

For my sustainable technology project, I am introducing a solution to the increasing problem found in this and other schools today regarding parental /teacher communication. It seems that presently, at least at the middle school and high school level, parents may not be as involved as in the past, whether it would be due to increased instances where both parents work, or simply parents' reliance on the school and/or teacher themselves to initiate communication regarding their child's educational experience. Also, as technology has grown to where school newsletters are becoming more electronically delivered and schools and their school districts all having their own websites. Furthermore, schools are cutting costs for supplies like paper and going more environmentally friendly. Notes home from school or the teacher are becoming less common. Clear communication between the teacher and parent is essential for student growth and learning both in the classroom and at outside the classroom, especially at home. Often times when there is a gap in this communication, the parent only knows what their child tells them, if that is anything at all. Furthermore, parents may only hear from their child his or her own side of what is actually happening inside the classroom, or from their own opinions of the teacher in which many parents believe without questioning and without following up by talking to the teacher personally. I find that this is a much unfortunate reality these days. On the other side of the coin, there are some teachers who do not reach out to parents any more than they are required, such as when its progress report time, parent/teacher conferences, or when the student has a major negative behavior problem. This is also unfortunate, because in many cases, student learning and achievement may be driven the most from the parental influence or the lack thereof at home. Moreover, I don't believe that enough communication is made when students do positive things when

compared to the negative. Some teachers only make contact other than those mandatory times as mentioned earlier when there is a negative reason, behavior or performance based. Opening up the parent and teacher communication lines can prove to be a vital and effective way to enhance student growth and development academically, socially, and emotionally. This in itself is a focal point in our school's mission to educate and foster a learning community. This includes not only the staff and students to which it serves, but to parents and citizens of the community we all live in.

My plan for a solution to this problem is meets my top goals of being extremely cost effective and sustainable. Today social media is becoming increasingly accessible at an unbelievably fast rate. Social media can be defined as being web-based and mobile technologies that give people access to interactive communication through various organizations, communities, and individuals. This includes major social networks like Facebook and Twitter, video sharing websites such as YouTube, and web blogs among many others. This in addition to being able to create an e-mail account or a webpage rather easily provides an incredible opportunity to communicate today. Now class websites, online grading books, and communicating through email is hardly a new concept and has and still is being used by many teachers today to communicate with students and parents alike. However, I offer an all-encompassing, social media driven solution that creates an multiple avenues for communication not only with specific parents directly, but to open up the classroom for all parents to observe and follow what is going on in the classroom. This totally interactive system of communication through use of essentially free of cost technologies which are becoming mainstream way of communication today will help close the gap between teacher and parent like never before.

My plan starts with each teacher creating a personal teacher webpage, with separate links to specific class web pages. This class webpage can include normal things often seen on class web pages today such as class assignments, calendars, information, due dates etc. etc. but it will also have links to

its unique Facebook page, Twitter page, and YouTube. In addition there will be links to both a class specific Blog and the teacher's e-mail address and other contact information. All of these technologies will be interconnected to each other. The class Facebook page will be accessible to parents, but they won't have to "friend" the class so their own personal private profiles will be seen. This way parents won't be apprehensive to join the group. The unique Facebook class page allows for many possibilities. A Facebook page allows the abilities for the teacher to send messages to the entire group, or to specific people and vice-versa. The teacher can post class updates, links, photos, or videos. And with Facebook being an increasing accessible mobile phone technology, this would allow those parents with mobile technology to have unlimited access to everything on the page wherever they carry their mobile phone. In addition to Facebook, the teacher can create a class specific YouTube account, uploading videos that can communicate a variety of message including messages to the parents directly, showing the class at work on a specific project or presentation. Of course the parents can subscribe to the YouTube group to access the videos and they can be posted on the Facebook page as well! I think the ability to visually see the teacher spread a message in their own words or observing students learning and involvement in class activities is an extraordinary way to communicate and I believe that parents will be pleased. They may in fact find themselves checking back every day to watch a new video. Then we have them hooked! As I mentioned earlier, there is even more ways for parents and teachers to communicate through popular social media means. Twitter provides means for teachers to create a twitter community for communication with parents. It can even be set up to private so only the parents who request permission and are granted can see the tweets. Besides being able to tweet updates for assignments, quizzes, tests, etc., the teacher can tweet links to relevant articles that parents can use as resources for the student to use at home. Also, like Facebook, the parents would be able to communicate with other parents as well, not only the teacher. Again, like YouTube's interconnectedness to Facebook, tweets can be shown on the class Facebook status as well. Talk about convenience! Another nice technology

resource a teacher can use to communicate is having a class Blog. Blogs can provide commentary on any subject and can include text, pictures, and links. A teacher could maintain an interesting blog for parents to follow regarding any subject that could pique even more interest from the parent. Blogs have become highly popular and could provide insight into the personality of the teacher for parents to get to know. Of course, a teacher would use e-mail to communicate with parents as well. A teacher can set their email so that every time they create a new blog they can email the blog to every parent. All of this in addition with online grading books being available to parents creates the ultimate social interaction and communication capabilities for teachers and their students' parents.

All of these things social media driven technologies I have mentioned in my plan to increase parent/teacher communication are fairly easy to learn and maintain. It is because of this ease that makes this plan simple to implement both in training teachers to use and technical support. I believe it would be an easy sell to my teaching colleagues to, at least on the side of how user friendly it would be to set up. It would probably take a day or two maximum to instruct how to use the features and set up accounts, groups, etc. as needed. The fact of the matter is, many, if not most students today, have their own accounts and that could be a motivating selling point to the teachers who are skeptical about creating their own social network pages. Teachers should try to relate to and become familiar the world their students live in and communicate daily through. As far as costs go, I believe we can minimize monetary costs to the professional development of one or two days of training, which could already be budgeted. In addition, costs that can be included may consist of a video recording device or camera to take photos and videos. Many teachers may already have phones or cameras that could do this on their own. Other than costs of computers and internet service in which the school already provides, I suggest holding an annual informational seminar for parents to come to learn to use these technologies themselves where we offer food and refreshments. We could possibly raffle off some items to motivate parents into showing up to get involved in this new plan. I believe these associated costs are minimal

and very economical considering the improvement in communication capability created through this plan.

Funding for this solution can and should be very simple for the costs associated are very low. I believe that a simple annual fundraiser such as selling raffle tickets to win a laptop computer could be enough to fund this technology plan. Because of the fact this plan is so cost effective and relies solely on the teachers' ability to access the internet and do simple things like recording video or taking pictures with a camera, uploading files, images and videos, and basic keyboard typing makes this a very viable course of action to increase parent/teacher communication. Furthermore, this plan eliminates much paper use with documents being sent home which saves money and is more environmentally friendly. In fact, I believe it gives the parent-student-teacher relationship a more personal feel. It also promotes positive use for social media and networking sites which can receive negative criticism and views from educators and parents alike and open up the eyes of individuals who are cynical in the power of its use in the right fashion.

I believe the implementation of this plan is small, very cost-efficient, and manageable. This plan of course begins with a vision. Teacher/parent communication is arguably a key component in education. Without, it makes connecting with the student and having an impact on their academic, social, and emotional growth more difficult. Furthermore, I believe that because of today's economic conditions and the social environment, parents as a whole are becoming less directly involved in their child's education, putting the responsibility more on the schools and teacher themselves. I personally believe that the more influence they can have and "in-the-know" parents are, the better it will affect their child's educational experience in a positive way. This solution is a good solution because it allows parents an opportunity for more intimate and direct access into the child's classroom for day to day/week to week experiences. Its interactive nature also provides participation into their child's life

which is always a good thing and something that lets the students know that people care about what they do every day in school. The skills needed to implement this solution are minimal in my opinion as well. Simple web-browsing, uploading files, typing, and basic uses of camera work are all that it takes to provide an effective. I believe this plan also offers significant incentives for teachers and parents alike. It gives teachers a chance to relate to students and the social growth and world they live in today. Also, it can be very beneficial and even time efficient to reach parents and communicate effectively without making numerous phone calls and scheduling meetings, which takes time from both the parent and teachers to accommodate together. Resources to execute this plan are minimal as well. A couple days of training and the purchase of cameras, something that isn't very expensive for the basic camera functions needed. Computers and internet access is already provided in schools and teachers can provide this service to parents from their own homes, even from their own personal devices if they have them. The principle issue for this solution to work is to ensure the correct action plan is taken for effective application of this proposal. I believe that the one or two days taken of professional development to train and present this plan to teachers is imperative for the users of this technology to get out of what it is intended for. This means that the purpose of this plan needs to be properly presented in a way that makes its users accountable for using this technology in its proper and most effective way. Of course, proper direction and leadership is essential in addition to any technical support needed.

It is important to understand that technology in schools is not an end-all in itself. One must be able to use technology for specific goals used to foster learning and promote growth and development. Open teacher/parent communication is a key aspect to a child's academic, social, and emotional progress. Parents should be informed of what their children will be learning, assessment dates, homework assignments, projects, along with social and behavioral interactions. Teachers should not only communicate negative concerns but also successes and progress. Furthermore, it can be very

beneficial to provide a first person view of activities happening in the classroom through photos and videos. Building teacher-parent relationships through consistent communication is especially vital to the success of students. Previously communication between teachers and parents has been done through face to face meetings including parent/teacher conferences and open houses to name a few. In today's age, there are many ways to keep connected with parents using technology. Using a combination of these social media resources can involve parents in their child's successful education.