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# SETTING UP CLASS WEB PAGES, NEWSLETTERS, AND NEWSPAPERS TO DOCUMENT AND CELEBRATE LEARNING

Learning communities have lots of news and celebrations to share. To keep parents informed of the classroom events and to share good news, teachers are involving the students in the publishing of web pages, newsletters, and newspapers. These communications provide another avenue for sharing student writing and accomplishments. Parents can also be kept informed of special event schedules, items needed for the classroom, and topics being studied.

Depending on the ages of the students, they can become responsible for much of the production of classroom publications. Some class newsletters are completely written, edited, and produced by students. The teacher simply facilitates the process and may contribute a guest column.

Keeping the parents informed of the curriculum and events enables them to be more involved in their child's schooling, a factor that has been shown to enhance academic success (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Because many homes now have computers and Internet connections, teachers are using that mode to facilitate communication. Keep in mind, however, that families without Internet must also be kept up to date. If you have families who speak another language at home, you may also want to consider finding someone in the school or community to translate your newsletter if you cannot do it yourself.



## FOCUS ON ENGLISH LEARNERS

Translations for non-English-speaking parents help them become part of the learning support team for their children.

## STEP BY STEP

The steps for creating a classroom website, newsletter, or newspaper:

- **Start simple** Teachers have used photocopied newsletters for many years. They are effective communication tools and are a great way to communicate with the parents and community. Using a word-processing program, set up a standard format for the piece and gradually add elements such as graphics, student art, and classroom photos. Simply

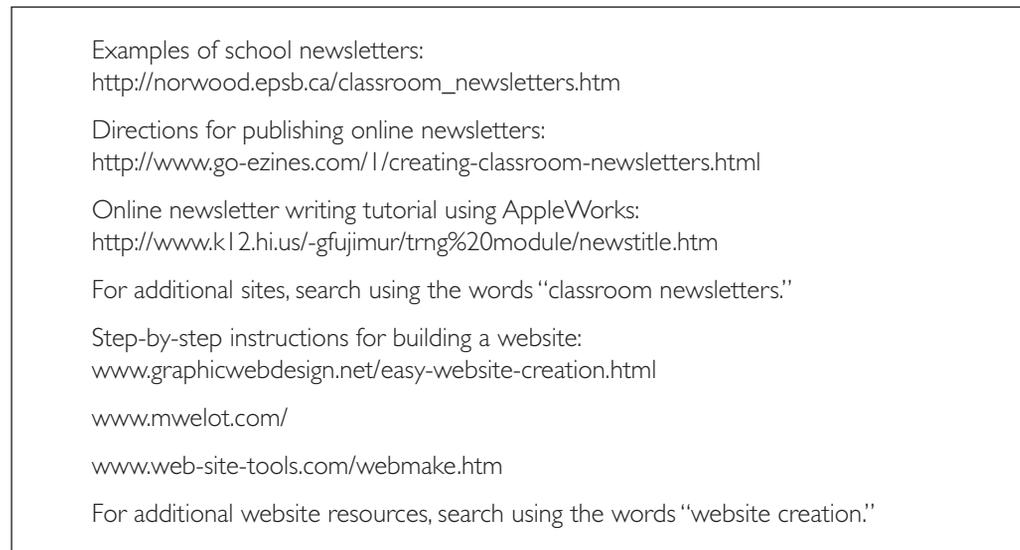
**Figure 34.1** An Example of a Class Newsletter Using Microsoft Word

The Cougar Roar	
Published by Mrs. Clark's Third Grade                      September 12, 2005	
<p><i>Special Events this week:</i> Field trip Thursday, September 15, 2005—We still need a parent volunteer. We will be walking a lot, so be sure to wear comfortable shoes on Thursday.</p> <p><i>Classroom needs:</i> <b>Egg cartons, yarn scraps</b></p>	
<p><b>My Kitten</b> by Melissa Fox Kitten Soft and sweet Purring, stretching, licking My kitten loves to sit in my lap.</p>	<p><b>Sneakers</b> by Jim Treadwell Sneakers Torn, stinky, old Running, jumping, racing My sneakers look bad, but they go fast.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Teacher's Corner</i></p> <p>We have four students who have published books this week: John Grey Rebecca Brown Carlos Lopez Didi Sommers Come by the classroom to read their books. Those students will be having lunch with Mr. Frederic, the principal, at his weekly authors' luncheon on Friday, September 16. Their parents are invited to join the party at 11:45 in the principal's conference room. <b>Congratulations!</b> <i>Mrs. Clark</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Class News</i></p> <p>The following students have moved up a level in reading this week: Henri Korda Gloria Goode Maria Sanchez Joey Howard Lewis Thomas</p> <p>Kelly Taylor has a new baby sister. Her name is Faith.</p> <p>Robbie Greene has been selected for baseball all-star team and will play at the high school field on Saturday at 2 PM. Let's all come out to cheer him on!</p>

take pictures with a digital camera and download the pictures onto the computer. With a simple photo-processing program, the pictures can then be resized, cropped as necessary, and moved into the newsletter. Student art can be photographed or scanned using a flat-bed scanner and copied into the newsletter. See Figure 34.1 for an example of a newsletter done in this way.

- **Find resources** As you get more confident, you may want to find a different way to publish the newsletter. You may want to expand it to several pages in order to include more student writing. There are many resources available for even the most technologically challenged. For sources of information about creating web pages, electronic newsletters, and e-zines (a web-based magazine), see Figure 34.2.

- **Set up the process** In order to collect materials for the newsletters and make sure that a newsletter goes home on a regular basis, an organizational structure is a necessity. There should be a clearly marked location in the classroom where students may place any material they wish to have published in the newsletter. If you plan to send home a newsletter each Monday, set a deadline that allows you to complete the newsletter before you leave for the weekend. Students need to understand that late submissions will be considered for the following week. Make an attempt to publish work by as many

**Figure 34.2** Resources on the Internet for Classroom Publishing

different students as possible. This necessitates keeping track of exactly whose work is published each week. Let parents know when they can expect the newsletters to come home. To help parents to get into the habit of reading the newsletter, print it on the same brightly colored paper each week. This will help them locate it in crowded backpacks.

- **Gradually turn production over to the students** As the year progresses, gradually turn over the production of the newsletter to the students. Form a committee to select the student work to be included. Have students do the typing and layout. This will take some instruction in the beginning. Eventually all you should need to do is review the content and write the "Teacher's Corner" items. Once you have a core group of students trained in the process, give them the responsibility of training additional journalists. If you want to get more complex and add a web page or electronic newsletter, check with the parents to see if you can locate a volunteer. Many parents use computers at work and have valuable computer skills. They may even be willing to train students in the web-page production process. Some of your more computer-savvy students might even be capable of creating it themselves. Older students could be brought into classrooms with younger students to assist in the process.

- **Keep a class scrapbook** Be sure to keep copies of all the newsletters you send home. Use them to create a class scrapbook, adding student work that was not published each week as well. Students enjoy reading through these types of publications, so place the scrapbook in the classroom so that it's accessible to the students and any visiting adults.

- **Add bells and whistles** Don't feel that you need to start with all the bells and whistles in place. Start with a simple format and, as you get more comfortable with the technology, add features. As you add features, be sure to train your students in the process so the responsibility can become theirs.

- **Get feedback from parents and administrators** Never send home a newsletter without sharing it with your building administrator. Principals may be comfortable about your newsletter going home without their having read it each week, but get permission before you do this. No matter what, be sure to share the newsletter with your principal each week so that he or she knows what's happening in your classroom. Ask parents for feedback also, determining which features they enjoy and what they would like to see added.

## Applications and Examples

Miss Hunt's second grade starts the year with a simple, one-page photocopied newsletter that goes home each Friday. As the year progresses, the students are submitting more

writing, art, and photos of projects to be published. Miss Hunt decides to expand her newsletter into a newspaper. Using the same technology she used for the newsletter, Microsoft Word and PhotoShop, she simply expands the newsletter into a four-page newspaper. She enlists two parents to assist her in the project.

The students know that any work they want to see published must be submitted before they leave school on Wednesday afternoon. Miss Hunt's two helpers arrive after school to choose the materials to include in the weekly edition of the "Hunt Herald." They keep careful track of the students who are published each week and try to make sure everyone is published at least once a month. This translates into eight pieces of student work in each issue. Sometimes, if the pieces are short, they manage to include work from more students. The newspaper is published on bright orange paper that another parent has donated.

Miss Hunt gets a lot of positive feedback from the parents and her principal, and she's very careful to make sure she recognizes the hard work of the two parents who work on the paper. Gradually, students sign up to work on the paper and stay after school to help publish. By the end of the year the students are doing all the selection of items for the paper and the layout. They've learned to use the scanner to include student art. The third-grade teacher is thrilled that these students are ready to work on a newspaper because she plans to publish one next year.

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Ms. Meadows's eighth-graders publish their own classroom anthology online, using work written for Ms. Meadows's language arts class. Since the students are older, they submit their writing by e-mail so nothing has to be retyped. A rotating group of students makes the selections for the anthology.

The students learned to create the web page by walking through the steps from a website resource ([www.web-site-tools.com/webmake.htm](http://www.web-site-tools.com/webmake.htm)). One of the fathers helped them get started and volunteered to pay the \$10 monthly fee to the hosting service (TruePath.com). The students keep the web page up to date. Ms. Meadows and their principal must approve all content before she makes the page visible to the public.

They are gradually including more art, graphics, color, and photos to make their web page more dynamic. Several of the students have now created their own personal web pages as a result of their involvement in Ms. Meadows's project.

## CONCLUSION

Teachers have used newsletters to communicate and celebrate with parents for many years. The process is becoming easier and more exciting each year with the new technology that is available in almost every home and school. Parents appreciate this type of communication and say that it helps them to stay in touch with their children's school and teacher (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The newsletter can also be used as a method for locating parents with specific skills to volunteer in the classroom. Publishing a newsletter proves very motivational to budding authors and provides a rich creative outlet for all students as well.

## References

Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (Eds.). (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.

## Suggested Reading

Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we have. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.

Moles, O. (1996). *Reaching all families: Creating family-friendly schools*. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Reachfam/index/htm>

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