

SCHOOLS

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Grant funds new software for Portland Adventist

Phonics, English, math programs link school, homes

BY ROBIN COUSINEAU
 staff intern

A giant \$2.065 million check is proudly displayed above a trophy case in the entryway of Portland Adventist Elementary School. It resembles the kind of check that would be delivered to the doorstep of a sweepstakes prizewinner, but this check's purpose goes far beyond that.

Portland Adventist received the money as a grant from Eduss Educational Software System in mid-March. Eduss, a foundation sponsored by corporate donations, funded the Portland Adventist grant, Portland Adventist Principal Robert McDonald said.

The grant provides the school with three software components — math, English and phonics.

When a child finishes a full assessment for his or her grade level, the program creates a tutorial based on any missed concepts. Assessments take approximately four hours of work and are taken at the beginning of each year.

"Generally a teacher will not find if a child has a missed concept for up to two years," technology coordinator Randy Cummings said. Once the tutorial is made, students are able to have step-by-step explanations for each problem that they do not understand.

The grant pays for technical support, services and all upgrades over the next five years.

Portland Adventist is the first school to take the Eduss system to its second level. Stage 2 connects the school to the home, which



Portland Adventist Elementary School Principal Bob McDonald, left, accepts a \$2 million check for software from Theo Scherman, global CEO of Eduss Broadcast Media Inc.

allows teachers to assign homework and tests on the software and students to work on it outside of school.

When a teacher assigns a particular assignment or test, he or she can easily transfer it to the Internet, where students can copy the file to their computer. When they are finished with their assignment, they send it right back to their teacher.

"So no dogs can chew up their homework," Cummings said, laughing.

The software goes home with the children for free — with a family server charge of \$10 a month. Families with more than one computer also are given one set of software per computer in the household. Two sets are given to families of divorce if children are switching between homes.

According to Cummings, about 97 percent of the school's students own a computer and have Internet access.

The software is incorporated into the classroom in different ways depending on the teacher. "A lot of the teachers have project-based learning," Cummings said. "One group will be working at a table on a project, another group may be working at a desk and another group may be working on the com-

puters ..."

Science and math teacher Brad Hunter is adjusting to the new software. "I was a little bit apprehensive because we hadn't done anything like this before," Hunter said.

He said he has spent 75 percent of the past few weeks testing his kids to see where they are with their math skills. "The biggest thing is that it's self-paced. We have some kids who are go-getters, and we have some kids that you have to prod along," he said.

The software has been added to all of the 165 computers in the building. That allows every classroom to have seven computers, along with a computer lab in the building for the 300 children.

The software is not designed to replace the teacher.

"The teacher's role is still that of a teacher," McDonald said. "The teacher is still primary to teach the concepts and then the software program can move in to back up and reinforce those concepts."

Portland Adventist is still adjusting to the new software system, but the school has taken one giant step into the technology void.

"I tell parents whenever I give a tour, 'we don't teach technology anymore, we use it,'" McDonald said.