

By Amber Hanneken

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SWINK — Books? Check. Pencils? Check. Paper? Check. Apps? Check. Check. Check.

While other schools are struggling to provide the most basic school supplies due to increasingly tighter budgets, Swink School has figured it out. Through frugal spending, applying for grants and participating in community partnerships the school has provided its educators and students with iPads, new computers and SMART boards.

"It's just what we've decided to commit to," Superintendent Ed Kennedy said. "We've been very careful with our money and how we spend money and folks before me did as well."

In May, all of Swink's teachers and paraprofessionals received new iPads — a tablet computer made by Apple, which can be used for audio and visual media consumption like books, movies, music, games and Internet access. Like the iPhone — Apple's smartphone — the iPad has access to a large library of applications, which in the education world can mean programs that help students with reading, math, history, geography and much more.

A year ago, Swink had no computer lab and some teachers weren't even able to check e-mail, but that all changed when Kennedy hired Susan Tate to be the school's technology instructor. Together, they have made technology a priority at the school not only with the iPads but also providing SMART Boards in every classroom and ordering 24 brand new MacBook laptops for the school's technology lab.

The average class size at Swink is 14 or 15 students, Kennedy said, and because of that teachers and staff are very aware of students' home situations. Swink is a small farming community and the school is the center of it all.

"This school is not just a school, it's a community. So goes the school, so goes the community," paraprofessional Tony Womack said. "We have ice cream socials down here, the water department comes down here and uses this building. If (someone in the) community has a birthday party and say it's raining, we'll come unlock the gym so they can have their birthday party in the gym."

The technology lab is for the community as well. After school, adults and students can use the facility's computers and learn the various hardware and software. Because some students don't have computers at home or have computers but no Internet, the technology lab is a place to finish an assignment. Also, since Swink has a four-day school week from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., there are longer class periods for students to have more time to work.

Womack was originally against the idea of the iPads and new computers. "I did not want technology because I thought it replaced the love and the one-on-one and the hugs and the 'hang in theres,' but it doesn't. It's just a tool to help the teachers help the kids," he said. "Here at Swink School we have a lot of power to take care of these kids and we love our kids. This is what makes Swink a family — and it's not just me, it's every administrator, every teacher, every teacher's aide. We all pull together."

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