable writing solution for the classroom, providing distraction-free laptops without Internet access, at a fraction of the cost of standard laptops. At Creek View Elementary, the NEOs are used to write and publish students' own stories, conduct spelling tests, and work on joint projects with other classes.

Holcomb has noticed that the frustration level associated with writing by hand just isn't there with use of the NEOs. "It can be extremely frustrating for students to get a story out of their heads and then to flow easily onto paper using a pencil when it can be done so much quicker with the NEOs," she said. "The writing process goes much faster than it does by hand, and students write more than they would otherwise."

Proof exists that NEO usage is helping their students' writing skills grow. "Each year we measure our students' writing progress against our district's rubric based on Georgia Performance Standards," she said. "Last year our target was to have 85% of



Students at Creek View Elementary enjoy using NEO laptops, and have shown writing growth on the district's rubric, based on state standards.

students achieve a six-point increase on their score, and 97% made it.”

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This holiday season, AlphaSmarts will help educate thousands

A child in the U.S. grows up surrounded by technology, using computers fluently earlier than ever before. In fact, computers have become such a part of the classroom that it would be challenging to teach and learn without them!

Halfway across the world, in a little village in Northern Kenya, students the same age as yours are learning about technology, too—through reading textbooks about computers. Due to frequent power outages and lack of equipment, Kenyan students lack vital hands-on lessons that make the difference in truly preparing them for today's high-tech world.



How you can make a difference

In the spirit of the holiday season, the AlphaSmarts for Africa humanitarian program was developed to provide schools in Northern Kenya with AlphaSmart laptops for use in classrooms, in an effort to help teach fundamental technology skills to students in poverty-stricken areas.

This is where you can help: From now until March 28, 2008, simply donate your old AlphaSmart Pro, 2000, 3000, Dana or NEO models, regardless of their condition. In exchange, we'll provide you with a **\$50 discount** toward a brand-new AlphaSmart NEO or NEO 2 laptop.

"An AlphaSmart laptop can make a huge impact for students in a Kenyan classroom, with even a single laptop providing more than 25 children with access to vital technology skills," said Greg Wright, Senior Vice President and General Manager for Renaissance Learning's Electronics Division.

Your donated laptops will be refurbished, packaged, and sent to Kenya for distribution. [Generation for Change and Growth \(GCG\)](#), whose mission is to promote educational initiatives that enhance learning and eradicate illiteracy, will distribute and implement the donated AlphaSmart laptops in the Kenyan schools. The organization will also provide valuable training for teachers on how to use the laptops in their classrooms.

"Due to constant power interruptions and in some cases, absolute lack of electricity, standard laptops aren't much use due to their reliance on this resource. The AlphaSmart laptops are battery driven, and that makes all the difference," said Dr. Ali-Young Mahamud, co-founder of GCG. "It is exceedingly necessary that every child experiences the pleasure of learning through technology. There shouldn't be any reason not to, not even poverty. This project is making this reality come sooner than anyone would imagine."

No good deed goes unrewarded

While the children who receive your laptops will get the tools to help them succeed in today's world, you and your students will not only be rewarded with the deeds of charity, you'll also benefit through the use of brand-new NEO or NEO 2 laptops that provide a much greater range of capability and function than your old machines.

For details on how to donate, visit www.alphasmart.com/helpchild.

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February 2-5, 2008 • Orlando, Florida

What the National Conference will offer for writing instructors and AlphaSmart-using educators

Newly redesigned and expanded for 2008, the National Conference on Accelerating Learning will be unlike any conference you've ever attended before.

More than just training on your Renaissance products, you'll find an array of workshops and sessions geared specifically on writing instruction, practice, formative assessment and more.

Just a sample of what you'll experience:

- [Maya Angelou, Cheryl Brown Henderson, and Wintley Phipps](#)—Featured General Session Speakers
- [Teaching Writing a Better Way: Using Evidence-Based Practices](#) presented by [Dr. Steve Graham](#), leading researcher on writing instruction and development, will present a variety of writing practices that have been shown to be effective in scientific studies or through the study of exceptional teachers of writing. Dr. Graham will incorporate humorous student writing examples into this session.
- [Literacy Matters: Reading and Writing Across the Content Areas](#) This interactive pre-conference workshop presented by Dr. Robin Fogarty will leave you with simple and effective strategies that foster reading and writing in your classroom.
- [A Districtwide Focus on Writing with NEO 2](#)
Presented by Brian Betze, Superintendent, Berlin Township, NJ, you'll hear the story of the first broad-implementers of NEO 2 and their quest to make writing instruction a district-wide focus.
- [Formative Assessment with NEO 2 or 2Know! Classroom Response System](#)
Learn innovative ways to use the 2Know! classroom response system to gauge students' developing knowledge. Explore

AccelTest software and learn to create surveys polls, teacher-paced sessions, and integrate questions with existing PowerPoint presentations. Discuss strategies to view results and make decisions about the next steps in teaching and learning.

- **Managing Writing Instruction**

Learn how to design effective writing assignments, support learning, guide students through each step of the writing process, and manage your writing classroom efficiently.

And so much more! To see more writing-oriented sessions, visit

www.renlearn.com/nationalconference/08/BestPractices/Writing.htm

Don't wait—reserve your spot today!

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Announcing AlphaSmart's 21st Century Writing Grant

The AlphaSmart 21st Century Writing Grant program assists education leaders as they implement technology to improve student performance in keyboarding and writing. To achieve this purpose, two grants will be awarded this year.

Grant Award

- One NEO 2 SmartOption Mobile Lab valued at \$7,750
- One day of on-site professional development valued at \$2,400
- Three, one-hour webinar training sessions valued at \$149 each

Timeline

- Details and application available at www.alphasmart.com/k12 starting Tuesday, January 3, 2008
- Applications due: Friday, February 15
- Winners Announced: Monday, March 17

Eligibility

K-12 institutions, including public, non-profit, charter, and private schools are eligible to apply. Additionally, institutions of higher education working with eligible K-12 institutions, are eligible to apply.

For full details, application and more, visit www.alphasmart.com/k12.

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AlphaSmarties Best Practices Tip

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Procedures Prevent Problems

Alliteration aside...establish procedures to distribute and collect NEOs and DANAs. Most teachers use a permanent marker or paint pen to number each device. Teach students to return their NEOs or DANAs to the same slot and USB cable each time. With a clear set of instructions and a little practice, students quickly learn to retrieve their NEOs or DANAs and are able to get right down to work.

If teachers share a SmartOption Mobile Lab, determine a schedule to delete all files using the management software. Because current studies show that students write more with NEOs and DANAs, the devices quickly fill up with all kinds of student files. While it's not a problem for the NEOs and DANAs, students may find it time consuming to sort through a long set of files each day.

One media specialist established a procedure that all files are deleted each Friday afternoon at 3:30 p.m., unless a teacher tells her that a project is underway and the files need to stay. The media specialist posted a message board on the inside of the cart's door where teachers can write instructions if files are not to be deleted. Otherwise, Monday morning, students have a clean NEO or DANA to use.

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Product News

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"I don't get it—how can these little laptops actually inform my instruction? How does it work? Does it take a lot of time?"

Picture this:

Ms. Johnson is a sixth-grade math teacher at Anywhere Middle School in Anywhere, USA. Her class is made up of students all over the board in learning abilities—sometimes she is astonished how quickly some of her students catch on, and others, well...they're not quite as quick as the others. She has taught the previous few concepts to prepare the class to take on the next lesson of learning ratios, and wants to know if her students are ready for instruction and practice on the next concept.

She *could* just assume they are ready and begin teaching the concept, but doing it that way in the past has caused her to spend more time revisiting previous concepts to get them all up to speed, while her faster learners languish in boredom and resort to disrupting the others.

Or, she could get a quick and easy snapshot of each student's readiness for the new concept and teach accordingly.

Here's how it works using NEO 2:

1. During Ms. Johnson's preparation for today's lesson, she uses AccelTest, the assessment software included with NEO 2, to design a quiz to determine if her students are ready to learn about ratios.
2. Once class starts, Ms. Johnson begins a student-paced classroom response session.
3. She asks her students to turn on their NEO 2 laptops and join the session using the unit's Responder SmartApplet.
4. From her classroom computer, Ms. Johnson sends her ratio readiness quiz using the NEO 2's radio frequency technology to all of her students' laptops.
5. Ms. Johnson asks her students to read each question that appears on their screens, select the best answer, and when finished, hit send to submit their answers electronically to her computer from their NEO 2s.
6. From her classroom computer, Ms. Johnson watches as each student submits his or her final answers.
7. Ms. Johnson reviews the results, adjusting her lesson plans accordingly, and creates two different assignments: one for students who demonstrate readiness for ratios, and one for students who may need some additional practice before tackling ratios.
8. Using AlphaSmart Manager, Ms. Johnson uses her classroom computer to update each student's NEO 2 with the assignment that's appropriate for him or her.



This is just one short example of how NEO 2 can be used throughout your teaching day to quickly determine what students know

and then develop assignments and lesson plans to meet each students' need.

Want to get a better understanding of the NEO 2's capabilities? [Sign up for a FREE webinar!](#)

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Conference Appearances

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Name	Dates	City	State
Florida Educational Technology Conference	January 23-25, 2008	Orlando	FL
Educational Computer Conferences Teaching, Reading & Learning Diversity	January 24-26, 2008	San Francisco	CA
Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference	January 30-February 2, 2008	Orlando	FL
National Conference on Accelerating Learning	February 2-5, 2008	Orlando	FL
eTech Ohio Technology Conference	February 4-6, 2008	Columbus	OH
Texas Computer Education Association Conference and Exposition	February 6-8, 2008	Austin	TX
The Teaching and Learning Expo	March 7-8, 2008	New York City	NY

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