

## Tonica, other schools see benefits of grading system using the Web

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**Tonica School superintendent Larry Bequeaith navigates through the school's online report card system while he explains the advantages of the program on Wednesday. The program allows students, teachers and parents to view grades and assignments online, as well as allowing parents and teachers to communicate via e-mail.**  
*NewsTribune photo/David Manley*

When Amy Mareta wants to know how her two daughters are performing in their elementary classes, she simply turns to her computer, enters her password into the school's Web site and with a few key clicks, Mareta knows what her daughters' grades are in all of their classes. She also knows their homework assignments, if they were completed or not, and any correspondence from their teachers.

"I find out right away how they are doing," Mareta said. "I don't have to wait for the mid-term grades to be mailed. I know right when I go to that program how my two daughters are doing and if they need help with any of their classes, I can e-mail the teacher and find out what we can do." That's what Larry Bequeaith wants to hear.

"This program increases the communication between parents, teachers and students," said Bequeaith, superintendent and principal of **Tonica** Grade School District No. 79.

Tonica grade and junior high is housed in the same building. Bequeaith said out of the school's 178 students entered into the program, there have been about 75 percent of "hits" to the site by either parents or students to check grades. The program also has the percentages of what an "A-grade" is compared to what a "C-grade" so parents know where their child stands and where he or she may need additional instruction.

"Parental involvement makes a huge difference in a child's success," said parent Chris Johnson, who has a 12-year-old daughter enrolled in sixth-grade at **Tonica**. "Brittnee can go on there and find out her assignments and her grades and I

also can go on and see how she is doing. I can look at it at any time. No more phone tag with teachers."

Johnson like Mareta can only check their own children's grades; and the grades can only be viewed and not changed.

"It's a very secure system," Bequeaith said. "No one can check the grades of anyone besides their own children." Shannon Marcinkus, who teaches math and science to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students for **Tonica** junior high students, said the program definitely makes it easier to communicate with parents.

"We still send home report cards to parents," she said. "This doesn't do away with the old system."

Marie Fiocchi, a second-grade teacher and assistant principal at **Tonica**, said she was a bit hesitant when Bequeaith put the new program on the table.

"I was probably the person who was the least bit interested in it," she said. "I love it now."

Fiocchi said grading students has become easier.

"Before it was a lot more time consuming in totaling the students' grades and this does it automatically once I enter something new, such as a test score, the student has done," she said.

Bequeaith said the program could increase homework completion by 30 percent and grades could increase jump 5-10 percent.

"We were starting to lose the parental support that a school and its students need to succeed," he said. "This really gets parents involved with their children and it doesn't put the kids on the defensive because they can access it, too."

Bequeaith said the program was implemented as a pilot program for the second semester of this current school year and, if it continues to gather the positive response it has from parents, it will continue for the following school year.

And online grading may be something that all schools in La Salle could have next year.

Bill Novotney, regional superintendent of schools, said the Regional Office of Education is in negotiations to have report cards online.

"We hope to get done in the next month," Novotney said.

"We discussed it our last superintendents' meeting. Our hope is to share the cost of these online report cards with the superintendents in La Salle County."

He said the ROE is working with Northern Illinois University which has a program online and ready to go for elementary and secondary education programs.

"As far as we know we could be one of the first (in the state) to be involved in this particular venture," he said.

Novotney said he is aiming to get the program online by this spring.

Peru Washington School and Milton Pope K-8 School in Marseilles already have report cards online for parents.

Peru implemented the program in fall as did Milton Pope.

"It is working extremely well for us," said Peru schools superintendent James Bagley. "We've had nothing but positive comments from parents. It adds another form of communication for us to use with our parents. It keeps them right up-to-date. If there are any potential problems the parents, the teacher and the student can work together to correct it."

Jane Bauer, superintendent of Milton Pope, agreed.

"The benefits to online report cards include another communication tool to use from the school to the home," she said. "Parents can also use it to see how their children are doing in their respective classes; and those parents are given a password and only they can check their child's progress. Parents can access it 24 hours a day."

She said the parents can just click into the system and e-mail the teacher if they need to send them a message.

"It's a running grade book where teachers can post grades and assignments and parents can check them," she said. "It is invaluable to everyone involved," she said. I can't think of a single drawback to it. If you don't have means to a computer at home, it is a drawback."

Bauer and Bagley said they continue to send report cards through the mail to parents.