

On the Same Page: Area Schools Install Software To Monitor Student Progress

By Paul Gingras

Twenty years ago, computers had relatively little impact on education or how parents interacted with schools, but in several area districts throughout the Eastern Upper Peninsula (EUP), computer technology now affects every level of the public school system, including the cafeteria. This fall, St. Ignace Area Schools became

the latest in the EUP Intermediate School District (ISD) to install a program called PowerSchool, which dramatically increases the ability of parents, students, teachers, and administrators to monitor the habits of students and keep up with their academic progress.

"It is the biggest technology event in the district," said Gregg Fetting, technology coordinator for

St. Ignace Area Schools.

PowerSchool is connected to the district's Web page, enabling parents and students to use the Internet to access students' grades, information about graded assignments, details on past grades and assignments, attendance data, and teachers' e-mail accounts. Parents can access slightly more information than students.

All information is kept strictly confidential, Mr. Fetting noted. No one can see a student's information without the proper codes.

As they peruse the data, students and parents can now ask questions and get quicker replies than ever before, and the district is encouraging parents to e-mail teachers about grades, in particular. To access the program, separate identifications and passwords were mailed to parents and students in St. Ignace Thursday, November 30.

Tahquamenon Area Schools was the first district in the ISD, and one of the first in Michigan, to implement PowerSchool, said Amy Marchese, the district's technology director, who pioneered the effort in the region. Since Tahquamenon did so in 2001, Brimley, Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting, Pickford, DeTour, and St. Ignace school districts have followed suit, and Les Cheneaux Community Schools has purchased the program, she said.

St. Ignace Area Schools quickly reported high access rates, said Superintendent Mike Springsteen. Many of the users were students monitoring themselves, and the same has been happening in other districts. Since the St. Ignace system went online the end of November, an average of 97

LaSalle High School students have accessed their digital information a day, while an average of 26.6 parents check their child's progress daily. LaSalle has 339 students.

At Tahquamenon Area Schools in Newberry, which enrolls 317 students in high school, access rates have increased every year, Mrs. Marchese said. On average, 61 parents and 59 students at Newberry High School use PowerSchool every day.

Students have reacted positively to the program. After one student moved out of the Tahquamenon district and started attending a school that didn't use Power School, she told Mrs. Marchese that she missed it.

Quick access to academic information has become an incentive for students to improve their grades, she added. Often, they try to fix problems before their parents see them.

When Tahquamenon was looking for a digital system, administrators discovered that the Internet was a universal way to give access to both Windows-based and Apple-based computers, she said, so PowerSchool's success is based on its accessibility via the Internet.

The program is used primarily by third through 12th grade classes, the levels that grade on an A through E scale. Kindergarten

through second grade classes use a different system, which has taken longer to integrate, Mr. Fetting and Mrs. Marchese said.

Teachers, Mr. Fetting said, can post grades instantly and can add details and comments about graded projects. The program becomes a digital grade book.

When accessed, class lists appear for middle and high school students. More detail about a particular class is available by clicking on the grade for that course. This brings up each graded test and assignment the student completed and the grades received. A zero will come up if a student misses an assignment, Mr. Fetting explained.

Teachers also have the option of providing a description of individual assignments. This is common in English and social studies classes, Mrs. Marchese noted.

A student's absences are recorded and there is a link to a student's account balance, which details how much a student spends on lunch each day.

These accounts have changed the way some schools run lunch programs. Rather than using the traditional method of paying cashiers with cash at the end of a line, students now have pre-paid accounts. They tell the cashier their student number and the

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Stupak Urges President To Oppose Troop Surge

As President Bush meets with his national security team and on the heels of reports that the U.S. has exceeded 3,000 military casualties in Iraq, Congressman Bart Stupak has written a letter January 5 to the President to urge the administration to reject calls for an increase in U.S. troops in Iraq. Instead, Congressman Stupak called upon the administration to adopt an "Iraqi Accountability Plan" that would end the conflict and bring American troops home.

"Our current policy in Iraq has failed," Rep. Stupak wrote. "In reality, the situation in Iraq is worse that it has ever been, by almost any measure."

Rep. Stupak said that the facts on the ground led him to be particularly concerned by reports that the administration is contemplating increasing the number of American troops in Iraq.

"Sending more of our young men and women into harm's way is exactly the wrong policy," Mr. Stupak's letter continues. "By increasing our presence, we will invite even more attacks on American personnel and reinforce the idea that the United States is in Iraq as occupiers rather than liberators, leaving Iraqis more dependent on U.S. personnel for their security. Instead of more troops, we need a plan to begin bringing

our troops home and turning responsibility for Iraq over to the Iraqis."

Rep. Stupak said such an accountability plan would answer questions such as: How many Iraqi security forces have been trained and how many must be trained to take over security for Iraq? What construction and infrastructure projects must be completed before the U.S. can leave Iraq? What is the amount of food, medicine, and humanitarian aid that Iraq will need to sustain its citizens until June 1? Since this is an internal Iraqi conflict, with whom does the U.S. sign a "peace accord" to end the war?

Rep. Stupak previously called on the administration to commit to establish an "Iraq Accountability Plan" in July and August 2006 and in December 2005.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

School District Gift Is

Example of Caring Community

To the Editor:

Over the years, we have all heard the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." Bringing school and community together is an important and necessary ingredient in producing well rounded and responsible citizens. Thanks to a supportive community, parental support is evident in every classroom, in every project, and in every event. The recent unselfish donation from an anonymous community member to keep the Les Cheneaux schools open

throughout February is an invaluable gift. A gift that hopefully will show our young people that the community truly cares about them and that their education is important. It does take a village, a village of caring, concerned people banding together to help each other. I am proud to be in a community which cares about education, cares about each other, and is willing to help in any way possible.

Kate Ter Haar
Cedarville

'Sportsmen' Is a Term ORV Riders Use for Themselves

To the Editor:

While it may, in fact, be newsworthy that the U.S. Department of the Interior is enthusiastically urging the use of ORVs in the national forests, the characterization of these users as sportsmen (in the front page headline, December 14, 2006) has me somewhat confused. Sportsmen is a term that ORVists have applied to themselves, a term borrowed from the hunting and fishing promoters.

As reported in the December 14 article, however, these same sportsmen are responsible for extensive damage to the forests they love so much. The Forest Service plan to turn illegal damage into legal damage by redirecting traffic onto a network of wheel-worn trails makes one wonder who is determining the policies and set-

ting the priorities concerning the use/abuse of public lands.

In a time of high fuel costs and a global fuel shortage, when the release of burnt fuel is choking our planet, in a nation where obesity is a chronic illness, when budgets for wilderness protection and law enforcement are shrinking and respect for nature is an oxymoron, it seems awfully shortsighted to promote as sport an activity that consumes fuel, pollutes the air, tears up the ground, and disquiets the woods, all for the joy and excitement of those who prefer to take their nature sitting down and making noise.

I suggest that such an activity more closely resembles a disease than it resembles a sport.

Tom Hoogterp
Engadine



January is designated as School Board Appreciation Month. Public school boards of education are the key link between community and public school system.

They are the representative voice of the community. They are elected to provide leadership and to provide the governing structure and governing policies of the local public school.

The Revised School Code of 1976 addresses the role and the duties of the school board. It is the board's role to govern the public school.

It is the board's duty to adopt bylaws to develop the policies that will promote efficient operations of the schools. It is the board's duty to hire a superintendent; the superintendent may not be a member of the board. The board is required to hold at least one regular monthly meeting as determined by the bylaws. No actions of the board are lawful unless voted on by a majority vote of the board members at a school board meeting.

Board members shall be elected by the public. Boards may propose millage requests and other election questions within the scope of the law.

Boards are to conduct their

News From St. Ignace Area Schools

By Mike Springsteen, Superintendent

business in compliance with the open meetings act. It is the board's duty to prepare estimates of the amount of taxes needed for the district in the ensuing year. It is the board's duty to adopt a budget in the same manner and form as required for its estimates and to determine the amount of tax levy necessary for its budget.

Working as a collective group and representing the community, the board sets the operational policies of the school and then hires a superintendent to carry out those policies.

In Michigan there are 552 local school districts and 57 intermediate districts, with a total of 4,100 elected school board members.

This summer the St. Ignace Area Schools Board hosted a workshop put on by the Michigan Association of School Boards. The presenter at the workshop was Mary Kerwin. The focus of that workshop was board roles and responsibilities. The four principle roles identified at the meeting were:

1) Vision – It is the primary role of the board to determine vision and chart direction for the district's schools.

2) Structure for success – Based on this vision, the board

hires and evaluates a superintendent, develops policies, and adopts a budget.

3) Accountability – It is the board's responsibility to track the progress of the schools toward the visions that they have determined.

4) Advocacy – It is a responsibility of the board to be a lobbyist and a cheerleader for the district's schools.

School board members must make tough decisions on complex educational and social issues impacting the entire community. St. Ignace Board of Education members bear the responsibility of a \$6.5 million budget affecting 780 students, 100 employees, three school buildings, and a large athletic complex. In addition to monthly meetings, they are involved in a host of school-related activities and committee meetings. Board members for the St. Ignace Area Schools are President Jane Ann Weiss, Vice President Rick Litzner, Secretary Sheri Oja, Treasurer Mike Grogan, Trustee Andy Brown, Trustee Dave Latva, and Trustee Ann Massey. When you see them, let them know that you appreciate the work they do.

Happenings around the school: Progress reports were mailed in mid-December. The new computer

software program "Power School" allows parents and students to go online to view grades, attendance, hot lunch accounts, and more. This tool for communication may eventually do away with the need for mailed progress reports. Currently the system is only in the beginning stages, but already huge numbers of parents and students are going online daily to review their progress.

All winter athletic teams are practicing and competing. Those teams include basketball, volleyball, wrestling, cheerleading, bowling, swimming, and dance.

The Christmas season has provided several weeks of exciting activities for students and teachers. While there were many different activities, the highlights included the Elementary Christmas Program, the Band and Vocal Music Christmas Concert, and the Basketball Team's Holiday Tournament.

Teachers reported back from break Tuesday, January 2, for professional development sessions. Students were back Wednesday, January 3. The end of the first semester will be Friday, January 19. Semester exams for high school students will be January 17, 18, and 19.

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



A Mourning, A Focus on Betty Ford

"Struggle is educational," Betty Ford, the most candid and consequential of the nine presidential first ladies I observed while covering politics, wrote in her 1978 book, "The Times of My Life."

Nearly three decades later, the nation watched the frail 88-year-old former first lady gallantly struggle through six days of national mourning for Michigan's Gerald R. Ford.

During the media coverage, Americans were educated about her own marvelous legacy of openness in dealing with battles with breast cancer and drug and alcohol dependency. She was a strong advocate for improved awareness, education, and treatment. The Betty Ford Center in California is regarded as the nation's top facility for treatment of chemical dependency.

She wrote: "I am an ordinary woman who was called onstage at an extraordinary time."

Tom Brokaw, who covered the Ford presidency for NBC, said she "spoke her own mind" but was "no loose canon by any means."

Donald Rumsfeld, former Ford chief of staff and twice defense secretary, drew a smile from Betty Ford when he referred in a funeral eulogy to her sometimes "unvar-

nished" remarks. Dick Ryan, retired Washington senior correspondent for *The Detroit News*, wrote "she brought a vibrancy and brashness to the role of first lady that had been missing since the days of Eleanor Roosevelt."

Governor Jennifer Granholm called her "a leader in her own right" for speaking out on women's issues, and said: "She has fought for the Equal Rights Amendment and has demonstrated to women and the country that it is OK to fight for what you believe in, even if your husband is the president of the United States."

The Betty Ford Fan Club includes former Michigan First Lady Helen Milliken, who was in the ERA, abortion rights, health, and other trenches where Betty Ford fought. "She was a leader in her own right," she said of Betty Ford.

Now It Can Be Told

After Ford's death, some important comments were revealed, including criticism he once expressed, to be revealed only after his death, to the *Washington Post's* Bob Woodward about President Bush on Iraq.

At a less profound but nonetheless interesting level that can be

understood by any housewife, now comes Helen Milliken, willing to discuss the Kitchen Clash that happened during the Fords' overnight visit in 1975 to the Governor's Summer Residence on Mackinac Island after Jerry and Betty Ford attended the National Cherry Festival in Traverse City.

In canvas bags, the Millikens and their Lansing resident cook, Helen Marin, had brought to the Island provisions for the four meals that they would serve the Fords and assorted other guests in the 24-room, three-story Victorian house on a bluff overlooking the Straits of Mackinac that the state purchased in 1945.

The steward who traveled with Ford had his own idea about what should be served when, and there were inevitable conflicts on this and such matters as flower arrangements. But nothing approached the level of the Rumble at the Refrigerator, won by Marin.

About 10 days before the presidential visit, the Ford advance team deemed the mattress in the master bedroom too soft. It was replaced. Strips of tape were put on the bathtub off the master bedroom to guard against a presidential slip. Loose bricks were firmed

up along steps leading to the second story. Another now-to-be-told story: When Ford visited Northern Michigan University in the winter of 1978 for a lecture, he had these ringing words: "There is a certain determination and tenacity in the people of the Upper Peninsula. ... John Adams would have felt right at home in Marquette, Houghton, Sault Ste. Marie, Crystal Falls, or just about any community the length and breadth of the Upper Peninsula."

Turns out these were not words his staff had prepared. He was unhappy with their draft. So, at the suggestion of Matt Surrell, then secretary of the NMU board and former press secretary of U.S. Senator Bob Griffin, then-NMU News Director Jim Carter, rewrote the speech.

Carter, feeling free now to 'fess up to his role as presidential ghostwriter, told the *Marquette Mining Journal*: "It will always remain a high point in my experience as a writer."

George Weeks retired last year after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly *Michigan Politics* column is syndicated by *Superior Features*.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.