

# Extending a Helping Hand

## One High School Mentors Another as They Make the Transition to VHS

~ by Ted Wilczynski, VHS Site Coordinator, Ware High School

The VHS journey began for Ware High School in Massachusetts with the training of a site coordinator and a NIM teacher during the fall semester of 2000. Using a combination of regular budget and grant funding, we have significantly expanded the Virtual High School presence at Ware High School. Presently, we have two NIM teachers and two site coordinators.

Since the spring semester of 2001 many students at Ware High School have taken advantage of VHS courses that they otherwise would never have been able to experience. Students now regularly take courses like DNA Technology, Screenwriting Fundamentals, Pre-veterinary Medicine, and Meteorology, to name a few. The benefits go far beyond the actual course.

For the students, it exposes them to the available technology so that they use it to the fullest. The skills that they learn and use on a daily basis give them a technological advantage over students who only take face-to-face courses. VHS students maximize the value of the computer as the ultimate tool. This experience carries over to other classes as well as to their daily lives. It fosters self-discipline and time management, characteristics that are invaluable no matter what goals you have set for yourself. For teachers, new and veteran alike, it gives them a “new look” at why and how they do things, and in the process makes them better teachers in any venue.

### School-to-school mentoring

This school year we have embarked on a new adventure. Through the awarding of a state model technology integration grant, we are actively in the process of “mentoring” another school system into the VHS community. Palmer High School was recruited and has accepted our offer for training and support with the intention of becoming a member of VHS in the fall of 2003. Palmer is similar in size to Ware, and they will benefit, as we have, from exposure to the expanded curriculum offerings.

Jason Finnie, a member of the Palmer social studies department, has been trained as a site coordinator and is eagerly awaiting the beginning of the second semester when Palmer students will be allowed to embark on the on-line learning experience. Jason will also train as a NIM teacher beginning in January of 2003. He is committed to the methodology and will be an asset to VHS.

### Grant funds support training

The grant has allowed us to expand our presence with VHS by the training of an additional NIM teacher and site coordinators. In addition, all VHS staff members at our school have been outfitted with laptop computers. We are excited about the opportunity to enlarge the VHS community as everyone who is a member will benefit.

It is significant that we have been able to expand VHS at our school in the face of budgetary cutbacks. Other schools could learn from this experience. I would encourage other schools to investigate technology grant possibilities to bring VHS to their schools as it is a very worthwhile program and is only getting better. ▲ ▼



*Students at Pope John XXIII Central High School in Everett, Massachusetts are enthusiastic about VHS. Front row (L to R): Meghan Cody, Jennifer Troiani, Kristina Belgiorno, Nancy Fabbo. Middle row: Rochleen Lucarne, Christina Feeley, Leeanne Spinale, Philip Charles, Lori Falzarano. Back row: Nick DePrizio, Frankie DeCandia, Mary MacNeil (site coordinator).*