

## IPads help EEMS students get a leg up on literacy

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**ELLSWORTH** — More screen time is not usually a recommendation for improving literacy, but it is for a pilot program involving iPads and Ellsworth Elementary-Middle School K-3 students.

Since last January, the students have been a part of Momentum, a Maine Department of Education project designed to improve literacy using iPads.

On Nov. 9, Maine Education Commissioner Robert G. Hasson Jr. visited the school to observe first-graders using the tablet computers. “The visit was great,” Hasson said. “I was impressed with the students’ use of technology in the classroom and their response to the improved instruction.” Ellsworth’s Curriculum Coordinator Rachel Kohrman Ramos said the students have been much more engaged in the classroom since they began using the iPads.

Each computer is matched with each student’s identification in order to provide individualized help. Using a student’s performance on the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) assessment test, the devices hone in on literacy areas the student needs to practice.

“It helps them with the gaps they have with their learning,” said Kohrman Ramos. If a student is having trouble with phonics or with multi-syllable words, the iPad will offer specific practice in those areas. “The students are working at their level with the instruction they need,” Kohrman Ramos said.

The students also are able to record themselves reading stories. That feature has been a big hit at parent-teacher conferences, the coordinator said. Literacy Specialist Lee Anne Larsen coordinates the Momentum program for the Maine Department of Education. Larsen said the department will have an idea how the program is working when it has been implemented for a full year. While Momentum started in January 2017, students and faculty were not fully ensconced until March.

In addition to improving student literacy, the Momentum program also aims to bolster teachers’ literacy teaching skills, Larsen said. Ellsworth was one of eight schools statewide chosen to participate in the pilot program. “There was a desire to ensure enough resources are going into the schools that are under-resourced,” Larsen said. The schools chosen have a “historically lower level of student achievement” and a “high amount of student poverty.”

The Department of Education launched Momentum to see whether the iPad program should run in every Maine public school. “If we were to scale this up, what would that look like in Maine?” Larsen said.

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