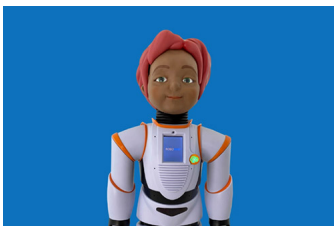
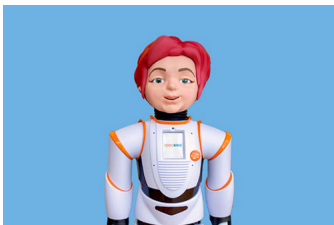
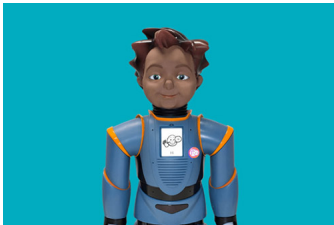
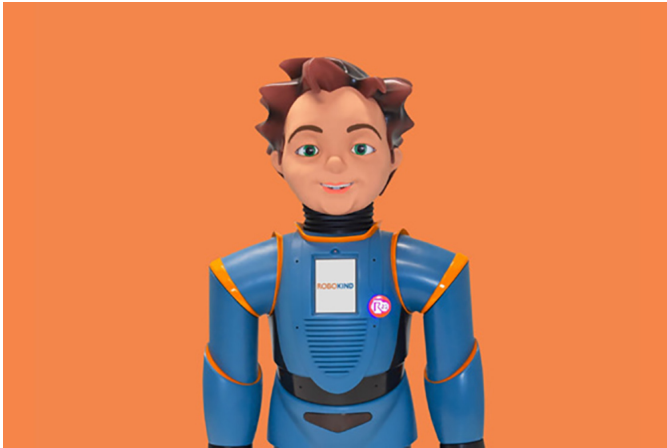


Robots as educators at GMCS

Written by By: Molly Adamson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 23 April 2021 04:46



Milo, Carver, Veda, Jemi teach special skills

Gallup-McKinley County Schools are moving into a high-tech future with robotic teaching.

The district is tackling issues that affect students with Autism Spectrum Disorder using the advancements of Robokind.

Robokind is a Dallas, Texas-based company that was founded in 2011. The education technology and robotics company developed an evidence-based, social-emotional instructional curriculum for ASD students. This curriculum comes in the form of robots that can show facial expressions to help ASD students learn facial cues. Their names are Milo, Carver, Veda, and Jemi.

According to a 2020 report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 54 children in the U.S. is on the autism spectrum. People with ASD can have trouble with language learning, social cues, and creative play.

“Adding tools like the Milo robot is just one other layer of support to provide the students ... with communication issues and the social and emotional concerns where they’re having difficulty engaging with other students, with other staff members,” John Overheim, GMCS’s Director of Services for Exceptional Students, said.

We’re looking to use these robots as a bridge to be able to fill that gap in terms of getting them to begin engaging with a device and then eventually transferring those skill sets into human interactions and generalizing the behaviors, so they’re able to interact with their peers and their teachers and their related service providers, and the public as much as they possibly can.”

“Working with [GMCS] has been an amazing experience for our team because we get to see the impact that is possible when educators commit to systemwide innovation,” Robokind’s founder and CTO Richard Margolin stated in a press release.

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The district has purchased 66 robots, with a price tag of a little over \$812,000.

“The reason we’ve gone big with the purchase is because of the geographical areas that we cover. We wanted to ensure that our staff and our related service providers have easy access to this as a tool to be able to use it on a regular basis,” Overheim explained.

“We felt that if we just ordered one or two of these and tried to share it throughout the district, it probably wouldn’t be as effective as [it would] if everyone had access to them on a regular basis at their school.”

Overheim said the students won’t begin working with the robots until the next school year. The robots are currently in production now, but the district should be receiving them in the next three to four weeks. Then a training schedule for teachers and related service providers will be put together.

Students with ASD will work with the robots and their curriculum for 15-20-minute lessons at least three times a week. Overheim stressed that these robots will not be replacing any personnel, but rather they’re supposed to be used as a tool to enhance what the district is already doing.

Daniel Gerow, Robokind’s Senior Director of Marketing and Communications, also wants people to know that the robots will not be replacing humans.

“... [At] the end of the day [the robots’] job is supporting educators. We will never replace an educator,” Gerow said. “All we’re doing is we’re making them more effective, and that’s great for everyone, because students generally are gonna (sic) have better outcomes, whether that’s behavioral, emotional, socially, or generally academically.”

Gerow said that Robokind has seen some students with ASD be able to attend general population classrooms part-time and, on occasion, full-time after working with the robots.

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