

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 28, 2006

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Acting Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: SchoolZone

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director

RESOURCE

STAFF: Darrell Davis, Kent Dochuk, Glenn Johnson, Wendy Johnson, Stephen Lynch, Darwin Martin, Deb Olmstead

INFORMATION

Background

SchoolZone provides parents and students with secure access to school and student information and is designed to enhance the relationship between school and home. SchoolZone assists schools to meet the district expectation of engaging families and the community in supporting the school's instructional focus. Development of SchoolZone began in April 2003 and new features and schools continue to be added on an ongoing basis.

SchoolZone provides parents with timely access to information which helps 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. SchoolZone provides online access to daily homework assignments and class news in a convenient calendar format. Teachers can easily include handouts (such as project descriptions) and announcements about upcoming classroom events. As well, users will find attendance information, news of school and district events, achievement results, interim marks, progress reports, timetables, course history and access to selected online educational resources. SchoolZone also provides access to collaborative storage space where files can be shared between students working together on the same project.

SchoolZone has been designed to take advantage of the existing information on the Student Information System which saves time for teachers. The system is user friendly for teachers and allows them to easily enter, copy or reference existing documents into SchoolZone.

SchoolZone Implementation

Use of SchoolZone is optional. As part of the planning process, schools are encouraged to consult with their school staff and parents prior to making a final decision on whether to use the application. Each school develops its own implementation strategy, including which features they will use as well as the frequency and type of information provided to parents. Some schools launch SchoolZone with the involvement of all their teachers while others take a staged approach and involve those teachers who have expressed an initial interest. District Technology has put many supports in place to assist schools with their implementation of

SchoolZone. The ITS Help Desk answers questions from school staff and ITS technicians install the software and provide technical support as required. Training sessions are available to provide the skills needed by teachers, lead teachers and administrative staff. Implementation planning and advice is available, including camera ready templates schools can use as part of their communication strategy to parents.

As of February 2006 there are 50 schools using SchoolZone with over 24,000 teacher, parent and student accounts. Since September 2005 there have been 29,000 homework entries made and 24,000 interim reports published. Some schools average 150 logins daily by students and parents.

Feedback

SchoolZone has recently been recognized for its innovative approach to providing parents with school and district information. SchoolZone won first place in the prestigious National Technology Innovation Award from The Learning Partnership in 2005. From hundreds of submissions, SchoolZone also won the Ektron award for Best Editor Integration.

In addition to the 50 schools in EPS using SchoolZone, District Technology has established an inter-jurisdictional cooperative with Aspen View, Elk Island Public and Peace River Catholic school boards. Each of these school districts pays a licensing fee to EPS in exchange for access to the SchoolZone application. Revenue generated from the licensing fees goes directly into supporting future SchoolZone enhancements, increasing the pool of resources available without further investment from EPS.

Feedback gathered from SchoolZone users is used to determine what changes are necessary to existing features as well as which new features are a priority to build into the application in the future. We have received many positive comments and emails from teachers and parents who use SchoolZone, including:

“I can’t tell you how fabulous the SchoolZone website is and what an indispensable tool it has become for our family. I have two junior high students and we have no more miscommunications or arguments regarding homework or dates & times of school events! Hooray! I really can’t imagine living without it; it has become a real ‘lifesaver’ for us.” - Ms. Penny Wall, parent, Ellerslie School

“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

To accompany this report, staff and parents from Vernon Barford will demonstrate how SchoolZone has helped them enhance communications between home and school.

GJ:ad