



Paul Aiken | Camera

Ben Boyer, a science teacher at Boulder High School, sits in his podcast studio in the school Tuesday. Boyer has found creative ways to engage students via podcast.

BVSD pushes use of podcasts

District applying for grant to train more teachers in latest technology

By Vanessa Miller
Camera Staff Writer

Most people don't know the Yeastie Boys song "Fight for

Online

Listen to an excerpt from one of Boulder High teacher Ben Boyer's biology podcasts. Read about the use of iPods and other technologies in St. Vrain elementary schools. www.dailycamera.com

Your Right to Ferment," but many Boulder High science students do, thanks to a recent push to get teachers using

podcasts as supplemental teaching tools.

"It just makes the connection," Boulder High biology teacher Ben Boyer said about why he started creating podcasts to help auditory and visual learners study and review class material. "When they're plugged into their earphones, they're locked in. You have the person's brain."

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New technology pushed in Boulder Valley schools

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Inspired by Boyer's use of podcasting — technology that allows teachers to record lessons that can be downloaded to iPods or MP3 players — the Boulder Valley School District has launched a project to get more middle and high school science teachers doing the same. So far, eight science teachers have gotten on board, recording lectures or creating supplemental podcasts.

The district is applying for a grant to train more teachers in podcasting and get more iPods that can be checked out by students who don't have their own. Right now, iPods can be checked out at some schools — such as Boulder High and Monarch High — but not in all secondary schools.

"Finally the district has said, 'Let's do this. Let's teach other science teachers,'" Boyer said.

"Kids are more likely to listen to a podcast on their way to Vail than take a biology book."

Boyer has found creative ways to engage students via podcast like singing about yeast and fermentation to the tune of the Beastie Boys' "Fight for your right to party."

"I'm not pretending I can rap," Boyer said. "But I'm

scoring some geek points with the kids."

The long-term goal of the project is to connect science teachers who have podcast experience with science teachers who are newcomers to the technology, said Samantha Messier, director of science curriculum for the district.

"It's a powerful tool," she said.

With the extra grant money, the district is hoping to double the number of science teachers using podcasts next year and continue expanding the program into the future, Messier said. The district might, at some point, consider training teachers in other subjects to use podcasting.

Teachers now making podcasts have used them to preview a class, review a lesson or study for a test. Monarch chemistry teacher Julie Andrew made it mandatory for students to listen to some podcasts, and next year, she plans to require students to create molecule animations using podcast technology.

"I'm hoping the kids will be able to use the technology to make their own podcasts as assignments," she said.

Unlike Boulder High's Boyer, who makes creative podcast installments a couple of times every few weeks, Andrew has taken to recording her chemistry lectures for ad-

vanced placement students and posting them online to be downloaded daily.

"They love it," she said, adding that the students bug her about it when she doesn't post the day's lecture.

The science teachers who have been using the technology said they've noticed improved performance among students who listen to the podcasts. Student scores at Boulder High have jumped 13 percent over historical averages on the comprehensive lab exam, and Monarch science teacher Kristin Donley said that after she started creating podcast tutorials, she saw average test scores rise 11 percent.

Boulder High sophomore Marina Dargitz, 15, said she enjoys Mr. Boyer's podcasts and finds them helpful. Her favorite one was his science rap, which jogged her memory come exam time.

"It was a rap that made sense," she said.

Having a way to go back and review the teacher's lecture after class also has been helpful, Marina said.

"I'm more of an audio learner — and around lunchtime I'm more interested in food than science," she said. "So, with this, you can listen at home when you're more tuned in."