

Best Practices Newsletter

Using Technology to Advance Collaboration and Learning

The omnipresence of the Internet, social media and video games has transformed how we learn, live, work and play in the 21st century, so it's no wonder schools have embraced technology in the classroom.

With technology, teachers can send, receive and grade assignments; provide feedback to students; post lectures and communicate with parents. Gone are the days of being loaded down with stacks of papers to grade or spending precious time photocopying.

For students, technology brings the classroom to where they are. Whether in school or out sick, with a login and a few clicks, students know what assignments were made and when they're due. They can even ask their teacher questions — no more excuses for missing assignments.

This newsletter shines a spotlight on how technology helps teachers maximize time, engages students in learning, allows students to work with classmates and teachers anytime anywhere and prepares students to be tech-savvy for today's workforce.



One-to-One With Chromebooks

Michael Graham, principal of **Westside High School**, has committed his entire staff and student body to be technology-driven through the use of Chromebooks. He eliminated any budget for textbooks and uses the most current resources and research for students to use when learning.

"We are not buying anymore textbooks. Ever! We now use the textbook money to buy the Chromebooks," Graham said proudly.

Westside is a rural school in Jonesboro, Arkansas, serving 670 students in grades eight to 12. As a Google Classroom site, it has a plethora of support and resources despite a limited budget.

Students are provided one-to-one Chromebooks and use GoGuardian to ensure they are utilizing the devices for their intended purposes. Teachers have found Chromebooks allow instruction to be more student-centered and help students own their work.

Lessons are automatically differentiated as students are learning at their own pace, and teachers can hone in on students' strengths and challenges. This results in a dramatic improvement in all data areas, according to Graham.

Transitioning to One-to-One With Chromebooks

Geometry teacher **Letitia Mosier** shared her personal transition to using Chromebooks. "You can't really focus on the device ... It is more about *how* you use the device and implement it in your classroom. Instead of using the term 'one-to-one' – it should be 'one-to-world.'"

Mosier also shared important considerations teachers should be aware of when implementing one-to-one devices, such as classroom setup, charging places, what to do if a student doesn't have a Chromebook, and setting up expectations and norms. For example,

This newsletter describes best practices presented at the 29th Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 2015. **SAVE the DATE.** Join us for the 30th Annual HSTW Staff Development Conference July 13-16, 2016 in Louisville, Kentucky. Click [here](#) to register.

Come early for the College- and Career-Readiness Standards Networking Conference, July 11-13, 2016 in Louisville.

"When I am speaking to you, the Chromebook is shut." Her classroom is set up with students divided in half and facing the center aisle to improve implementation and attention.

Other content-area teachers have found Chromebooks an effective tool. Theater director **Brooke Chapman** said she uses Google Classroom to organize student activities and post announcements, meetings and rehearsal schedules. All related participants receive an immediate email notice.

But What If...

...students do not have Internet at home?

"There is an offline component that can be used," explained Graham. "But they cannot collaborate. When they get back to school, the cloud retrieves the information."

...veteran teachers struggle with or resist adoption?

"There is a mandate to ensure students are college and career ready. If a teacher cannot support innovation, then they rethink their role in our school," replied Graham.

...our school can't afford it?

Google Classroom is free and permanently yours. Westside created the domain @WestsideHS, allowing students and staff access to all of its resources. Chromebooks are also very affordable compared to regular laptops.

Goodbye Papers; Hello Google Classroom



Using Google Classroom, **Heather Eggers**, a Westside High School English/language arts teacher, has largely done away with paper documents. All assignments and most assessments are done electronically.

"I really needed an efficient way to manage the influx of papers that I was getting from students," she said. "Before Google Classroom, the students had to share documents with me individually or put them into a folder that they shared with me, and I would constantly have students who would forget to share or put their work in the shared folder. Plus, I would have to go into each student's individual folder and search for the correct assignment every time I graded it. It was a document nightmare."

As she searched for a solution, Google announced it would soon be releasing its Classroom app. Eggers applied and was selected to participate in a trial run during the summer of 2014 before it went live. "It made everything so much more streamlined," she said. "I am able to remind students about deadlines, give information and helpful articles and tips, assign work... and I don't have to go to more than one place."

This efficiency has allowed her to provide feedback in real time, and reduced excuses from students claiming they are unable to do their work because they couldn't find it. "It is now ingrained in my students to check Google Classroom when they are absent, and most of the time those students are caught up with the class even before they return," Eggers said.

Students Embrace New Technology

Eggers provides training for her students at the beginning of the school year. Occasionally she has a student who struggles with the technology and she works with them individually, providing tutorials for Classroom and other Google apps. "[Google Classroom] is very user-friendly, so the students quickly learned how to navigate the areas of the program," Eggers commented.

"It's amazing how much more work gets done when they see my picture pop up on their screen to let them know I have opened their document."

— Heather Eggers, teacher

The Impact of Google Classroom

Since she began using Google Classroom, Eggers has noticed a decrease in the number of missing assignments that counted as zeros and a slight increase in the overall average grade for her classes. She also noted that the number of students who passed the AP language exam in the 2014-15 school year was the highest it's ever been, although she is unsure how much Classroom contributed to her students' success.

Westside High School	Missing Assignments	Overall Class Average
Before Google Classroom – September 2013	45	83%
After Google Classroom – September 2015	11	86

Part of the reason for the decline in missing work, she explained, was she could easily see who had or had not turned in assignments. She follows up with these students through blind copy emails, reminding them that their assignment is late and needs to be turned in. As a result, she has seen big improvements in students submitting assignments on time.

Clearer deadlines and easy access to assignments and materials have also impacted student engagement. Prior to Google Classroom, Eggers said she had to rely on what she observed in her classes. Now she's able to pull up their assignments while they are working to monitor their progress and provide timely feedback. "It's amazing how much more work gets done when they see my picture pop up on their screen to let them know I have opened their document. Plus, many of them will ask questions through "comments" when they would have never raise their hands in class to ask," she said.

This constant dialogue between student and teacher can be done anytime, anywhere as long as the student has access to a device, such as a computer or mobile app, and an Internet connection. "I don't take papers home to grade anymore. This places all the work on the student. I just monitor and collaborate with the student," Eggers said.

Google Classroom is available to any teacher who subscribes to Google Apps for Education, which is free to schools.

Contacts: Heather Eggers: heggers@westsideschools.org; Michael Graham: mgraham@westsideschools.org

The Flipped Career and Technical Education Classroom

"In the 21st-century U.S. economy, nearly two-thirds of all jobs require education and training beyond high school. One growing sector is jobs that pay between \$35,000 and \$75,000 a year in fields such as advanced manufacturing; energy; health care; information technology; and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). To secure these jobs, individuals need to know how to analyze data, apply math, use technology, think critically and solve problems – skills students can develop in high schools, work-based training programs, and community and technical colleges and universities."

— Southern Regional Education Board, 2015

It is time for career and technical education (CTE) teachers to change the way they teach to prepare students for the demands of the new economy, maintains **Beth Green**, SREB's project manager for Advanced Career (AC). Advanced Career is an intellectually demanding, project-based learning curriculum that requires students to learn technical skills while using math, science, literacy and technology.

"When raising student expectations, it is important to look at time in a different way. How might we use time in a way that helps students reach college- and career-readiness goals?" Green asked.

One approach is to consider homework. Traditionally, CTE teachers avoid assigning much homework. If they do, it is usually to complete a project. A flipped classroom approach helps the teacher flip the amount of time they spend in the classroom. Tasks which can be accomplished individually outside of class allow more class time for collaborative work, labs, field-based experiences and other activities that promote higher-level thinking skills.

Some examples of appropriate homework for CTE students include independent reading, writing drafts of papers, peer reviewing final versions of papers, listening or watching mini-lectures and participating in online discussion groups. When students return to class, they have the necessary background to work with their collaborative teams or participate in labs.

The flipped classroom also allows teachers to spend additional classroom time with engaging activities, cooperative teamwork and other methods, such as recording lectures and posting them online for students to view during and after class.

The ability to use these digital resources whenever and wherever is particularly useful for students with special needs, English language learners and those who need extra help or have to do makeup work. Ultimately, the practice saves time for teachers and promotes student independence.

Contact: Beth Green: beth.green@sreb.org



Deepening a Student and Parent-Friendly Flipped Classroom

“Flipped classrooms should be about learning, not about what methods are used,” according to **Bobby Dodd**, principal of **Gahanna Lincoln High School** in Ohio. Dodd said technology is key to reaching students in an information age, but simply using new technology ideas, such as flipped classrooms, is not enough. He stated it is great to innovate, but leaders must also remember to communicate.

Blended Versus Flipped

Because of the rapid expansion of flipped classrooms, the practice has developed a bad reputation in some places, typically due to misinformation. Leaders must encourage creativity and communicate effectively to ensure accurate information is shared, otherwise “flipped” may mean it is time for parents to “flip out.”

“If you are going to use methods such as videos and sites to assist in the instruction of the class, inform parents and students you have a ‘blended learning environment,’” Dodd said. This provides the opportunity to explain what a blended classroom is, how it works and how it’s different from a flipped class.

Explaining Blended Learning

- Explain why you believe a blended learning approach is the best method to use for instruction.
- Let parents know what software and devices you will be using and why.
- Explain what classes will look like on a daily basis.
- Explain expectations regarding devices, what students are responsible for when they miss class, etc.

Communication Is Key

Dodd recommended multiple formats for communicating, multiple times and in multiple ways:

- **Emails** are a staple for most parents, so they should be used to provide details with links that explain blended learning.
- **The phone** is still a basic piece of technology and should be used to address problems and concerns with parents individually.
- **An open house** provides the opportunity to take parents through a lesson and demonstrate the tools and feedback students receive.
- **Videos** should be short and to the point (no longer than five minutes).
- **Blog posts** should include links to articles and videos that parents can view for themselves.

Tools and Resources for Blended Learning

- **Educreations:** This video creation app for iPads can be stored in the cloud or shared with students and others via email and social media.
- **Show Me:** Create digital lessons on this app for iPads and share them with students and other educators.
- **ScreenCast-O-Matic:** Create and share free screen recordings using any device.
- **YouTube:** Use this website to upload and share videos for free.
- **Khan Academy:** Free online courses, instructional videos and personalized learning dashboards are available to anyone, anywhere.
- **Padlet:** This online virtual bulletin board allows for large file uploads, creation of student reports and portfolios, analytics, and the ability to monitor schoolwide and classroom activity.
- **Today'sMeet:** Use this tool to create online classroom discussions and presentations.
- **PollEveryWhere:** Engage students in real time using polls that can be accessed via mobile phones, Twitter or Web browsers.
- **Edmodo:** This free site allows teachers to collaborate with students, parents and each other.
- **Schoology:** This learning management system is designed to enhance collaboration and provide instructional design tools.
- **Google Classroom:** This learning platform helps teachers create and organize assignments, provide feedback, and communicate with their students quickly and efficiently.

The Do's and Don'ts of Implementation

After determining what kinds of tools and resources will be used in the classroom, Dodd shared a few tips to help instructors ensure they are implementing blended learning effectively:

1. Do not make videos longer than five minutes.

Web videos and marketing lose about a third of viewers by 30 seconds, 45 percent after one minute and almost 60 percent after two minutes. “If this is the case for commercials, how long do you think the attention span is for instruction?” Dodd asked.

2. Keep student and teacher lines of communication open.

“Develop a plan that spells out how communication will take place between all stakeholders,” Dodd said. “Always plan for too much communication.”

3. Have an intervention system in place for each class period.

Student struggle is part of the learning process. Make a plan for how you will provide intervention. Dodd encouraged teachers to “create as many intervention opportunities as possible for students.” This may include separate miniworkshops during class, retaking assessments or alternate assessments such as projects and videos, and peer-to-peer teaching.

4. Change and mix it up.

Dodd advised using different teaching methods each day based on formative data gathered during class periods – blended classrooms don’t have to use video 100 percent of the time.

Taking the Lead

It is critical when thinking about communicating with parents not to depend on students to communicate your ideas. Teachers and leaders should not let anybody else send their message, Dodd said. Leaders have to communicate the what, the how and the why for technology. If they don’t, parents and students will generate their own answers to these questions.

Contact: Bobby Dodd: doddb@gjps.org

Strategies and Resources for the Flipped Math Classroom

“What is a flipped classroom? It is often something math teachers hear about that sounds good, but they are overwhelmed when it is time to implement it,” said **Paige Graiser**, a mathematics consultant for SREB.

Flipping the classroom allows teachers to give the immediate feedback that students need, reduces the amount of time spent in class lecturing and encourages students to use each other for peer learning.

We cannot observe the standards for mathematical practice when we are lecturing. The flipped classroom allows us to see it in action,” Graiser said.

“Homework is becoming obsolete. What used to be class work [lecture] is done at home and what used to be homework [assigned problems] is now done in class.”

— Paige Graiser, teacher

She explained that Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasizes using scaffolding to move students from what they already know to what they can do next. It informs teachers of the level of problem solving a student is capable of and allows teachers to provide an environment of collaboration with a more expert peer.

“We want students to be involved in a productive struggle rather than be lectured or guided through the productive struggle,” Graiser said. “Ultimately, it allows students to take a greater sense of responsibility for their learning and concentrate on understanding and application.”

Flipped Classroom at a Glance

The flipped classroom allows teachers to make math a team sport rather than an individual sport. “Homework is becoming obsolete. What used to be class work [lecture] is done at home and what used to be homework [assigned problems] is now done in class,” said Graiser.

She describes the flipped classroom as:

- a means to increase interaction and personalized contact time between students and teachers.
- an environment where students take responsibility for their own learning.
- a culture where students who are absent or involved in extracurricular activities do not get left behind.
- a place where content can be permanently archived for review or remediation.
- a classroom where students are engaged in their learning.



Successful Flipped Classes Include:

- learning environments that are highly structured (often planned down to the minute).
- a significant amount of questioning, problem solving and other active learning activities, forcing students to retrieve, apply and/or extend the material learned outside of class. (The activities are directly relevant to the out-of-class work.)
- the ability to access assignments through smartphones or other devices, particularly during “wait times.”
- Bloom’s Taxonomy — upper levels of learning only during class and the lower levels when at home for study and review.

Some concerns for the flipped classroom may include the school’s electronic policy and students without access to the Internet. There are several solutions that can be implemented, according to Graiser. These include burning CDs or DVDs, using flash drives, and dedicating time during and after school.

Flipped Classroom Resources

During Class Time: Videos, podcasts, online discussions, online quizzes, class wiki, and reading, writing and question tasks

Distributing Content to Students: Edmodo, YouTube, Screencast-O-Matic, Vimeo, Google Classroom, Moodle and Wikispaces

Other Resources: Khan Academy, FlippedLearning.org, Teaching Channel, National Public Radio, Math Playground and The Math Dude (www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org)

Contact: Paige Graiser: paige.graiser@comcast.net

Been There, Done That... and Changing It!

The integration of a one-to-one technology program and new ways of thinking at **West Rowan High School** in Mount Ulla, North Carolina, has transformed it from a traditional learning environment to one where technology and innovation are part of everyday school life.

The school operates on a 90-minute block, with some core classes following an A/B schedule. “Skinnies,” which are short elective classes, are set up to meet every day.

Integrating Technology and Digital Skills

Principal **Jamie Durant** said the use of technology and MacBooks in everyday lessons created a need for collaboration, connectivity, lesson relevance and an environment of personalization. Professional learning communities quickly began to take form and have real meaning, with teachers discussing units of instruction and lesson design. Giving teachers more time to collaborate and supporting them with technology strategies to use has been the biggest breakthrough for them as a school community, said Durant.

Angi Waldo, the math instructional design coach at the school, agreed, recalling how excited students were because the lessons were more relevant and integrated technology. “As a classroom teacher (at the time), I embedded digital skills through small group instruction, daily lessons and at-home assignments. I would have several groups working around my classroom in a blended approach,” she explained.

Waldo used a variety of resources, including Discovery Education websites purchased by the school (such as IXL). Nearpod, Kahoot, Socrative and others. “I also implemented a flipped classroom portion to many of my lessons. I would video a minilesson and assign it for homework along with a few practice problems,” she said.

Creating Relevant Courses

The next step involved the school thinking outside the box when it came to the courses students were offered to increase their relevance. Durant described how they grouped classes together, citing examples such as:

- Honors biology + agriculture + horticulture
- Microsoft + AP U.S. History
- Environmental science + marketing

The school also created an accelerated program for over age eighth-graders. The students attend the high school for two classes each day. Soon these students begin believing and acting like they are high school students, with a desire to earn credits and move forward.

Results

These combined efforts over the last few years, including doing classroom walk-throughs with administrators and teachers, organizing teacher teams, and creating a common vocabulary between teachers, said Durant, have increased enrollment in both AP and honor classes and increased the graduation rate from 85 percent in 2012 to 94 percent in 2015.

Contact: Jamie Durant: jamie.durant@rss.k12.nc.us; Angela Waldo: angela.waldo@rss.k12.nc.us

A Scientific Method to the Madness: Identifying Struggling Students

“Implementing personalized learning in our classroom has improved classroom management and given students ownership over their learning,” said **Megan Kumbatovic**, a physical science and chemistry teacher at **R. B. Stall High School** in North Charleston, South Carolina.



She and her professional learning community (PLC) partner, **Brittany Matson**, who teaches physical science, chemistry and engineering, meet every Sunday for about five hours or during their common planning time throughout the school week.

Together, they develop their individualized approach to instruction and preplan units of instruction based on the standards for their course. The units of instruction are divided into stations, with students rotating through each station to complete their assignments and assessments at their own pace.

“Our classrooms were set up with different areas such as the lab area, assessing area, conference area, group work and independent work,” Matson explained. “Within the lab area, there are multiple labs set up at the same time. Sometimes, the stations are mini labs, aligned to each indicator.”

For example, during a unit on forces, Kumbatovic and Matson created an area for each of Newton’s Three Laws of Motion with different stations. At each station, students completed different hands-on activities to explore each of the scientific laws.

Following the Road Map to Success

During their PLC time, the pair also develop “road maps” of assignments and assessments. Students move between stations using individualized road maps to track themselves as they travel through stations to complete units of instruction. Using Master Connect, a summative assessment for each standard and formative assessments are embedded throughout.

To further help students, Kumbatovic said, they use a flipped classroom technique to create videos of notes and lectures. “We decided to do this to allow students an opportunity to move at their own pace and get the help that they need. This allowed struggling students an opportunity to have individualized time with us and also allowed our advanced students to move on to more difficult topics.”

Students developed a social contract for behavior and celebration activities for achieving goals and good behavior. Matson said the standard operating procedures they created for the students to follow has assisted with quality-of-work expectations and improved behavior.

The teacher pair encourage other teachers to visit their classrooms and get a firsthand view of how students are actively engaged and producing authentic work.

Contact: Megan Kumbatovic: megan_kumbatovic@charleston.k12.sc.us; Brittany Matson: brittany_matson@charleston.k12.sc.us

Questioning MDC and Nspire Calculators for Math

At **Highland High School** in Albuquerque, New Mexico, **RuthieAnn Trujillo** uses technology to engage students and formatively assess their understanding of mathematical concepts. The Nspire calculators keep her students focused and allow her to see their range of understanding in real time.

During a typical class, Trujillo presents a graph or other mathematical representation of information on the board and asks her students to submit on their Nspire calculators four math terms that apply to the visual they see. Their responses are then projected for all students to see.

After discussing the terms, the students work in pairs to create questions using appropriate math language. The student pairs follow the question formulation technique (QFT) outlined on their worksheets to produce higher-order questions.

Through the Nspire calculators and questioning techniques, learning and assessment become student-centered and student-driven, Trujillo said. Students not only create their own questions, but also find solutions to the questions they created.

Trujillo uses a step-by-step guide for her instruction while using the QFT worksheets:

Step 1: Review the rules for producing questions.

- Ask as many questions as you can.



- Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer the questions.
- Change any statements into questions.

Step 2: Produce your questions.

Students alternate asking questions and recording them on the worksheet, following the rules established in Step 1. Students then select a question of their choice and submit it using the Nspire calculator.

Step 3: Categorize your questions as open or closed.

Once their questions are submitted, the teacher projects them for students to determine which ones are open-ended and closed-ended. Closed-ended questions are rewritten into open-ended questions.

Step 4: Prioritize your questions.

Students prioritize the questions they feel are the three most important from their lists. The three most important questions are then submitted using the Nspire calculator and projected.

Step 5: Establish next steps.

These questions are now the questions that the students will solve.

Step 6: Reflect.

Trujillo believes asking good questions is the first step in helping her students gain knowledge about mathematics. This is especially important for her Algebra I strategies classes, which are made up of students who scored in the lowest 25 percent. Their instruction is also double blocked to further increase their understanding of the concepts they struggle with.

At the end of each year, Trujillo regularly sees her students move from her strategies class to honors geometry after scoring the same as honors students on assessments that include the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, district benchmark and state exams.

Contact: RuthieAnn Trujillo: ruthieanntrujillo@aps.edu

How to Talk to and Teach a Generation of Gamers

The son of Taiwanese immigrants, **Nai Wang** struggled in school. Not only was he an English as a Second Language student, he was also diagnosed with ADHD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Coming from a low-income family, he could not afford treatment. Wang admitted he once failed math and never finished a single novel in high school.

Because of his struggles in the classroom, Wang grew to love video games, explaining they managed to hold his attention. This enjoyment eventually led him to become a self-taught programmer and digital learning specialist.

Wang believes that gaming can not only give teachers insight into their students, but also ideas about how to approach lesson design. “The vast majority of educators are not gamers,” he said. “Over the years I realized that there was a severe disconnect between our teachers and students in understanding pervasive influences on our students in the forms of the entertainment they consume.”

Generation of Instant Gratification

Most of today’s educators grew up in a passive entertainment world. They “watched” TV or “listened” to the radio but were never brought into the action in the manner of today’s avatar-based entertainment. In today’s gaming world, people make decisions, see the direct results of their actions, receive quantified feedback, earn rewards and choose when to play.

In the old world, none of these things were present. This new “active” learning environment that video games represent has developed a generation of students who find it difficult to sit in a traditional educational classroom focused on delayed gratification and passive listening.

“The biggest difference now is they are in control. They’re not just watching a story unfold,” Wang said. Students are used to constant interactivity and when it is lacking in the classroom, they disconnect from learning.

The multibillion dollar video game industry will continue to expand. The vast majority of individuals ages two to 17 have played at least one video game. Wang asserted it is essential that educators begin to better understand gamers to meet their needs as students in the classroom. The secret is to harness the power of gamification and have empathy for gamers and their needs.



“Gamifying” the Classroom

Wang warns that transforming the classroom into a gaming venue or spending time developing games is not necessarily the right approach. Instead, he encourages teachers to look at how games engage people and apply those lessons to their own teaching styles.

Consider the statement: Video games provide challenging goals, constant feedback and measurable growth that hook players and keep them invested. Now replace “video games” with “active lessons” and “players” with “students” and you’ll see that the lessons of video games can easily be applied to the classroom.

Providing feedback early and often allows students to recognize and monitor their own progress, with tangible rewards motivating students to meet levels of understanding or accomplishment.

Wang suggests a couple of free learning tools teachers can use to support their students. The first is 3D Game Lab, a customizable, open platform that uses virtual currency and branching progression to reward and motivate students. The second is KP Compass, an individualized, student-centered system that allows students to level up and explore through project-based learning while receiving continuous formative assessment feedback to improve learning habits.

Contact: Nai Wang: nai@kpcurriculum.com

Socially Connected: Linking Educators and Community



Blaine Hathcock

Demopolis Middle School serves more than 2,200 students in Marengo County, Alabama. Despite well-trained staff and a supportive school culture, Principal **Blaine Hathcock** realized there was a need to develop a more positive image of the campus. “Demopolis was getting blistered on social media; everyone was saying bad things.”

In his discussion with community members he discovered a pervasive lack of awareness of what was going on at the school and decided it was imperative they share the good things happening in the system.

“The use of social media has been a game changer for public perception of our school.”

— Blaine Hathcock, principal

Investing in Technology

To help kick-start the process, the district made a concerted effort to bring technology to the community and its schools with a \$1.5 million investment in infrastructure and equipment. Hathcock jokingly described the transition the campus and district underwent as going from the “outhouse to the penthouse in terms of technology.”

This technology upgrade allowed them to make better use of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to share the good things happening on the campus with the community and get ahead of the negative publicity. The school also upgraded its website so that all teachers had their own Web page and could share details from their own classrooms.

Connecting Students With the Community

The school then decided to do live news broadcasts. Teacher **Meggin Mayben** developed a broadcast class to provide information to the community. Hathcock said it was important to “let teachers run with it” and praised Mayben as the source of many of the good ideas that have been used to further reach the public.

Mayben said, “It was exciting and overwhelming at the same time. The broadcasts originally started with just two webcams, a video camera, a computer and six kids.” Early broadcasts focused on students leading the pledge and basic announcements with one camera angle. But as they built the program, she was able to connect with Western Alabama University and purchase a “switcher,” which provided more flexibility in how they recorded videos and generated excitement among the students.



Meggin Mayben

The announcements go online and are archived for 30 days so community members can keep up with school and community activities even if they miss a live broadcast. The focus on social media and communication have allowed the campus to “get ahead of the game” said Hathcock. Mayben agreed. “The perception of our schools has been through the roof since we began these things.”

The broadcast class now connects with businesses to sell advertising time and has received a \$1,000 sponsorship from a local bank. Not only has this provided an extra source of funding for the school, but also real-world learning opportunities as the students meet with members of the community to develop ideas and finalize agreements.

Utilizing Social Media

Once the website updates were complete, staff began to use Twitter to share photos, videos and messages about current events at the school, and it has proven to be the best method for getting information out in a timely manner. The school also enhanced its presence on Instagram, which is a popular form of communication for students.

Finally, the school developed its Facebook page. Since the social media site is popular with parents, it is the perfect medium to post weather updates, school closings, and video and photo highlights. In the end, Hathcock said, "The use of social media has been a game changer for public perception of our school."

Contact: Blaine Hathcock: bhathcock@demopoliscityschools.org; Meggin Mayben: mmayben9@gmail.com



Follow us on Facebook and
Twitter [@SREBPDPrograms](https://twitter.com/SREBPDPrograms)

For more information about the school improvement models offered by SREB, contact Gene Bottoms, senior vice president, at gene.bottoms@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211.