

Lincoln nonprofit gives teachers tools to manage Web sites

*BY KEVIN ABOUREZK/Lincoln Journal Star
Monday, Dec 17, 2007 - 12:21:54 am CST*

Green and red paper stockings hang from a bulletin board above a green paper Christmas tree.

Paper Santa heads float above Missy Timmerman's kindergarten classroom at Cedar Elementary School in Beatrice.

The scenes from Timmerman's classroom come from a photo slideshow she posted on her school's Web site.

Timmerman said her students' parents and grandparents have commented on how much they like seeing photos from her classroom.

"It's also a way for me to record what I did day to day," she said. "The kids also like seeing themselves on the computer."

The Beatrice Public Schools' Web site is just one of 70 school Web sites in Nebraska the Lincoln-based Foundation for Educational Services has helped develop. And it's just one of nearly 550 Web sites for schools and educational organizations around the country the nonprofit foundation has helped create.

When the foundation began offering educators help with their Web sites in 2003, it had just 42 clients, said Joyce Schaben, client relations manager.

She said the foundations provides a variety of services to schools and educational groups, including Web templates that teachers can use to build their own Web pages.

"The whole thing is to communicate better with parents," she said. "If they have a tool, it's easier for them to do it."

Across the country, school administrators are pushing teachers to provide more information to the community about what goes on in their classrooms, she said.

The resulting teacher Web sites often include the teacher's class schedule and contact information. Some teachers even provide a list of homework assignments for their students.

Some schools offer parents the ability to see their children's grades as well, Schaben said.

And many teachers are coming up with some creative ways to lure viewers to their Web pages.

In Childress, Texas, for example, fifth-graders record video of themselves saying the Pledge of Allegiance each morning.

At Farragut Community School in Farragut, Iowa, school officials post poems about bullying on their school's Web site as part of anti-bullying education program.

At Olympia Community Schools in Stanford, Ill., school officials use their school's Web site to provide the community with information about school improvement projects.

"We see a lot more schools putting out a lot more information about bond issues," she said.

In Nebraska, the foundation works with many smaller, rural schools, such as Fairbury and Beatrice. In those schools, one teacher often will learn to create their own Web site and then will teach other teachers how to do it, Schaben said.

One challenge smaller schools often face, however, is getting others involved in producing multimedia for their Web pages and keeping those pages updated, she said.

That's a challenge Timmerman can understand.

"It's hard to keep up with it," she said. "The kids can't really do any of it."

But it's worth seeing the kids' and parents' reactions to the photos, she said.

"My own mom checks it quite a bit."

Reach Kevin Abourezk at 473-7225 or kabourezk@journalstar.com.

**© 2002-2006, Lincoln Journal Star and JournalStar.com.
All rights reserved.**

Reprinted with permission from the Lincoln Journal Star 12/18/07.
