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Disney Digital Music Lab Almost Magical

North-side Walt Disney Magnet Elementary School recently built two custom labs where teachers and children from all grades can use technology to augment curriculum — from music to physics. The Disney Animation Lab opened in 2004, followed by the Digital Music Lab in 2005.

In Disney's Digital Music Lab, each child gets a hands-on experience in every music class. In fact, 775 students use the Digital Music Lab every week.

"We were looking for ways to marry our arts program with our technology program," said Brad Fisher, Disney's technology coordinator. "People have the impression that we're on the lake, we're a magnet [school]...but we're at 75 percent poverty level. It's such a wonderful opportunity to offer the kids something like digital music."

Students at the Disney Digital Music Lab



"The kids are really taking to it and just to have that buy-in makes it so much easier as a teacher," said Sarah Roodhouse. The Disney teacher was brought on specifically to teach in the lab. She has experience teaching in music labs at the college level, and is able to leverage that experience when teaching Disney's elementary students. In addition to the digital music lab curriculum, there are two other music teachers at Disney that provide traditional music lessons for students.

"Once they get started making their own [music], that's all they want to do," Roodhouse said. Already in the lab's first year, Roodhouse has seen amazing outcomes from her students. Students that had never expressed a strong curiosity or proficiency for music before are displaying talents and interests in composing, transposing, and playing.

The school had no other lab in the District from which to model it's from, so Fisher had to do some (non-musical)

Disney's Digital Music Lab components

TECH|XL Leased Hardware:

- 30 Dell computers, with
 - 2.8 GHz processor
 - 1 GB RAM of memory
 - High-end sound cards

Software:

- MiDisaurus
- Music Ace Maestro
- Finale
- Piano Suite Premiere

improvising of his own.

"I have no music education background, so it was scary to go it alone at first," Fisher said. "We definitely had a few bumps in the road getting it set up."

Fisher had to consider the facility's challenges, such as the classroom's low ceilings. He used work-a-rounds, however, and instead of using projection screens like the original plans called for, he used two flat screen TVs. He also found a company that custom-made long tables to fit the two types of keyboards that the children need in the lab — the regular computer keyboard and the musical keyboard had to both sit comfortably in front of the 19-inch monitor. The Dell computers are all leased through the TECH|XL program and are loaded with music education-specific software.

Other key parts:

- 30 19-inch flat panel monitors
- Koss headphones
- Keyboards
- 2 Viewsonic flat-screen TVs
- Agati custom-made tables
- Edirol Midi keyboard controller PCR-M80

For more information about Disney's lab, contact Technology Coordinator Brad Fisher at bfisher@cps.k12.il.us.

Hands-on learning at the Disney Digital Music Lab



"We've had surprisingly few failures," said Fisher. "How many technology coordinators can approach the principal and say let's build a digital music lab, and she says — let's do it!"

The labs were funded through private and grant funds. Disney's principal, Dr. Kathleen Hagstrom, and Fisher realize that not all schools currently have the funds to build these types of labs, but they encourage schools to get creative. The Disney staff is very willing to give tours, talk about funding, or just toss around ideas about how to better integrate technology into the curriculum.

"If you're a CPS school, you're welcome to come see what we've done," invites Fisher.

A student practices her skills



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