

Search Archives

Search eSN with Google

New web publishing tools enhance schools' presence online

By **Steven C. Moskowitz**
May 1, 2004

View your eMail Profile:

News

[Current Issue](#)
[Past Issues](#)

Resources

[Technology Solutions Center](#)
[Calendar](#)
[Conference Information Center](#)
[Educator's Resource Center](#)
[Forums](#)
[eNewsletters](#)
[Funding Center](#)
[Partners News](#)
[Professional Development](#)
[Special Reports](#)
[Site of the Week](#)
[Product Spotlight](#)
[Surveys](#)
[Readers' Choice Awards](#)

Services

[Customer Service](#)
[Sitemap](#)
[Media Kit](#)
[Press Room](#)
[Content Exchange](#)
[About Us](#)

View your eMail Profile:

[More info](#)

continued

advertisement

Another major benefit to implementing a web-based publishing product is the potential of increased student achievement through parental involvement. When the Mahopac School District, located in Putnam County, N.Y., implemented a student information portal from Pearson NCS called ParentCONNECTxp, a majority of the parents immediately signed up for accounts.

"The project has allowed parents and children to become partners in education," according to Donald Beverly, assistant to the superintendent.

ParentCONNECTxp is a web-based product where parents can log on to a secure web site and view their child's homework, grades, and upcoming assignments. "Parents can have a sense of upcoming assignments and help their children with scheduling and time management techniques. The project has added a new dimension to parental involvement in the district, and we hope to see an improvement in scores as a result," Beverly said.

Different companies, different products

It is important to realize that these products vary greatly in features, price, customization, and support. Some companies offer support only via eMail, and others have dedicated support staff who are willing to go on site if needed. Some companies offer support during business hours only, and some offer 24-7 support. It's also important to consider training as well. The features of the product selected will dictate the training requirements. Prices for on-site training vary greatly from product to product, so it is wise to ask up front.

Web-based publishing tools may include some or all of the following features:

- District web page template
- School web page template
- Teacher and class web page template
- Teacher and staff eMail
- Student eMail
- Parent eMail
- eMail and spam filtering
- File storage
- Grades
- Attendance

[eMail this article](#)

[Discuss this article](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

[Send us a news tip](#)

[Print this article](#)

[More Headlines](#)

This Week Online

Something on your mind?
Discuss it in the **eSchool News Forums!**

Ads by Google

Are Your Children Safe?
Get the names and addresses of sexual predators

- Homework templates
- Student portfolios
- Web logs (blogs)
- WebQuest templates
- Curriculum maps
- Threaded discussion message boards
- Training options
- Listserve options
- Private and public areas

Black berry Tips Exposed

Discover the hidden tricks & tools that get more from your Black berry

groovyonline.info/blackberry

ICEbrowser SDK by ICEsoft

Integrate Java based-browser into applications or embedded devices.

<http://www.icesoft.com>

Browse the web in 3D

Move through 100s of sites and at a glance choose the ones of interest

www.3B.net

What is this?

How can you select the best product for your district? A good way to start is by forming a committee of five to 10 people, with representation from all major stakeholder groups in the district, including teachers, clerical staff, administration, students, parents, and community members. The implementation will affect many people in the district, and it's a good idea to avoid a "top-down" approach. This is also a great opportunity to develop partnerships with local businesses.

The committee can be the clearinghouse for all decisions, collectively advising what information is relevant to post on the web site, as well as policies, procedures, and frequency of updates. When the site is completed, all groups will feel represented and the project can move forward.

Next, review the list of potential applications above. If you are just looking for a basic web site that multiple users can update, there are simple, inexpensive publishing tools available that allow districts to create attractive and informative web sites. If you are looking for more features, there are some excellent products available that are more comprehensive.

Select a product that best suits the present and future needs of your district. Many student information systems have add-on products that publish student information online as part of the annual subscription. But don't assume that your district will use specific modules, such as online grade books or class web pages, successfully without going through the appropriate planning process, including a comprehensive training and staff development program.

Finally, be careful that software does not drive your program. Student eMail might sound like a great idea, but where does it fit into your curriculum? Are the superintendent and school board on board? When you do select a product, make sure you do your homework by obtaining references from other districts and speaking with them directly.

Organize and design

What information do you want to publish on your web site? Start with the basics, and build from there. A good place to start is with the structure of the organization--names, contact information, departments, addresses, meeting schedules, and phone numbers. Every department can develop a page of text for the site that can be updated whenever necessary. Don't forget phone numbers, and don't forget the internet's global reach--include the district's area code as well.

After you collect this basic information, you can move on to how the site is designed and laid out. Look at other school web sites, and see what sections might apply to your own schools. With most publishing tools, the site can be created quickly through a series of menus and set-up options, or sometimes by the vendor. Many products have various options for features to use, color choices, and more. Some publishing tools offer more design flexibility than others, and that should be taken into account when choosing a product. Again, working with a district-wide committee allows for an equitable process in this phase.

Assign and commit

Who should be involved? This might depend on the complexity of the information you want published and the size of your district.

Most publishing tool packages are so simple to use that existing personnel can update the sites. This will become more of an organizational challenge than a

technical one. The optimal model is to designate one person as responsible for organizing the content in each area of the district, including school buildings and departments such as food services, transportation, special education, etc. This ensures that every building has equal representation.

Commit to a schedule of regular updates. This is perhaps the most important part of this process. A web site that is not updated is not worth the time it took to implement.

Train staff

The training phase is a critical part of the process. Staff members need to have adequate time to learn the new system and see the instructional benefits as well. Create guidelines for appropriate content, and review them with teachers. Many vendors bundle training with their products, depending on the complexity of the product that you purchase.

Mahopac designed a program consisting of one three- to five-hour training session on how to create and maintain an electronic grade book. Some teachers received additional training when warranted. "The teachers were surprised by the overwhelming response to the project by the parents," said Beverly. "The staff has experienced considerable feedback from many parents."

Training programs for these products will need to be repeated annually for new staff members.

Implement

After major decisions have been made, you're ready to roll out the new site, an event worth publishing. In Connecticut's Pomperaug Regional School District 15, the district rolled out its new web site with a splash. According to Russ Sage, the district's technology director, announcements were sent home to parents, press releases were submitted to local newspapers, and demonstrations were given at school board meetings. A prototype of the new web site was posted as a link on the old site, inviting comments from parents and members in the community before the site went live.

If you are planning on posting student information, such as student demographics, grades, and attendance, your district must adhere to the guidelines set forth by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Child Online Privacy and Protection Act (COPPA). COPPA prohibits commercial web sites from "disclosing, collecting, or using information from children under the age of 13 without verifiable parental consent."

You'll need to implement a parental verification procedure consisting of signed parent or guardian permission slips. Most companies that sell products that access student information provide sample forms and kits to schools, consisting of parental consent forms, press releases about the product, and instructions for parents.

Monitor

After the new site has been launched, your work has only begun. It is important to monitor the site closely and make adjustments as you go along. Most products or internet providers have web-enabled tools available for you to monitor the site usage. Look for information about site traffic. A successful site should show an increase in usage monthly. Also, make sure your site has a section for comments.

After all of these phases are completed, the finished product is well worth the effort. It is extremely gratifying to see staff members with moderate technology skills making a contribution to the district web site.

"Technology is such an important part of our society, and schools don't take advantage of what's available," said Cindy Penchina, owner of OS4E.com. Web-based publishing tools give parents up-to-date and immediate information, without relying on kids to transfer information to them, be it grades, permission slips, or just classroom news. From the school's

perspective, everything is documented and available, cutting down on phone tag between teachers and parents.

The internet has proved to be a convenient and powerful medium for conveying information. With these new communication tools, schools have an opportunity to use this new medium to share information with the community in a cost-effective manner. No longer must schools sit on the sidelines because of a lack of in-house expertise. Increasing communication with the community will reap positive rewards in terms of support from the community and will allow your district to proceed with its mission of teaching and learning.

PRODUCTS

Class Compass Great Barrington, Mass.

(413) 528-2975

<http://www.classcompass.com>

Offers several web-based tools for storing files and creating student portfolios, web logs, and project-based sites. Teacher tools include class web pages, personal curriculum maps, and WebQuest modules.

eChalk New York, N.Y.

(800) 809-3349

<http://www.echalk.com>

A full-blown online environment that offers district, school, and teacher web pages. Also offers staff and student eMail, file storage, teacher homework tools, and discussion boards.

Edline Chicago, Ill.

(800) 491-0010

<http://www.edline.com>

An online environment that offers district and school web space; additional web pages for classes, teams, and clubs; accounts for all staff and students; and homework and grade tools. Also can be configured for public and private access and can upload data from most school information systems.

Inet Teacher.com Kenmore, N.Y.

(866) 503-6026

<http://www.inetteacher.com>

Offers a set of tools to create and maintain district, school, and teacher web sites. Also has a password-protected section for student grades and homework tools.

Macromedia Inc. San Francisco, Calif.

(888) 649-2990

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/breeze>

The company's Breeze product provides tools to conduct online meetings, build virtual presentations, and facilitate training and professional development online. Flash technology enables presentations to be viewed in all standard web browsers.

Online Solutions for Educators Ossining, N.Y.

(888) 203-4704

<http://www.os4e.com>

Offers a collection of web-based products, including Sites-4-Schools, a template-based tool that creates school and district web sites; 30-Minute Web Sites for Teachers, a tool for building customized classroom web sites; Pupil Pages, a student portfolio repository; and School-2-Home, an administrative solution for displaying and managing school information.

Oracle Corp.

Redwood Shores, Calif.

http://www.think.com/en_us

Offers Think.com, a suite of free web sites and eMail tools for everyone in a school. Integrates free, protected eMail for students and teachers, and enables users to build web sites and collaborate with others on group projects. School leaders can use the service's administrative tools to create student accounts and review individual assignments.

Steven Moskowitz has worked in the fields of technology and education for more than 20 years. A certified teacher and administrator, he is currently the director of technology for the Brewster Central School District in New York.

[<< Previous](#) | Page 2 of 2

www.eschoolnews.com
info@eschoolnews.com
7920 Norfolk Ave., Suite 900
Bethesda, MD 20814
(800) 394-0115 - Fax (301) 913-0119

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage your FREE eSchool News eMail subscriptions here](#)
Contents Copyright 2005 eSchool News. All rights reserved.