
COMMUNICATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Vicenza American High School

Italy

Vicenza American High School has worked hard to improve communication with families and the community through its Technology Committee. The goal is to encourage two-way communication instead of the traditional school-to-home method.

The Technology committee meets twice a month to study ways to improve the use of technology and to increase the effectiveness of communication. The traditional format of newsletter communication does not measure how the information is received or if it arrives to the home in a timely manner. The focus has been the school web site, which is an up-to-date link between the school and the community. It also helps register students into courses and introduce families to our school from a distance.

Two years ago, the committee developed a web site so that parents and the community would have a focal point to receive and send school information. The first challenge was to identify and train a person to design and maintain the web site. The second challenge was to gather parents' e-mail addresses.

To solve the first challenge, we hired a teacher on staff who was talented in technology and had been trained by the district, to be the Webmaster. The second challenge proved to be more difficult to solve. While we realized that nearly all of our military parents had access to the Internet through their jobs, not many of them supplied their e-mail addresses. To solve this problem, we required an e-mail address on the enrollment form at registration.

The challenge that all schools face is the availability of time. It takes time to develop and maintain a web site. Because of this, we made the Webmaster position an extra-duty assignment, instead of a volunteer opportunity. The Technology Committee did not want to risk a break down of the web site after working so hard to establish it and to advertise it in the community.

The School Advisory Council has provided many ideas about the information that should be posted on the web site. We recently added a scrolling marquee to our home page that gives

information on upcoming events. It is updated at least once a week. We also now have the ability to get suggestions from the community and update our web site within 24 hours, making it a quick and responsive way to communicate.

Through a new course called the Technology Leadership Community, we offered technology training to members of our community. Students in the class learned computer applications and then taught other students, faculty, and parents. Now, we receive e-mail communication from some of the parents involved in the class.

The cost to implement this practice is measured more in the amount of time necessary rather than solely the amount of money needed. Technology implementation takes an investment of time. We have a dedicated staff that spends a great deal of their own personal time to improve communication through technology. The district made their expertise available through frequent opportunities for technology training and their personnel. The district's technology vision and the hardware they have provided over the years have benefited the school, students, families, and community. The only dollar amount incurred at the school level is the compensation for the Webmaster.

How do we know the web site is increasing communication? We have at least two ways of checking. Since the inception of our school web site, we have encouraged faculty and staff to create their own web sites making routine class information as well as up-to-date progress reports available to parents. Along with individual faculty and staff web sites, we have direct links that prepare and address e-mail messages so that parents can contact us immediately. Faculty surveys indicate greater communication, and a counter on the web site indicates an average of 500 hits to the web site each week!

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