

Educators explore tech tools

By Britney Tabor/ Staff Writer

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Educators have become students once again this week as they learn tools for integrating technology into the classroom.

More than 1,300 prospective, current and former educators from Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and Kansas are receiving training through today at the third annual Lone Star Technology Integration Academy conference at Denton's LaGrone Advanced Technology Complex.

The three-day event, hosted by the Denton school district, the Denton Public School Foundation and Adopt-A-School: Partners in Education, concludes with sessions for administrators.

Founded by Robert Bostic, DISD assistant superintendent, the conference brings together individuals from public, private and home school backgrounds for "innovative instructional opportunities," he said. The conference is funded by registration fees, vendors and contributions.

"It's kind of an advanced 'teach a man how to fish,'" Bostic said. "It's regional, but it's as high-quality as any national event that's out there. It's a regional high-quality event that focuses on technology, teaching and learning."

Mobile and tablet technology usage is a major push at this year's conference, Bostic said.

Educators are receiving training on tools created by Adobe — an event sponsor — as well as website creation, video, social media, photography, online collaboration, free tablet applications on classroom topics and tips for engaging students.

Students, parents and teachers have more access to mobile technology today than anything else, Bostic said, and academy sessions attempt to help educators understand that reality.

In some cases, educators are creating presentations with experts for use in their classrooms, he said.

This is the second year the conference has been open to educators outside the Denton school district. In 2010, about 500 Denton school employees attended, and Bostic said it's been overwhelming to see the event grow.

On a stroll through LaGrone, it wasn't uncommon to see educators getting demonstrations of e-readers, interactive whiteboards and mobile workspaces. Conference participants scrolled pages on their smartphones, laptops and tablets, reviewing applications on topics ranging from how to dissect a frog to rewarding students for good behavior.

While some educators observed applications related to music and foreign languages, others explored applications for science and math.

"It's just great to be able to get with other technology users," said Deana Howells, a first-time attendee from Liberty Christian School in Argyle. "It's a great networking opportunity. It's a great resource to get feedback."

Barbara Wyss, another first-time attendee from the Little Elm school district, said she wanted to brush up on her technology skills.

"Things change so fast," she said. "I need all the help I can get."

Technology, Wyss said, is like asking how much light one needs in a room. While one can operate with a little light, much more light is better, she said, and technology plays as much a role in the classroom "as we're able to let it play."

She said that she has intentions of applying for grants and getting as much technology in her classroom as she can.

Attending the conference, she said, has sparked her desire to be more cutting-edge and help students be successful and exercise power over their own education.

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