

ALLISON DOUGHERTY

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'READY TO WRITE'

Sophia Mummert, a third-grader at Hillside Elementary School in New Cumberland, knows what "collaboration" means. "Working things out" together, Mummert said, after she and her classmates were asked last week to define the word by West Shore School District instructional integration adviser Karen Ditzler.

A few minutes later, Mummert and the other students in teacher Linda Yon's third-grade classroom were trying the word on for size as they sat in small groups with laptops, selecting pictures and writing stories to accompany the images.

But the collaboration didn't stop there.

The next day, students at Horace Mann Elementary School in West Allis, Wis., opened their computers to see the results of the Hillside collaborations, which were created in all three of the school's third-grade classes.

Horace Mann students then selected their own pictures and words to add to the stories that were created in Pennsylvania.

The stories were then due back at Hillside, where the conclusions would be written.

The assignment is just one part of a series of progressive story projects begun by Ditzler this school year.

Next week, West Shore School District students in kindergarten through fifth grade will participate in a progressive story project with other area districts, as well as schools across the United States and in Canada, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Moscow and other far-flung places of the world.

"The kids love it," said Ditzler, who supervised her first set of progressive stories this school year.

Computers are heavily involved in the projects, from Ditzler finding participating districts through Twitter, to the Web conversations held over Skype with other schools.

The project is designed to strengthen students' writing muscles -- helping them with punctuation, word selection, introductions and point-of-view.

"There's a 'U' in there," student Eric Ashley said Wednesday, as a classmate typed the word "group" into the laptop.

Yon said the students enjoyed their experience. But the excitement about the project was apparent even before the class started working, when the 20 children in Yon's classroom cheered in unison, "I am ready to write."

To see and hear the stories written last fall by West Shore School District students, go to <http://writeyourstory.wikispaces.com> .