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Vineland is envy of tech savvy schools

By JOEL LANDAU

Staff Writer

jlandau@thedailyjournal.com

VINELAND -- Sometimes the Vineland school district can't keep ahead of its own technological leaps.

If Steve Dantine, supervisor of technology, knew years ago how many other districts are struggling to get where Vineland is now, he could have made some big money.

The board started paperless meetings six years ago, supplying board members and officials with laptop computers. Dantine created an online networking site so members can access agendas from laptop computers. The system eliminated piles of papers at each meeting, said Board President Frank Giordano.

A few years later, many more districts are following suit, and companies are selling program software for paperless meetings that range between \$20,000 and \$40,000.

"I get calls from other districts asking what program I use. I feel so stupid," he said. "I was so consumed with making it work for Vineland and then after it was working, feeling so happy that it did work that I didn't think to" market the program. "I wish I had developed a system to sell after I saw others doing it."

But Dantine and the district are not totally empty-handed.

The Center for Digital Education and the National School Boards Association awarded Vineland fifth place in its 2007 Digital School Boards Survey for districts with student populations between 2,501 and 15,000. It was the third time in four years the district received the award.

Dantine said the survey monitors the way districts communicate with parents by analyzing the district's Web content.

Dantine also notes the district's new outgoing call system and local cable channel 13 as other effective mediums. Parents can find schedules, registration information, contact e-mail addresses and phone numbers for district officials and information on sports teams on their home computers. The television station and phone messages give residents updates on school events and happenings.

"The whole concept is for the school district and school board to communicate with

parents," he said. "How do we communicate? Do we do it efficiently?"

Board Vice President Jacqueline Gavigan said using technology is a big priority for the board. Dantine is working on a new program so ultimately parents can get test scores and homework assignments for each student online.

"It's definitely one of our goals," Gavigan said. "We always ask how can we improve it."