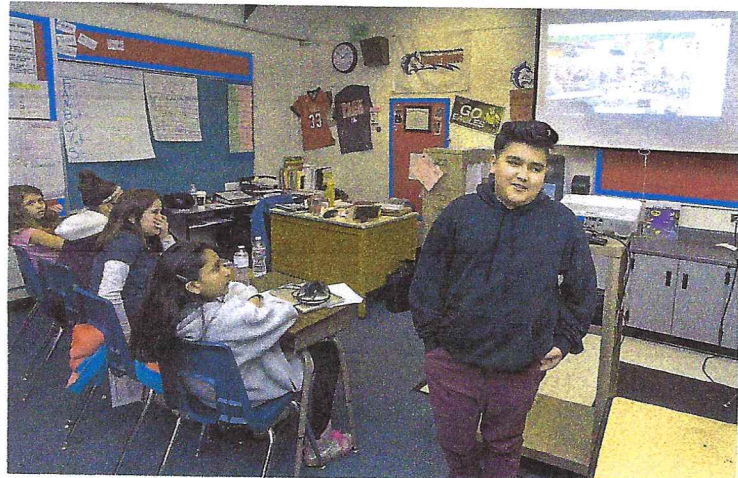


Pueblo's Franklin, Irving students use technology to share ideas

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CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES Ethan Martinez, (right) a fifth-grade student at Franklin School of Innovation in Pueblo, takes part in a nationwide Digital Learning Day storytelling project on Thursday. Ethan and classmates were in contact at both Franklin and Irving Elementary School.
John Jaques

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Digital Learning Day

Across the hall today, across the world tomorrow.

Fifth-graders at Franklin School of Innovation and Irving Elementary School pocketed a nifty lesson in technology's powerful role in keeping people informed and connected.

The students joined colleagues across the hall, the district and country in celebrating Digital Learning Day, an annual endeavor that exposes youngsters to the ways technology can improve and brighten up their educational journey.

At the two local Pueblo City Schools (D60), the fifth-graders shared and exchanged, via video chat, personally written and visually accented stories created through the Storybird software.

Inside Donna Tonko's classroom at Franklin, Zennin Swope informed schoolmates in Yonge Simmons' nearby classroom, as well as fellow fifth-graders at Irving, about the success of the Resolution Group in combatting bullying.

Zennin's classmate, Ethan "E.J." Martinez, offered an intimate account about his apprehension in making the move up to Franklin from the comfort of his elementary school.

"When I came to this school for my fifth grade year, I was really nervous," E.J. read aloud as his storyboard was virtually exported to those viewing and listening. "I was really nervous about making new friends."

Those fears, as E.J. gratefully discovered, proved to be unfounded.

"When I started, I realized there were a lot of great teachers who helped me get ready for future," read E.J., who also explained how he used his sisters, also students at Franklin, to help him broker new friendships.

"I was a little bit nervous reading my story before everyone," E.J. admitted. "But I really liked the fact that we could meet new people and hear their stories without leaving the classroom."

Advanced technology aside, Zennin said her favorite aspect of the project was being able to express herself.

"The most fun part? That I got to choose my own picture and tell my own personal story," she said. "But I liked getting to share it without having to stand in front of a class to do it."

From the Irving classrooms of Quinn McNierney came equally heartfelt narratives, accented by winsome artwork, about the joys and perks of attending that school on the west end of town.

Among those looking on with satisfied smiles and big grins as the children delved into digital connectedness were Zach Mather and Paula Herreraez.

"Technology can really be a great way to knock down barriers, if you will," said Mather, D60's director of technology. "It increases the ability to see people, whether it's across Pueblo or across the world.

"It's incredible the power it has."

Herraez, the district's digital learning coach, said while technology may be the vehicle, a student's personality is the driver.

"I think it brings out their personal stories and their sense of school pride and connectedness," she said. "Before anything, they had to sit down and craft their own story about their school experience."

Participation in Digital Learning Day is par for the superhighway course for Franklin, which as a blended learning school, combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods.

"All of our students from second through fifth grade have their own technology," said Franklin Principal Cary Palumbo. "They have a Chromebook that can be accessed all day long.

"And they're using it a lot of times to supplement and accelerate their reading and to remediate their learning in different areas."

Formerly known as Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, the changeover to Franklin School of Innovation reflects a reboot of sorts.

"We needed a new identity," Palumbo said. "This school was suffering through its fifth year of turnaround and with the move up to performance (in 2016-17 school year), which we are very proud of, we felt it was the new dawning of a new day.

"And we wanted the community and everyone else to know about it."