COMPUTERS A SCHOOL FIXTURE

Educators say computers are becoming a standard fixture in classrooms around the world, because computing qualifications are viewed as passports to lucrative careers, the British Broadcasting Corp. reports.

"The school I first became a head of, in the late 1980s, would have had one TV and video, perhaps a 16 mm projector, a computer and probably a few electric typewriters in the office," said David Cossley, principal of Kings College in England.

"It was an absolutely different world only 17 years ago. It's amazing the degree of change," he notes.

Information technology is incorporated into every lesson at King's College and the timetable includes long spells in the computer lab.

METHADONE OVERDOSES

Methadone, a drug used for treating heroin addiction and for soothing chronic pain, is increasingly being abused by recreational drug users causing an alarming rise in overdoses and deaths, The New York Times reports.

"Out of no place came methadone," said James McDonough, director of the Florida Office of Drug Control, "and now it is the fastest rising killer drug."

The surge in methadone abuse appears linked to several factors, including the growing abuse of heroin and OxyContin, a powerful addictive prescription painkiller.

Health and law enforcement officials are reporting some are turning to methadone when they cannot get other drugs.

FEW PLAN TO SPEND BUSH REFUND

Eighteen percent of Americans plan to spend any refund checks they receive from President George W. Bush's proposed income tax cuts while 6 percent plan to invest it, according to the Cambridge Consumer Credit Index.

Of those surveyed, 28 percent would put the refund in a bank savings account, 23 percent would pay off other bills, 19 percent would pay off credit card debts and 8 percent would use it for other purposes.
"The survey shows that consumers are in such a cautious mood that most people would save any tax refund or use it to pay off debt or existing bills, rather than use it for new spending or investing," Jordan Goodman, spokesman for the Index, says in a statement.

FOOD PROCESSING WASTEWATER TO ENERGY

In laboratory tests, Pennsylvania State University environmental engineers have shown wastewater from three food processors can produce hydrogen gas worth more than $80,000 a year.

"In addition to hydrogen, which can be used as a fuel and industrial feedstock, methane, the main component of natural gas, can be generated from the wastewaters," doctoral candidate Steven Van Ginkel and researcher Sang-Eun Oh, say in a statement.

By using a continuous fermentation process, nearly all of the energy can be stripped out of the wastewater in forms that people can use now, according to Van Ginkel.

"Over 10 billion BTUs of energy from methane could be produced every year at a single one of these food processing plants," says Van Ginkel.