

From the February 2002 issue of *CEA Advisor* (monthly newsletter of the Connecticut Education Association):

Online library service helping students and teachers become more cyber-savvy

When sociology teacher Sue Ludlow recently assigned her students at West Hartford's Hall High School a research project on wealth and welfare in Connecticut, her students took advantage of a new electronic resource to tap into a rich array of databases -- from newspaper archives to state and world online library catalogs -- that put information at the tips of their fingers.

Like most students these days, they logged onto the Internet for their research. Unlike most students, they used their public library cards to gain access to information from home or school at any time during the day or week.

"Students really liked the benefit of the 24/7 availability and I appreciated not having to cut and carry articles around anymore," says Ludlow.

Ludlow and her students are reaping the benefits of a new service from the Connecticut State Library -- the Connecticut Digital Library (also known as iCONN) -- that combines the benefits of a traditional library and the Internet. It provides access to an array of databases for research, with information on almost all curriculum topics for students or teachers planning lessons.

Available at no cost, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the digital library is accessible from home by the use of the barcode number on a public library card.

More than a dozen multi-use resources are available on the digital library for any K-12 student or teacher in the state from any computer with Web access. To use these resources, teachers or students simply log on to www.iconn.org. If their school has registered their computer IP addresses with the digital library, no further authentication is needed. Otherwise, access is available with the I.D. number of a valid library card from any Connecticut public library.

A new research route

"West Hartford is a good example of how Connecticut public school districts are finding that the digital library is one of the best routes to research success," says William Sullivan, administrator for the Connecticut Digital Library. "And, because access from home requires a public library card, it

provides an added incentive for students to acquire a card and use their public library.”

Sullivan adds that the usage of the databases has increased dramatically since iCONN became generally available -- a good indicator that iCONN is rapidly becoming a valuable resource to students and teachers across the state. “West Hartford is just one of many school districts whose library media specialists and teachers have taken advantage of the training programs for the digital library,” he says.

The Connecticut Digital Library – which went online nearly a year ago -- was created by the state legislature in 2000 in a bill based on an educational technology plan recommended by Lt. Governor Jodi Rell in 1999.

Two million dollars were appropriated in FY 2000-01 to purchase and develop the digital library, which was one of 19 policy recommendations made following a three-month study on computer readiness in Connecticut’s schools and libraries by the lieutenant governor. The recommendations were aimed at helping to prepare students and teachers to meet the information technology needs of the 21st century.

“The digital library provides teachers and students in Connecticut schools with free and equitable access to extensive information resources that can enrich teaching and learning,” says Sullivan. “Students who become proficient at using the databases will have a resource that will serve them well throughout their school years and in their careers beyond school.”

BOX

Digital library’s electronic resources clicks in West Hartford

West Hartford teachers and students have been tapping into the Connecticut Digital Library to enhance their learning and computing skills. Here are some of the ways they have used the resources of the digital library:

Wolcott Elementary School library media specialist Kathy Paquette introduced fifth-grade students to the digital library databases through a group lesson. Students then participated in a scavenger hunt to find specific types of information. Fourth-grade students in a gifted and talented program at the school used iCONN to locate information on heroes for their projects.

Smith Elementary School students found all of the children’s authors they needed in the biography database, while library media specialist Luci Leone finds the digital library the perfect partner for her print collection.

At the town's two middle schools, the digital library is a favorite resource of teachers and students. "I showed my seventh-grade students how easy it is to use iCONN from home or other remote sites," says Sedgwick Middle School library media specialist Lynne Hawkins. "They quickly accessed information for many projects including a geography assignment researching the effects of colonialism on Africa."

At King Philip Middle School, library media specialist Muriel Gaynor presented a teacher in-service workshop that demonstrated the range of available reading levels in the periodical databases and using the digital library's components to present differentiated lessons and activities.

At the Hall High School library, the digital library is the access point for two databases that all freshmen learn to use with their English classes. Library media specialists Mark Oliver and Janet Leonberger showed students how to use the reQuest database of statewide libraries' materials to locate books and videos beyond the school's library.

"Students learned about this particularly useful feature that lets them know whether a specific item is currently available in another library," says Leonberger. Adds Oliver, "When challenged to find specific details on someone's life, freshmen students discovered that they could find excellent articles on famous people for many of their assignments across the curriculum using Wilson Biographies Plus, one of the many databases in the digital library."

Photo Caption

When sociology teacher Sue Ludlow (standing) recently assigned her students at West Hartford's Hall High School a research project on wealth and welfare in Connecticut, her students took advantage of the new Connecticut Digital Library to tap into a rich array of databases that put information at their fingertips. Janet Leonberger, one of the school's media specialists, shows Ludlow and seniors Julia Cohn (left) and Melissa Martin how to use the reQuest database in the digital library to locate books and videos beyond the school's library.