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Teachers like Internet, wish it were better used in schools

By Martha Woodall

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

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Eighty-seven percent of teachers responding to a survey said they were comfortable using the Internet, and 84 percent thought the Internet could improve the quality of education.

Yet most said the Internet was not well-integrated into their classrooms because they lacked the time, equipment and technical support to use it effectively.

Those were among the findings released yesterday by NetDay, a nonprofit group founded five years ago as a grass-roots effort to use volunteers to wire the nation's schools for the Internet.

"Five years ago, that [Internet wiring] was a revolutionary idea," Julie Evans, NetDay's chief executive officer, said, noting that in March 1996, only 14 percent of the nation's schools had Internet access.

Because more than 95 percent of the nation's kindergarten-through-12th-grade schools now have Internet access, and 80 percent of classrooms are connected, NetDay has shifted its focus to helping schools use the technology effectively, Evans said.

The organization, based in Irvine, Calif., tapped Lake Snell Perry & Associates, a research firm in Washington, and the Tarrance Group in Alexandria, Va., to gather data on what the connectivity has meant to teachers.

Of the 600 public, private and parochial school teachers surveyed between Jan. 31 and Feb. 6, 75 percent said the Internet is an important tool for finding new resources and meeting educational standards. And 77 percent said teachers without Internet access are at a disadvantage.

But 60 percent of teachers who have Internet access said they spend less than 30 minutes on the Internet each day.

When they are online, teachers are doing research or gathering information for lessons (55 percent); communicating with other teachers (42 percent); or helping students with projects (41 percent).

Twenty percent said they use the Internet to communicate with parents, and 18 percent post lesson plans online.

Seventy-eight percent of the teachers said a lack of time hindered them from using the Internet more at school. Forty-seven percent said they lacked equipment, 50 percent

complained of slow speeds of Internet connections, and 46 percent said their schools lacked technical support to help when there were problems.

And 73 percent of the teachers told researchers they felt no pressure to use the Internet in their instruction.

Evans said NetDay would kick off an educational technology leadership campaign tomorrow to help remove the obstacles that are preventing teachers from using the Internet in their classrooms. She said teachers report fewer problems using technology when their principals and superintendents understand the time and technical support they need to use the Internet in class.

The NetDay survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percent.