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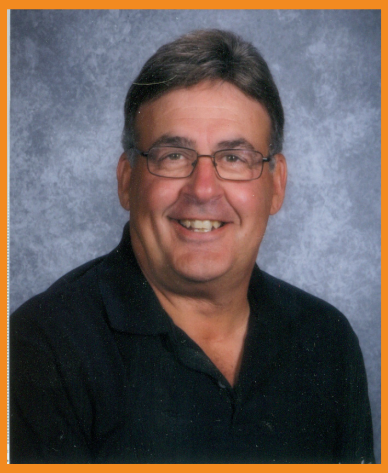
REALITYWORKS SUCCESS STORY

Cutting-edge Welding Training Technology Sparks Skill Development and Funding



Dan Lenin

Agriculture Education Teacher
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-Dan Leinen

Administrators at Harlan Community High School (HCHS) in Harlan, IA understand the importance of technology in the education of 21st Century students. They have been using virtual reality welding simulators to help Ag students explore the field of welding while developing basic skills and techniques. These welding education solutions, which were developed by Realityworks, Inc., mimic live action video games as they provide users with real-time feedback on basic welding form and positioning. Their advanced technology helps teach students how to weld, keeps students engaged and, according to HCHS Agriculture Education Teacher Dan Leinen, helps high school administrators continue "getting as much technology in the hands of kids as they possibly can."

A Cost-Effective Solution

"For us, it's not only about technology, but it's about saving costs," said Leinen.

"You don't need to purchase metal and rods and wire, yet it simulates welding."

According to Leinen, one of the most notable benefits of the easy-to-use simulators is their ability to introduce students safely and effectively to the art of welding.

"Unlike real welding equipment, no one is afraid of a video game – they're just going to go for it," said Leinen. "The anxiety of going out and welding for the first time is totally gone. That's something I can't teach."

Welding simulators help relieve fear and anxiety from students' first welding experience.

HCHS first expressed interest in Realityworks' welding simulators after viewing them at a Career & Technical Education conference, and Realityworks loaned two simulators to the school for beta testing. The exchange enabled HCHS students to use the welders while providing Realityworks with feedback about the machines. "We found that the simulators really push the students," said Leinen. "By the time they get done with them, they're ready for the real thing and they jump right in."

Funding the Simulators with Local Support

After experiencing Realityworks' welding solutions and seeing the advantages of such technology

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in the classroom firsthand, the administration began raising funds to purchase their own machines. A variety of resources were used to help the school acquire the simulators they now own, including funds from a federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act grant and donations from the local Future Farmers of America chapter and local businesses. Fundraising provided to be the most important part of the process, although Leinen said there was a specific reason why the school was able to raise money relatively easily: the welding simulators themselves.

According to Leinen, the school's ability to bring potential donors into the classroom and experience the simulators firsthand had a significant impact on the businesses' decision to donate funds.

"We had one here already, and if people wanted, they could come here and see it," said Leinen. "When people got their hands on it and saw what they would be supporting, and experienced what the kids would do in the classroom, it was a huge seller."

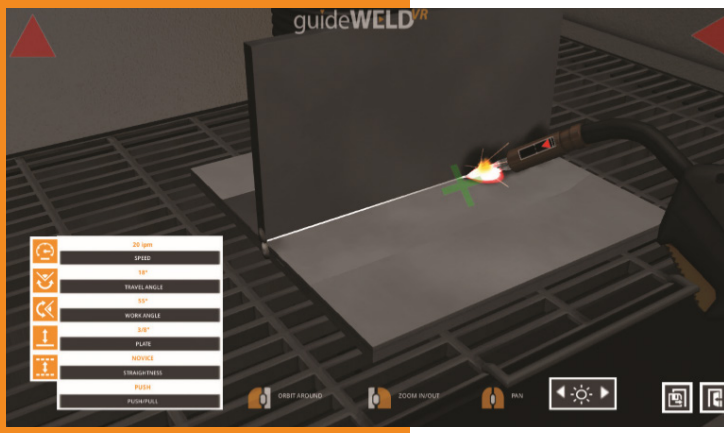
Leinen recalls one company owner who had an FFA background but had never welded. He sat down and tried the simulator and almost instantly committed to donating funds.

"In today's economy, it's hard to get funds from companies," stated Leinen. "But if you can show them what they're supporting, that makes a difference."

Students can gain welding skills while learning at their own pace.

Now, the difference can be seen in how the students are learning and the feedback that the school has received from the entire community. According to Leinen, the school continually receives feedback from parents, business leaders and community members about the school's advanced welding training technology. He plans to continue taking simulators to state conventions to encourage more schools to invest in their own.

"It's a drop in the bucket when you look at the total, overall scheme of things," said Leinen. "This is cutting-edge technology, and for a school district to use the same technology that major companies use to train is really exciting."



Students can review welds and refine their techniques with welding simulators, without the cost of consumables.