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By Erich Thurow, Chairman D200 Education Foundation

Remember the beginning of the film "Groundhog Day" when Phil Connors (Bill Murray) is doing the weather report in front of a green chroma key backdrop? The chroma keying effect allows a computer to fill the green background with another image with a person or people in front of the image. The effect is often used in video production to create exciting settings for performers.

Maggie Jensen, media director at Olson Elementary School, designed a project she calls "Lights, Camera, Learn!" which was funded by the District 200 Education Foundation this year to give upper elementary students the opportunity to work with this chroma key technology and create exciting videos that will be seen by students throughout the school. Mrs. Jensen told us, "when the equipment is used with the software, it enhances the visual experience for the viewer." She added, "It can also be used by learners to explain an idea, present a concept map, convey living history, tell a story or even create step-by-step tutorials."

The equipment arrived at the school in November including a huge green backdrop, the frame to hold it, a tripod with a connection that holds an iPad that works as the camera and the computer software that allows it all to work. Mrs. Jensen and her SWAT (Students Willing to Assist in Technology) team have been working ever since (mostly after school) to learn how it all works. The 5th grade SWAT team will lead the way and eventually teach other students how to work with the equipment.

Mrs. Jensen attended a weekend workshop presented by the Illinois School Library Media Association where projects aimed at "21st Century Learning" included a demonstration of young students using similar equipment. "I observed students collaborating on a project and utilizing the technology to create an informative video," she said. One of the first projects the Olson students are working on is a set of videos on the Boston Tea Party. Instead of just reading about it, the students are "reporting" on the events "as they are happening."

"Fifth grade teachers are preparing assignments where groups of students will use the video studio to create a video document as part of their classwork," said Mrs. Jensen. Most of the videos will be between a minute and a half and three minutes, but some may be as long as five minutes. Once again I am amazed at what a fairly small grant from us (under \$300) along with the district repurposing an underutilized space can do. We have turned a former computer lab into a remarkable learning studio, and I'm delighted that we can tie into the "Groundhog Day" film which provided us with the start-up funds to establish the Foundation

As we prepare for our February 6 Foundation "Groundhog Day" fundraising event, I encourage parents and community members to attend our dinner and auction. A generous grant from Wells Fargo Advisors has our Board really excited at the opportunity to raise even more money for more grants next year. Please visit our website for more information on the Foundation and to purchase tickets for the fundraiser. For questions or details about the event, please contact me at ekthurow@owc.net.