

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: FLEXIBLE LEARNING

Flexible Learning program uses technology to break down communication barriers to student learning

Communication can be a challenge for everyone, regardless of your age or ability, and it can create barriers between you and success. Assistive communication devices, however, help alleviate some of these barriers for students in the Flexible Learning program at Chimacum Schools.

Flexible Learning, formerly known as LifeSkills, serves students with a wide range of capabilities and needs in Pre-K through 12th grade and beyond. Many students require additional assistance, whether it's a person or a device, to complete academic or functional tasks, and make progress towards living more independent lives.

It truly is a team effort: teachers, therapists, paraeducators and technology all work together to support the individual needs of every student. Teacher Ann Abraham has been with the district for eight years and has a team of nine paraeducators right now, as well as Speech Language Pathologist Alice Ferland and Occupational Therapist Sarah McNulty. According to Abraham, "there would be no program without them and their dedication."

Assistive communication devices are a regular part of the Flexible Learning classrooms. These devices with specialized software, such as individual laptops

and tablets, are great for students because they can be personalized for specific, individual needs. They're regularly used to supplement traditional curriculum in reading, writing and math as many students have an easier time completing assignments this way.

There isn't a "one size fits all" device or program that works for every single student, but anything that can remove barriers and increase access to learning is a huge advantage. And they're not just for individual learning, either. "The utilization of communication devices in group activities is so fun! The students are teaching each other - and it is the best!" says Abraham.

Software & Devices Used

Just some of the specialized software and devices used by Flexible Learning programs include:

- Toby Tynavox
- LAMP
- News2You/Unique Learning System
- Edmark
- StarFall
- Zearn
- Laptops
- iPads and tablets
- Touchscreen devices
- Reader Pens
- Interactive Whiteboard and Projector

Behind the Program: Ann Abraham

Teacher Ann Abraham has been a part of the Chimacum School District since 2014 and currently leads Chimacum's Flexible Learning team. A 40-year veteran in education, her focus has been equalizing educational opportunities for all students. She holds a Bachelors in Education & Special Education as well as a Masters in Education & Special Education with a focus on Autism from Washington State University.

When Ann is not serving students, she enjoys sailing, traveling, and most of all spending time with her family, both human and canine.





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Teaching with technology

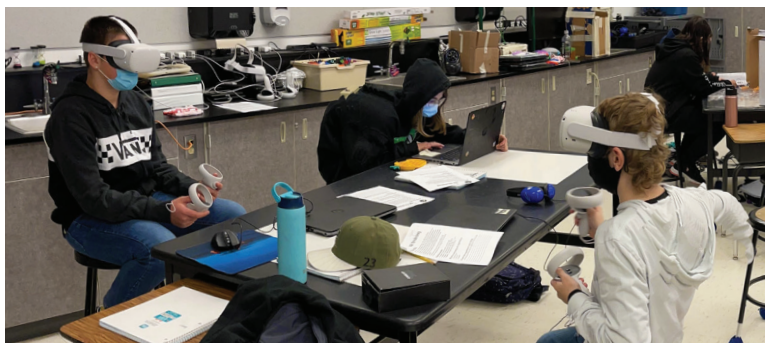
Students in Al Gonzalez's classes at Chimacum Elementary now have the ability to experience virtual reality (VR) as part of their regular classroom learning, which includes a combination of face-to-face and technology-based activities individualized for each student.

The diversity of Gonzalez's lessons pulls from 30 years of teaching experience and exposes students to a wide variety of programs and resources. Students have more control over their own learning and can choose how they learn the same content as their peers. "Kids are motivated and engaged by having a choice in what and how they learn," says Gonzalez.

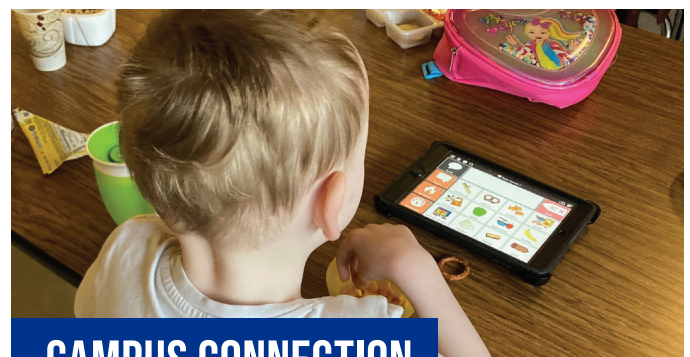
Recently, Gonzalez acquired a multi-year license to Avanti's World, an educational VR platform. Students are able to experience things they cannot in their physical classroom, explore independently or as a class, attend guided lessons, and track comprehension. The license also allows for other teachers in the district to use the program in their own classrooms.

Gonzalez also has four Oculus Quest 2's fully immersive VR headsets. He participated in the "Teach with Interactive 3D" contest designing a lesson using Fortnite Creative, then used funds from the contest to purchase the VR headsets for his students.

"Teaching with technology doesn't mean that I have to be good at everything. I'm often learning as I teach, so I get excited when students show me what they've learned and we all grow," says Gonzalez.



ABOVE: Students in Al Gonzalez's 6th grade science class use virtual reality as part of their learning. TOP RIGHT: A non-verbal Pre-K student uses an iPad with communication software purchased via PLDL grant funds to communicate with staff.



CAMPUS CONNECTION

Port Ludlow Digital Life grants equalize educational opportunities

Port Ludlow Digital Life (PLDL) established a scholarship and grant program that has helped provide countless digital devices and access for Chimacum students since 2000.

A district Occupational Therapist for 15 years, Sarah McNulty has seen the positive impact that funds from PLDL has had on all students.

Past purchases have included portable keyboards for those who have difficulties writing with a pen or pencil; iPads for students with communication challenges; and Reader Pens that can convert any textbook or worksheet into a digital reader format.

The most recent funds purchased Clicker 8, a writing tool designed for elementary students. It's a child-friendly word processing program that uses pictures, text-to-speech, talking books, and more to help learners and their teachers create individualized support for each student.

One student told McNulty, "Clicker helps me when I don't know what to write."

Partnerships like this one with Port Ludlow Digital Life are a vital component to the continued success of all students in Chimacum School District.

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