

Leading the way

Meet Mark Place

District Technology Coordinator

Mark Place is a teacher first and foremost, so the average person doesn't need a manual to talk technology with him. That's a good thing, since Place and his team of 18 are the people who handle all things techie in the City School District of Albany: computers, printers, phones, data and the Internet. Place came to the district in 2009 from the Brittonkill Central School District, where he taught earth science and then became the point person for data collection and management.

Q: What are some recent highlights in the district's technology program?

A: For the past year the Technology Department has been upgrading the district's network equipment and making its servers run more efficiently both in terms of staff time and energy consumption. And starting this summer, we'll be upgrading all 3,500 district computers to Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2010. Arbor Hill Elementary will be the first school on the new network.

We also just received a federal grant for \$500,000 that will allow us to upgrade a total of 20 classrooms at North Albany Academy, Giffen Memorial Elementary School, Albany High School and Hackett Middle School. This isn't just for technology classrooms, either. Teachers chosen through a rigorous application process will have their classrooms upgraded to the newest technology – SMART Boards, teacher laptops, student-response systems and Netbook computers. They will receive training to help them actively engage students through the use of technology. This grant kicks off the district's multi-year focus on purchasing interactive displays.

Q: Technology changes from moment to moment. How do you keep up with the trends?

A: I'm very lucky to be supported by the professionals in my office and on the district's Technology Committee. We all try to keep up by regularly reading technology publications and sharing articles and information with each other.

Q: Most kids are more technically savvy than adults. Any suggestions on how parents can keep up with their kids?

A: The new generation of kids isn't scared of technology because they grew up with it and they've known nothing different – unlike most of their parents. In general, I'd say don't be afraid to ask your kids to show you what they know. It's a good experience for you as a parent because it allows you to become the learners and allows your child to show off their knowledge. It's a win-win situation for everyone.

Q: When you're not keeping the district wired, what do you like to do?

A: I love traveling. I spent one summer escorting 1,300 foreign exchange students across the country. I also lived in Australia for a year during high school, so I try to get back there as often as possible.

