ARMSTRONG SCHOOL DISTRICT TV SHOW INSPIRES STUDENTS
New district TV show gives students opportunities in TV Production

In December 2003, the two leaders at Armstrong County Community Television of Worthington donated $225,000 worth of state-of-the-art TV production equipment to their local school district.

They did it for a single purpose: To give local high school students hands-on experience in broadcasting. This includes everything from running cameras to working sound quality in a control room.

Their gift of TV production equipment, gladly received by the Armstrong School District, opened new possibilities for student learning. This high-caliber camera equipment could make some college programs jealous and is not always readily available to students in rural areas such as Armstrong and Indiana counties.

Enter Armstrong School District’s plan. The district transformed two classrooms into a state-of-the-art production studio. After some renovation work, the studio became functional in late November, 2004.

Already, light bulbs are going off in students’ minds.

The school district’s weekly TV show, “Education Today,” was filmed entirely by a crew of Ford City Jr-Sr High School students. The taping day for this new show was Jan. 6, and the students were thrilled to be behind the cameras, controlling the sound and giving the “5-4-3-2-1” finger countdown. They enjoyed the experience so much that they didn’t want to leave. They even turned down a school bus that came to pick them up at the end of the day, opting instead for later travel arrangements through the district.

The Ford City Jr-Sr High School students taped a batch of three shows that day. The shows are airing the rest of this month on WIUP-TV Channel 20 Adelphi. The students will likely feel that surge of pride when their names roll up on the end credits, knowing that WIUP-TV reaches a potential 70,000 households in five local counties.

It will continue. On Jan. 27, Kittanning Senior High School students will take their turn behind the cameras to film February’s programming of “Education Today.” Programming is scheduled to include segments on Black History Month, the district’s math initiatives, community relations and a profile of television production classes at each high school in the district.
High school students from West Shamokin and Elderton will pick up the filming duties in March.

A word about WIUP-TV. That’s the cable channel run by Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Directors at WIUP-TV have generously agreed to air Armstrong School District programming during prime evening viewing time – all for free. That’s a terrific picture of public schools working with higher education for student benefit.

Now that Armstrong School District TV studio is running, students are getting hands-on experience behind a camera. They can now consider career paths they might not have otherwise have thought of a year ago. Increased job opportunities could result.

If you hear that Armstrong School District is trying to run other local TV stations out of business, it’s not true. We’re not even on the same playing field as other local TV stations. Our goal is not to compete with other TV stations, and we will seek no advertising dollars. Our goal is simply to provide students with a chance to sharpen their skills in TV production in today’s information age.

In the future, we may seek grants through foundations to support programming. That’s not the same as seeking advertising dollars from local businesses. Already, the Armstrong School District Foundation is working to partner with the Armstrong County Community Foundation to identify grants that could bolster the district’s TV studio and increase opportunities for students.

A shining example of the partnerships the district’s TV studio is making came during the second-annual Armstrong County Community Awareness Day on Jan. 10. The district worked with community leaders and the Armstrong County Community Foundation to produce a 10-minute educational video. The video’s goal was to increase prevention of child abuse, domestic violence and the dangers of alcohol and other harmful drugs. The video was played in scores of classrooms across Armstrong County. Teachers followed up with student discussion.

With the cooperation of our local communities, the district will have a dedicated Public, Education and Government channel from Adelphia to broadcast programming. When approval for this comes through, there’s no limit to what kinds of opportunities students will have.

*For more information about Armstrong School District’s TV production station or its programs, please contact Jonathan Szish at 724-763-5268 or email him at szij@asd.k12.pa.us.*