

Web Connect is a "hit" with parents of USA students

by JOHN BONKE

staff writer

Parents of students at USA High School or Middle School can see how their children are doing by accessing a Web site that reports on their child's progress. Parents can see if assignments have been completed and how the student did. Parents can also view attendance records. The information is current within two or three days.

This is made possible by a newer version of a specialized computer program and the school and parents are pleased.

USA Superintendent Kip Walker said, "The building principals, especially Mike Harris, saw the potential this has for real-time progress reports as an intervention tool."

He noted using this tool can replace a conversation parents may sometimes have with their child, which he characterized as:

"How's everything going?"
"Fine."

Another positive impact of the program is it allows schools to communicate not only on a regular basis but on a more timely one.

"We (schools traditionally) communicate quarterly," Walker noted. He added, if parents know there's a problem they can intervene. "Parents can identify an area in which a student needs help. Parents can be partners in education," Walker explained.

Walker said the efforts at USA have been made easier by of Fred Sharpsteen, the school's technology coordinator. "Fred has worked hard on getting us a good product," Walker said. He also praised the support provided by Cheri Nitz. "She has been phenomenal as a support person teachers and staff can turn to for help," Walker said.

Nitz, an administrative secretary and payroll coordinator for USA Schools, is in

mostly in the middle of the week from about 6 a.m. to about 2 p.m., he said referring to usage data he has gathered. Grades are the most-often viewed items, he added. Parents can log on at home or anywhere they have an Internet connection, he noted.

The system allows for step-parents and other adults, such as grandparents, foster parents or guardians to be involved in the education of the child. The system also allows for parents in an extended family, even if out of the area, to stay connected. Parents who have used the system are very positive about this experience.

Dr. Cheryl Canfield, a parent of USA students said she likes the feature because she likes to keep up with how her kids are doing. She said the program allows both the parent and student to know where they're at. She noted the parent and the student can tell if assignments, as well as and notes to excuse absences, have been turned in and recorded. "I can get a handle on it now rather than at the end of the marking period," said Dr. Canfield. Canfield said how often she uses the program varies.

Mary Kuhl, a parent of four children at USA, said the system is a very helpful tool. She added, "I enjoy being able to go on and seeing where they're at - it's very important to me." Kuhl said she feels most parents should be able to use the program regardless of level of ability with computers.

She added she uses the feature a couple times each week because tracking the progress of children and seeing if their assignments are being kept current helps a parent to know if their student is possibly missing a concept.

She said her children sometimes ask for her to look on the computer so they can know if they're missing any assignments. Kuhl said normally she uses the site more

out the additional homework and the newness of grades to a former elementary student could be a source of stress but using the site can help.

Lang, who uses the feature every week, said a parent can check on their child's progress throughout the school year and see what, as a parent, they can do.

Jason Beagle, who teaches science at USA said, "we do our attendance online and the office gets it within minutes."

He said he pulls up a seating chart online and enters the data into the system. Each teacher can set up their gradebook on the system using different weights for assignments, quizzes, tests and exams, Beagle said.

The program lets the teachers enter an incomplete to excuse a student when they are absent and miss an assignment and the computer will not include that as a zero, he noted.

Beagle said he still keeps a hard copy gradebook in case the electronic data ever would be lost.

Beagle said the biggest benefit of using the system is it allows parents to be much more in tune with their student's performance.

"This really opens up another line of communication to the parents," Beagle said. He added this system helps get the parents involved in the education of their children.

When a student isn't doing well in school, the school still contacts the parents, but this

Date	Description	Grade	Points	Average
01/23/07	HW (Week 1)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 2)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 3)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 4)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 5)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 6)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 7)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 8)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 9)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 10)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 11)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 12)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 13)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 14)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 15)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 16)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 17)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 18)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 19)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 20)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 21)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 22)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 23)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 24)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 25)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 26)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 27)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 28)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 29)	100	100	100
01/23/07	HW (Week 30)	100	100	100

Photo courtesy of SDS

This image shows a sample gradebook page for a student. Tabs can bring up schedule and attendance.

allows for a parent to check at home or from work or wherever they are at, he said. Beagle pointed out the parents can receive a weekly printout if they have no Internet access.

Sharpsteen noted sometime in the future school Web sites will become more of a Web portal thereby integrating all of the student's information such as grades, attendance, lunch balances and more.

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Teachers and staff can turn to for help, Walker said.

Nitz, an administrative secretary and payroll coordinator for USA Schools, is in charge of administering the SDS function at USA. She trains teachers and secretaries how to enter data into the system. Also, if a teacher or a secretary has a question, Nitz said she'll answer the question or call SDS and find out the answer.

This new version, along with being more visually-pleasing, is more user-friendly, said Sharpsteen.

Sharpsteen said using the site helps get parents involved by allowing them to easily see what assignments have been turned in. He added, "It lets them check on attendance without having to call in to the school." Sharpsteen explained the program accommodates the parent's schedule if they are unable to call during normal school hours.

"(The program) allows parents the opportunity to check on data 24/7." He noted the site assists with the educational philosophy: "To be successful, we need to get everyone involved in the education of the child." Sharpsteen said traffic to the site has doubled since last year and he estimates visits at about 2,000 per month. Parents use the site

She said her children sometimes ask for her to look on the computer so they can know if they're missing any assignments. Kuhl said normally she uses the site more so during the week.

Kuhl pointed out another feature allows parents to see if absences have been excused and can follow up with the student and teacher.

Lisa Lang, a parent of a USA Middle School student, said, "I love it. I'm so glad they put it in the Middle School. It's so proactive."

"It's a great way to keep on top of things," she added. "We have to help them but let them take responsibility, too." Lang said a parent might be concerned when their child enters the middle school level. "There's a big transition between 4th and 5th grades," she noted. Lang pointed

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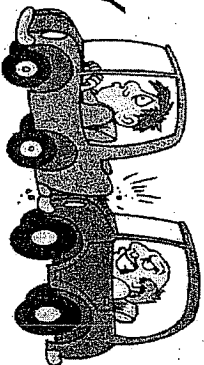
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