ing what else to do with them, Ashby said. She believes Samsung is getting ahead of the curve by providing tools and resources that can make teachers more effective and help students learn and acquire skills. ■

Educators at FETC Look to Inform their Digital Conversion

With Florida law requiring school districts to spend at least 50% of their textbook funding on digital materials by this school year, the January Florida Educational Technology Conference was a good place for educators to check in with peers, vendors and public officials on how that goal is being realized or can be achieved.

Santa Rosa instructional technology director Michael Thorpe said that district has many resources from a range of companies that includes Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Boston), Pearson (London/New York), Discovery Education (Silver Spring, MD) and Achieve 3000 (Lakewood, NJ), but they are scattered. The challenge is making it easier for educators to get to and use what the district has, he said.

Also, administrators and teachers still request traditional resources, Thorpe said. The technology department sometimes feels the content has gotten ahead of the devices available to access it, he added.

While Santa Rosa thought it was out front on infrastructure, having achieved complete wireless coverage, as the district purchased more Dell laptops—its device of choice—the technology department realized more access points in classrooms were needed while other components, like switches, were getting old.

To address the issue of scattered content, Santa Rosa is moving to ClassLink (Clifton, NJ) to achieve a single sign-on environment and also is implementing the OneRoster standard developed by IMS Global Learning Consortium (Lake Mary, FL)

Other district leaders responded to Thorpe by describing their own pain points, with many agreeing on the need to educate teachers, students and parents on using technology options. The teachers do not use it because it is new and the students do not use it because they are confused by multiple versions of the same application given by dif-

ferent teachers, one educator said. Another recounted how copying costs soared when the district stopped buying textbooks and the teachers printed out resources found on the web.

Educators generally agreed that it would be helpful to find out what is working in other districts and suggested the Florida Department of Education could function as a clearinghouse for that information. Cali Stringer, bureau chief of educational technology at the FLDOE, said that department could not take on the role of recommending any products or solutions, but was looking to foster collaboration among the districts and at using the needs analysis it conducts to help start that conversation.

Looking at the OER Option

Stringer also urged districts to take a look at open educational resource options to see how they can fit into a digital conversion, while Andrew Marcinek, open education advisor at the Office of Education Technology at the U.S. Department of Education, suggested that bureau's Learning Registry might be a place to start. The registry is not a repository of resources, but rather a card catalog of metadata tags, Marcinek said.

Rather than creating an alternative destination to existing websites, Learning Registry was created to be an open source community that allows existing educational portals and online systems to publish, consume and share information about learning resources with each other and the public. Data about resources includes grade level, subject area, author and standards alignment.

Robert Dillon, director of technology and information at the Affton (MO) school district, suggested educators "go open" in their professional lives, in the same way they are opening up their personal lives on sites like Twitter. It is a mind-set change, he acknowledged, cautioning district personnel, "You can't create haystacks of stuff and make teachers find the needles." ■

EdTechLens Launches Rainforest Journey for K-5

EdTechLens (Schenectady, NY) in the fourth quarter launched Rainforest Journey, a customizable platform that delivers multimedia content covering all areas of K-5

life science through a virtual trip through the rain forest. Rainforest Journey is the first product from the start-up company launched in 2014 to create online curriculum incorporating theme-based learning and non-fiction for K-5 classrooms.

EdTechLens founder Ellen Senisi told *EER* that the company and Rainforest Journey synthesize work she previously has done as a teacher, writer, curriculum editor and educational photographer. The program's lessons include photographs, video clips, original music, sound effects, reading passages, assessments, primary source materials and hands-on activities.

With technology changes, there is a fantastic, creative opportunity to reinvent the textbook, which is linear, not searchable and has a reputation for dullness, Senisi said. Software developed is not always a good fit for K-5 because generally software is built for advanced users without an understanding of K-5 needs, she added.

Rainforest Journey is the prototype of a program format that Senisi plans to extend in the same way to K-5 physical science and earth and space science. Senisi wrote the content herself, drawing material from a book project on the rain forest and using the New York State science standards as a guide. When the Next Generation Science Standards were released, the program was retooled to align with those.

Rainforest Journey works on any device connected to the Internet. Senisi said with schools in transition K-5 teachers need the flexibility to teach whole class lessons on a whiteboard, to instruct small groups with devices, or to print out lessons as PDFs.

Launch Follows Pilot

Rainforest Journey was piloted for nine months with school and home users. Among the findings from the pilot was a need to change the delivery platform to make it more customizable.

Senisi chose Opigno, an open source elearning platform based on the free open source software Drupal from Connect-i (Preverenges, Switzerland). The new platform allows for better concept connections, for example allowing students to click on links to scientists in the field talking about work they do related to a topic learned.

Additionally, the new platform delivers data analytics for both teachers and administrators and adds interactive features with more—like learning games—in development.

EdTechLens began fundraising in November. Senisi has been working with consultants as she established the business, but will begin hiring full-time staff with additional funding.

EdTechLens will target three segments: schools and districts—via direct sales, individual online sales to classroom and home users and channel partners. Senisi sees a profusion of platforms looking for content partners. The pricing model is student subscription, with a pricing grid in development. ∎

Learning.com Enhances and Partners

Learning.com (Portland, OR) in the fourth quarter released enhancements to its flagship EasyTech digital literacy skills curriculum, including lessons for middle school that cover real-life applications of spreadsheet presentation and image editing tools, along with lessons on web search and online collaboration.

The company also continues to build partnerships with districts and states. The Oregon Elementary School Principals Association is partnering with Learning.com to provide free access for all Oregon fifth-grade students to TechLiteracy Skills Inventory, with the goal of helping students gain the skills necessary to use technology for learning and completing online assessments.

The Oregon initiative follows a partnership in Florida with the North East Florida Educational Consortium, Panhandle Area Educational Consortium and Heartland Educational Consortium that offers schools access to EasyTech and Inquiry, a project-based approach to digital literacy instruction, as well as Curriculum Foundry.

Curriculum Foundry helps districts build and share custom digital curriculum with a set of curriculum building tools that includes a repository of OER and other free digital resources. Professional development is also included as part of that program, with Learning.com hosting webinars and face-to-face training at regionally selected sites. ∎