

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 27, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: SchoolZone

ORIGINATOR: A. Habinski, Executive Director, School and District Services

RESOURCE
STAFF: Darwin Martin, Glenn Johnson

INFORMATION

Background

SchoolZone is a new information system developed by District Technology. It provides parents and students with secure access to school and student information and is designed to enhance the relationship between school and home. This is in direct support of Focus Expectation #6 for schools, "Engaging Families and Community in Supporting the Instructional Focus". Using portal technology and the convenience of the Internet, it is available any time and any place.

SchoolZone provides online access to daily homework assignments and class news from all of the student's participating classroom teachers gathered together in a convenient calendar format. By accessing the site, parents will have timely access to information and help them be more actively involved in their children's academic success. Students have access to a valuable organizational tool to help them plan their time. Teachers can easily include classroom handouts (such as project descriptions and assessment tools) and send announcements about classroom happenings. As well, users will find attendance records, news of school and district events, achievement results, timetables, course history, email and access to selected online educational resources.

The system has been designed to take advantage of the existing information and processes already handled by the Student Information System (SIS), rather than duplicate or create a large amount of additional work for teachers. Most of the information being made available to parents is being automatically loaded from SIS, and teachers are only entering information in the teacher planner section, which includes topics such as homework and classroom news. The system enables teachers to easily enter, copy and paste, or reference existing documents onto the SchoolZone without needing to know HTML or have other technical skills typically required to post or maintain a website.

Pilot Project

In September 2003, sixty teachers in eleven schools were selected to participate in a pilot SchoolZone. The primary goals of the pilot project were to gather teacher, student and parent feedback on the design and usability of SchoolZone and to assist us in determining future development priorities. The pilot project has also assisted us in the development of training materials for teachers, students and parents. Lastly, the pilot project has provided us with benchmark statistics that will assist us in ensuring we have a technical environment in place that can support district wide implementation.

Feedback from participants in the pilot project has been very positive. A number of pilot schools are progressing toward full school implementation whereas others have not progressed beyond use by two or three teachers. Based upon this experience, we have developed an implementation guide and best practices document that we are currently using with four new pilot schools. A sampling of user experiences:

“I just wanted to let you know how fabulous the SchoolZone website is and what an indispensable tool it has become for our family. I have two junior high students attending Ellerslie Junior High and we have no more miscommunications or arguments regarding homework or dates and times of school events. Hooray! Hooray! I really can't imagine living without it; it has become a real "lifesaver" for us. Congratulations on a fantastic idea and a job well done.” - Mrs. Penny Wall, Parent

“SchoolZone is just the most effective, most efficient communication tool I have ever had in the classroom. It is faster than our webpage or newsletters, and more reliable than agendas or dialogue journals. SchoolZone is my favorite method for communicating homework and quick messages. The potential is enormous!” - Dr. Donna Daniel, Teacher

Future Plans

SchoolZone will be available for use by all district schools in 2004-05. Development of new modules based upon user feedback will continue throughout the remainder of 2003-04 and into 2004-05. Additionally, a number of school districts in Alberta have expressed interest in using the SchoolZone application. Currently, we are working with Aspen View Regional School Division in Athabasca to implement SchoolZone in their district.

We will keep the Board of Trustees informed as district wide implementation progresses throughout the 2004-05 school year.

DM:gal