



As the assistant principal at Gracemore Elementary, Amy Casey's kids ooh and ahh when she takes out her Treo smartphone and snaps their pictures. "I like to record what's positive," she relates.

It's the Principal of the Thing

Administrators in North Kansas City Schools Find Treo Solutions to Every Need

BY ELIZABETH CRANE

Amy Casey didn't need convincing that her Treo handheld computer was an essential part of her first year as an Assistant Principal at Grace-more Elementary. "I love all things techie," she says, "and I was already a Palm [handheld] user." So when the North Kansas City Schools (NKCS) presented the new AP with a Treo, she was thrilled. But even she could not have predicted all the ways the handheld has saved her time, facilitated community and increased safety.

"We had a student who had an allergic reaction," she recalls. "Of course I was right there. I used the Treo to take a picture of what the symptoms looked like." By the time

the paramedics arrived, though, the symptoms of the reaction had subsided and the paramedics were unsure how to proceed. "But I had the picture," says Casey, "and I could show them what it had looked like." This allowed them to treat the child promptly and appropriately and with confidence of their diagnosis. Casey reaffirmed what she already believed: "I could not live without my Treo."

Principal Users

In NKCS, all of the principals and many of the district-wide coordinators carry a Treo 650 or 600. Janet Herdman, Executive Director of Technology for the district, was behind the initial push to get cellphones for district administra-

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tors four years ago. “We wanted something in case of emergencies,” she remembers. “In case services went out and what-not.” There were already dozens of Palm handhelds in use as well, being used for classroom walk-throughs for maintaining student data. Combining the two functions — the organizer with the phone — just made sense. “About a year and a half ago, I saw that we could spend another hun-

She made sure there was appropriate staff development in place and went ahead with the Treo. There are now between sixty and seventy in the district, plus cellphones and other Palm handhelds. Every new user receives a half-day in-service training session on the Treo smartphone; new principals attend a new-principal orientation that includes Treo smartphone instruction, and the district main-

was using both a cellphone and a Palm handheld before the advent of the Treo smartphone. Combining the phone functions with the Palm handheld functions opened a whole new realm of functionality. And by having his administrative assistant synch all the calendar data from his desktop, he has an updated calendar in his hands at all times. “I used to spend more time than I like to remember keeping



“I’m a principal who’s not much in my office. If you want to catch me, you’ll have to catch me on my Treo.”

-- Dan Clemens,
Principal, Eastgate
Middle School

dred or two hundred per device and get much greater functionality.”

Herdman looked carefully at what was available and realized that the \$400 price point (at the time) for the Treo 600 was within her budget. The district receives a discount on cellphone service through E-Rate, so this savings made the purchase even more affordable. “The expansion features of the Treo [smartphone] are very appealing from a tech standpoint. It also has a high rate of return on the investment. It’s a very powerful tool.”

tains a trainer/technician on staff to handle on-going Treo smartphone issues. “We have three full-time techs for the whole district,” says Herdman. “One of them is the Palm handheld and laptop expert.” The district’s commitment to the Treo smartphone couldn’t be stronger. Herdman says she hears from her principals all the time, praising the usefulness of the Treo smartphone. “This is a tool we really use,” she declares.

Gary Miller, Assistant Principal at Oak Park High School, was one of the administrators who

track of calendar issues,” he recalls. Using GroupWise, he keeps his calendar on his desktop where his AA can update it, and he keeps it synched. “I’d probably miss that most if I didn’t have the Treo smartphone.”

The district wants its administrators to be available all the time, and with the Treo smartphones, they are. Instead of being an intrusion, the use of the handhelds on weekends and evenings is seen as more of a perk. Casey uses the Treo smartphone to perform follow-up phone calls during her commute

Helping the Band on the Bus

Treos help keep school tour on track and on time

District Music Coordinator Pat Setser, 54, wasn't sure she wanted one of those new-fangled Treo smartphones. "I've tried a lot of different things. I've carried notebooks full of paper, and I tried a handheld about fifteen years ago. It was too big, and too heavy. I've tried these things and they didn't really cut it."

But the Treo smartphone she got worked so well she wrote an unsolicited email to Technology Director Janet Herdman.

"I would like to thank you again for getting me a Treo 650 smartphone. It may be best piece of equipment I have ever encountered to help organize a demanding schedule."

Setser described how the Treo smartphone made it possible to take a high school band by bus to Florida. Using the Treo smartphone, she made arrangements with the bus driver about which side of the highway to stop, which exit to get off, and even provided emergency map services. "We were somewhere in Tennessee," she recalls, "and we had to find our way through. In the middle of the night in some states you're just on your own; there's nothing there." The Treo smartphone's connectivity saved the situation.

Once they were in Florida, the parent chaperones who were flying in had to be picked up. Again, Setser turned to her Treo smartphone. She used Flight Status software to check on when parents were arriving, whether they were delayed, and then used their contact info to "get everybody together."

Once the band event started, the Treo smart-

phone became another instrument in the mix. With Metronome, Setser could set the tempo for the group out loud, then keep it silently for herself at the podium. If the band was playing without the metronome, Beat Match could tell her, within two taps, what tempo the band was playing, allowing her to speed them up or slow them down. "I use Beat Match when I'm evaluating other music teachers or judging competitions," says Setser. "I don't have to look at my watch and do the math to tell if a group is speeding."

After the event, Setser may have had trouble sleeping, but her Treo smartphone was right there, ready for anything. "My mind was buzzing, so at about 1 a.m. I sat down and input a huge list of things to do, things to remember, and things to change. And it was all right there in the morning."

"I used to spend my life looking for that little piece of paper," says Setser. "Now they're gone from my car, gone from my office." She was worried that the handheld would be an intrusion, but instead it has saved her time, energy, and about a ton of worry. "This is freedom. My stress level has dropped tremendously," she says. "I have a pretty complicated schedule, but it handles everything. Two people used to do this job. Now I do it alone, and it's a snap. And it took me half a day to learn [to use the Treo smartphone]."

"I think it makes life easier," she says. "I can take care of something, drop it, and move on. I rely on it so much, when I retire in a few years, I'll have to get my own Treo smartphone. I trust it, I'm a believer." ■

home. Clemens uses its data from home to write his weekly newsletter over the weekend. If he didn't have it, he'd be in his office on a Sunday, something he would prefer to avoid. Because the users are carrying the Treo smartphones almost literally 24/7, the district office can

send broadcast announcements, like snow day information, and be reasonably certain that everyone will get the information promptly. Staff phone numbers are stored in the Treo smartphone as well, making it even easier to deal with emergency sub issues or last-min-

ute arrangements with teachers and other administrators.

Classroom Walkthroughs Are a Snap

One feature that gets the NKCS administrators excited about the Treo smartphone is the Classroom

Walkthrough program. Amy Casey is in her first year at Gracemore Elementary. Her objective in a walkthrough, she says, is to “get a snapshot of what is going on in class.” To perform a classroom walk-through, she used to enter a classroom, evaluate all the features she was taught to look for — is student work posted? How are the students engaged? Are curriculum objectives being met? — and scribble frantically on a notecard in the four minutes she was allotted per class. Then, when she returned to her desk, she would spread the notecards out in front of her and try to make sense of them. It was a cumbersome and not particularly efficient method.

On the Treo smartphone, the Classroom Walkthrough software provides a checklist of all the things she can look for in a classroom and allows her to tap on each as she sees it. Is student work posted? Tap. Are there educational posters on the walls? Tap. She can also take a literal snapshot, using the Treo smartphone’s camera, of anything that catches her eye. But is it back at her desk, when she synchs up the information, that the functionality really comes into play. “I can generate reports across a grade level, and I can see trends that I wouldn’t otherwise see.” Before, with all those cards on her desk, the patterns were obscured. Now, they’re crystal clear. “It keeps me organized, too,” Casey admits. “I can see from the reports whether I’ve visited a classroom too much at one end of the day or the other, and I can correct that on the next visit.”

Dan Clemens, the principal

at Eastgate Middle School, uses his Treo smartphone camera and camcorder functions almost daily to record what’s working and what’s not in his classes, hallways,

but it’s also useful for the negative. When a student had a tantrum in her office and trashed it, Casey carefully documented the damage. When it came time to sit down



and yard. “It may be something a teacher is doing,” he says, “or student work displays, or a student-teacher hug.” He records whatever he sees and sends the best of it out to his staff in his weekly newsletter. The school has a video announcement system that runs a school newscast in the mornings, so his footage makes it onto that as well. It’s a way to share what’s going on throughout the school, he says. “All those moments when you think, ‘Wow, I wish I had a camera’ – now I do.”

Casey’s kids ooh and ahh when she takes out her Treo smartphone and snaps their pictures. “I like to record what’s positive,” she relates,

with the parents and the student, there was no confusion about what had happened.

Efficiency Rules

The pictures in the Treo smartphone aren’t just for sharing. The student data program, complete with a picture of each student, is a powerful tool, and the administrators in NKCS are using it in a myriad of ways. With a picture of every student on him all the time, Clemens has found that his middle school students still try to get away with things, they simply succeed less. “I’m on bus duty,” he smiles, “and a kid will come up to me and say, ‘I’m not taking the bus today,

I'm going home with so-and-so.' All I have to do is call up that student — their picture is right there, the number is right there — and I say, 'I'll call your mom and make

information is right there. The day a fire extinguisher got knocked off a wall and released irritants into the school environment, Miller was quickly able to send a message to

pull up a photo of a student with a list of five possible names, like a multiple choice test. "With so many kids, this really helps me to learn all their names." With 2,000 students in his high school, Miller's name-remembering task is even greater, but with the smartphone he feels he has a handle on it.

The Treo smartphone also helps Casey keep in touch with her principal, Mrs. Cynthia Kupka. Through text messaging on the Treo smartphones, Casey and Kupka can handle quick questions and urgent matters without interrupting the flow of their day, or racing back to a meeting point from opposite ends of that big building. For instance, says Casey, she might be called on to handle a situation with a student that Kupka had already started. "I can send a quick text message and get a little background on what has already been done" so that there's no time wasted. "The Treo smartphone allows us to work as a team. And without the Treo smartphone, we might not reach as timely a conclusion. It wouldn't be a satisfactory ending, and the parent may not be as happy."

For this Kansas City district, Treo smartphones are here to stay. The administrators who use them are not likely to give them up. "The thing has a million uses," says Clemens, "it's like carrying a computer with you all the time. I read my email on the Treo smartphone — it keeps me caught up, and it keeps me up on what's going on in my building." Miller and Casey agree. "My husband has a Blackberry," Casey says. "I like my Treo smartphone better. If I put them head to head, I think my Treo smartphone wins hands down." ■

Clemens' middle school students still try to get away with mischief, but with his smartphone, they don't succeed as often as they used to.

sure that's alright.' And they say right away, 'No, that's okay, I'll just take the bus.'"

A student doesn't have to be in trouble for the student data system to come into play. Miller uses his Treo smartphone as he walks the halls, keeping track of where students ought to be. "I look at schedules most," he says. "You see a student in the hallway, you can check where they should be, check their attendance record, their grades. You've got the information right there." He can also see how schedules line up and who should be in class with whom. This keeps things running smoothly. And in a school-wide emergency, all the necessary

district headquarters and notify the parents that the school had to be evacuated. "I've got a clip on my belt and it's there all the time — I notice if it's not there."

In Touch

It can be difficult for an administrator to know every child in the school, but knowing the children is a large part of building a school community that feels friendly and welcoming. "I have 620 kids in a quarter-mile-long building," Amy Casey says. "This is a challenge." Casey keeps up to date with who the kids are by using the game provided in the student data software. With this, she can have the system

