

ROB TV – Digital Video Streaming to Communicate

*Roberts Elementary School
Wayne, Pennsylvania*

Rob TV is for every child who ever wished a relative living far away could see him or her perform in a school play, concert, or debate or demonstrate a science project. Rob TV – Roberts Elementary School Television – is a technological bonus added to the school’s website that allows people everywhere to see what’s going on at this school. It’s a special gift to grandparents.

Rob TV is an informational streaming video program made using digital video, still photographs and Microsoft Photo Story software. Students are involved in the reporting, filming, editing and uploading, as well as starring in many performances and advertisements. The director and editor is the school librarian. So far, Rob TV has covered the third-grade wax museum, first-grade weather reports, second-grade musical and fourth-grade Opie Winfrey Show.

Its primary goal is to improve communications between home, school and community by “bringing home” (wherever that may be) the school’s events with the simple click of a mouse. Roberts’ students are a diverse group with far-flung family members. It is important that relatives and the larger community can connect with the school anytime and from anywhere.

Rob TV has a link on the school website. It was first publicized there and in the monthly newsletter. In May, a group of students introduced Rob TV at the student technology showcase at the Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg. In June, the local school board saw a presentation of Rob TV.

The district began by training people on the content and capabilities of the new website. Once the idea for an informational streaming video program was framed, district administrators discussed the pros and cons and gave permission to try it. Costs were about \$900 for the low-end equipment. Rob TV received a grant from the Upper Merion Educational Founda-

tion and additional funding from the school budget and KYW radio in Philadelphia.

The school decided to use Eyespot as its free web hosting service. It was necessary to protect the security of students, who were instructed not to identify themselves on any Internet video. Children can only be hosts of events if their parents agree to sign a photo release. The school offers regular classes on Internet safety and students must sign a Responsible Use Policy for the Internet. About 92% of Roberts’ families have computer access, according to the principal. To ensure equity of access, next year the school will focus on families without computers by planning workshops and assisting them in using libraries and other public places that offer Internet access.

Rob TV was a big hit in informal ratings from teachers, children, parents and the public. “Rob TV is a great tool to see the special things your children are doing in school,” said one parent. “It is especially nice for working parents who may not be able to attend an event during the school day. We also send the links to grandparents instead of making copies of performances on videotape or DVD, which is really convenient and a time saver.”

The broadcasts got rave reviews, too, from the school principal and the district superintendent. “How very, very cool!” said the superintendent, who urged other principals to tune in. “Our students are learning at an early age the power of mass media and developing presentation skills that they will use for a lifetime,” added the principal.

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