



# Another kind of distance learning

*Tech Valley students stay home and telecommute*

By Michael McCagg

How can a school run staff development activities while students are in school without use of substitute teachers?

Answer: allow students to work at home.

Five days this school year, Tech Valley High School is allowing its students to do classwork online from home.

The days provide an opportunity for teachers to take part in staff development opportunities while also providing students with an opportunity to show they are self-directed and can manage a certain amount of freedom while still completing assignments and lessons.

During the remote days, students are expected to log on to the school portal at 8 a.m. and review their class calendars. Those using public libraries are asked to sign on as soon as they are able; most libraries open at 9 a.m.

The Capital District regional high school's 101 students are expected to follow the time requirements posted to



Photo courtesy of Tech Valley High School  
**On a Tech Valley High School "remote day," Junior Jesse Feinman works while sitting on his bed at home.**

the calendars and post individual work in a timely manner.

Teachers are available in real-time for questions and clarification until 10:30 a.m. They are also available via e-mail until 3 p.m.

The first day was conducted on November 3.

"It was good," said student Mandi

Jung of the Coxsackie-Athens school district. "It allowed me to be more relaxed and in the end I think I got more work done than if I was in school."

Teachers also liked the day, which was designed, among other reasons, to allow them the opportunity for personal growth as they use the time when they are away from their computers and students for in-service training.

"We had outstanding results in biotechnology with 31 of 33 students completing all assigned work with good quality," said teacher Leah Penniman. "We have some bugs to work out in the system, but the distance learning concept shows promise."

Principal Daniel Liebert noted that remote working is nothing new as employers struggle to reduce expenses, minimize travel fatigue and create flexible work environments.

By conducting periodic distance learning days, the school

hopes to teach students the importance of self-direction – a key 21st century skill.

*Michael McCagg is communications coordinator for Tech Valley High School, a joint venture of Capital Region BOCES and Questar III BOCES.*



Photo courtesy of Tech Valley High School  
**Tech Valley High freshman Nick Cooper discovers that one of the perks of telecommuting is that no one asks you to remove your hat.**

## Around the State

### Paterson tries again to pull troopers out of schools

Gov. David Paterson's proposed 2010-11 budget calls for the reassignment of almost 90 school resource officers statewide, as a hiring freeze placed on the New York State Police continues.

Former Gov. Eliot Spitzer attempted a similar move two years ago, but was met with swift and strong opposition from lawmakers, school administrators and parents. The proposal was subsequently left out of the 2008-09 budget.

State officials say reassigning the troopers will save the state \$17 million, but opposition is building again.

"We think that school resource officers are an effective way to prevent crime in schools, far more than video surveillance or metal detectors," said NYSSBA spokesman David Albert.

*Source: Legislative Gazette (2/8/10)*

### Tisch: Middletown is first-rate

Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch, after a visit to the Middletown school district, has praised it for the focus on literacy, the arts program, teacher training and educational partnerships, and its ambitious technology initiatives.

"It all about attention to detail, which separates the good from the great," Tisch said, calling the district "first-rate, well-run" and an example for others.

After hearing about the districts use of technology, Tisch said, "I am blown away by the use of resources."

*Source: Middletown Times Herald-Record (1/29/10)*

### Charter cap getting closer and closer

Amid a lull in the debate over raising New York's cap of no more than 200 charter schools, the state Board of Regents has approved five more of the independently run schools.

The approval of four charter schools in New York City and one in Buffalo leaves the Regents with just one more authorization to make, which they expect to do their March meeting.

SUNY, the state's other charter school authorizer, has 18 more slots to fill.

*Source: New York Post (2/10/10)*

### Unpaid school taxes on the rise in parts of mid-Hudson Valley

As the economy has gone south, the amount of unpaid school taxes is moving north – sharply – in parts of the mid-Hudson Valley.

In Ulster County, Comptroller Elliot Auerbach is projecting \$22 million in unpaid school taxes for the 2009-10 school year, up 5.6 percent over last year and a 53 percent jump from three years ago.

In Orange County, unpaid school taxes are up over 8 percent from a year ago to \$32 million and up 26 percent from two years ago. In Sullivan County, unpaid school taxes have remained relatively flat at about \$17 million.

*Source: Middletown Times Herald-Record (2/8/10)*