

## Final Project

Lisa Mele  
CEP 815

### **The Learning Problem**

The school that I teach at is a middle school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. We have close to 700 6th through 8th grade students in our school. We have a wide range of students, from the very affluent to the very needy, and a mix of ethnicities. Being located next to a major university is certainly one of the factors that influences the student population at my school.

It is expected that within my school, parent communication is a priority. I have certainly seen evidence that when parents are actively involved in their child's learning, it can really benefit the child. One of the main learning problems that has plagued my colleagues and myself, however, is how to continuously keep parents updated. We receive constant emails and phone calls from parents who want to know their child's grade, what work they are missing, or about upcoming assignments. We have meetings with parents at least twice a week who simply want to know what assignments their child is missing. It often takes away from all of the teachers' prep times, impacting the quality of the lessons they can prepare each day. We often tell parents that they can always check the homework assignments on each teacher's website, but parents complain that it is frustrating to have to check multiple websites daily. I do understand and appreciate the parents' interest in their child's academic success, but it seems like there has to be a better way to keep parents constantly updated without having to give up prep time daily. This year, teachers were given extra duties, such as monitoring lunch and recess as well. The common statement heard from all of the teachers in the school this year, regardless of grade or subject, is that they just don't have enough time in the day. Certainly one way to fix this would be to address the way in which teachers communicate with parents.

### **A Technology Based Solution**

The solution to this problem is to train each teacher in how to use the website Edmodo as a way to continuously communicate with parents. Edmodo is a free Internet site that resembles Facebook, but really is just a great communication tool. It can be used in a collaborative manner in that students can write on the class wall to respond to prompts, discuss class topics with each other, or even post files or links and comment on them. I often have my students post their Prezis or Glogs to the wall so that classmates can view and comment on them. Another great feature of the site is that teachers can post an assignment box on the site for students to turn assignments into privately. The teacher can grade it right on the site and comment/highlight/annotate on the actual paper that the student turns in so they can see what corrections they need to make. The site avoids the problems that Facebook can lead to with students because it does not allow for individual profiles or chatting, students are simply part of a class.

This will help the learning problem described because parents can be given a code to view their child's progress throughout the class. With Edmodo, parents would be able to view each assignment their child turned in, the grade received, and the teacher's comments. This would also show them which assignments their child is missing. They would also be able to see upcoming due dates for assignments and access the class calendar to see what the class did and what homework is due. One of the best features is that parents will be able to link all of the teachers' Edmodo pages together for their child. They will start from the same Edmodo page and simply have to click the teacher's name for the class they want to check on. This will certainly save them time from having to backtrack through the many steps of the school website to get to each individual teacher's website. It will also answer some of the main questions that parents are curious about: grades, missing assignments, why an assignment received the grade it did, upcoming assignments, and what their child did in class.

Edmodo is a great site because it is so easy to use and comes with great tutorials. To

train staff to use Edmodo, a workshop session would need to be done in which staff practice creating an account, posting assignments, grading assignments, and posting on the wall. A screencast tutorial of how to use the site will also be provided as a way for teachers to review. They could also be directed to the Edmodo blog or the Edmodo support community for additional help. Parents may also need to be trained in how to use Edmodo. Edmodo provides a letter to send home to parents to instruct them about the uses of Edmodo and how to log in. A simple screencast walking parents through the steps of logging in and looking at the various features of Edmodo could be placed on the school website for more specific information. The best part about Edmodo is that it is completely free. There is no cost to the school, teachers, or parents. It is a free community for learning and communication. Training could easily be done on a teacher workday at no extra cost to the school since professional development is expected on these workdays anyways.

### **Funding the Solution**

This site is free and would not cost anything to the school, teachers, or the parents. It even has a free app that the students could access on their school issued iTouch.

### **A Path for Implementation**

Vision: The communication issue is a problem because it takes teachers away from doing what really matters- planning quality, effective lessons and collaborating with their PLC. The solution I have proposed is a good one because it answers many of the parents' most frequently asked questions and in fact goes into more detail because it allows them to see the assignments for themselves. This will also allow the teachers more time to work on their lessons and address more pressing matters.

Skills Needed to Implement the Solution: Teachers, parents, and students will need to be given some instruction on how to use Edmodo. While there are many online video tutorials, school specific information could be created as a screencast and posted on the school website.

Incentives: The incentive for teachers to use this program is that it will free up more time for them, which is one of the main complaints teachers have at my school. Instead of constantly having meetings or answering emails about a child's grade, they could work on improving their lesson plans or collaborating with their PLC partner. Parents would like it because it would keep them in the loop about their child's daily activities and grades. Students like it because it allows them to communicate with peers and post interactive projects. It also allows them to view their grades at any time, which they are not currently able to do. It would also save the school money purely in paper printing costs. With 700 students printing papers for their various classes to turn in, the school goes through a huge amount of both paper and ink throughout the school year. Students would be able to digitally turn in all papers and projects with Edmodo.

Resources: All that would be needed to implement this program is a computer and an Internet connection. These are already available and viewed as priorities at my school. As a bonus, all students are given school iPod Touch devices to take home, so they could access Edmodo through the iPod Touch app at home. Furthermore, the majority of my students have computers and those who do not are given one by a district program for the school year.

Action Plan: I would first introduce teachers to this concept during a professional development session on a teacher workday. I would make it a guided lesson and show them how to create accounts, walk them through the features, and show them how my students use the site to turn in all of their work for an example. I would also guide them to the support community and create a screencast of all of the information for them to reference later. I would

also work with the team leaders from each grade at a separate time to make sure they understood how this site works to be the leaders at it for their team. Once teachers were familiar and comfortable with the program, I would provide them with the parent letter and remind them about the ways that parents can access the site.

Measures of Success: If all teachers were to use Edmodo regularly to update grades, homework assignments, and daily activities, it would certainly be seen as successful. Another major factor of success would be if parents were checking it regularly in an effort to stay on top of their child's classes. Throughout the year, I would assess whether or not this site helped with the communication issues by polling teachers and even polling the parents to get their overall reactions. I would consider this successful if 70% or more of both groups agreed that Edmodo was useful as a communication tool. This would show that a clear majority were benefiting from the site. As long as parents felt like they were being kept up to date and teachers felt like they had some of their prep time back, I would think it was certainly a step in the right direction.

#### Appendix: Core Communication

Dear Faculty:

As you know, communication with parents is a central component of our school's mission. We strive to keep parents up to date on class information and how their child is doing in school. Because of this, it seems like many times we find ourselves answering the same questions again and again on the same topics: grades, homework, and daily class work. I have heard often that people feel they spend all of their planning time meeting with parents to discuss student grades and they wish there was an easier way to get that information out to all parents. Great news! There is an easier way!

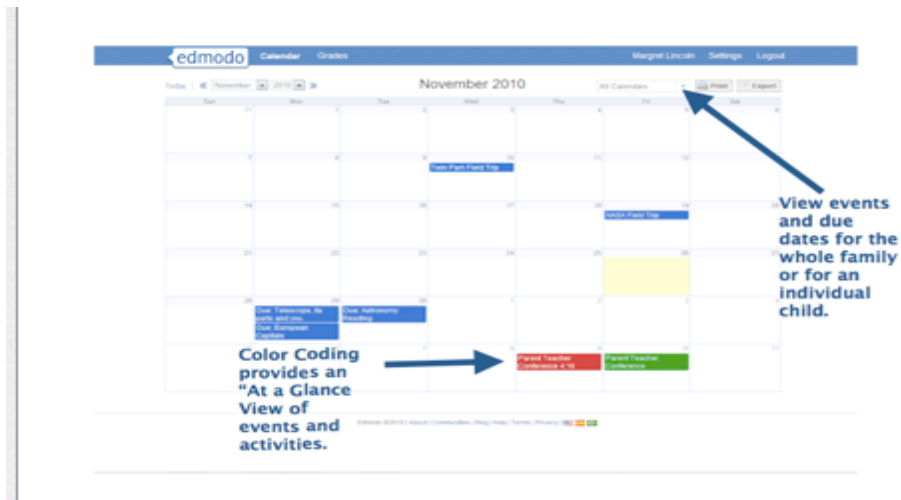
This year, we will be implementing the website Edmodo to help assist with parental communication. With Edmodo, you will be able to collect, grade, and comment on assignments digitally, keep an ongoing grade book throughout the year, update a homework and daily work calendar, collaborate with students and their parents, access resources from teachers around the world, and more. One of the biggest things this site will help with is answering those three big topics parents are always wondering about: their child's grades, homework, and daily class work. This will be great for everyone in fact, because it should cut down on parent meetings and emails for you. Now parents will be able to answer their questions for themselves just by looking at their child's Edmodo page.

So just what is Edmodo? It's a collaborative site for students to communicate, turn in work digitally, and more. Get a peek at just what the site can do for yourself! Watch this quick video to get an idea: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHtwgZEHZNs&feature=related>

Scroll down to see just how Edmodo can work to make communication easier for you!



Parents have their own code to sign in with to access their child's account



Keep parents informed about homework, daily activities, and upcoming events.

## Parent Accounts Now Available

January 10th, 2011 | 19 Comments | [Like](#) [Send](#) | [Tweet](#) 53 | [Edmodo This!](#)

Parent Accounts are now available on Edmodo. With Parent Accounts, teachers can:

- Exchange messages and maintain open-communication with parents.
- Provide direct access to grades and assignments.
- Send notifications to parents about upcoming due dates and missed assignments.
- Alert families to school events and activities.



Parents can have accounts for each of their children and will be able to easily switch between classes for all of their children.

As you will soon see, Edmodo will transform the way that we communicate with parents on a daily basis and these changes will be positive for parents, teachers, and students. At our next teacher workday, you will get to learn more about Edmodo firsthand. Bring your laptops and prepare to be amazed at how the world of communication and collaboration is about to change at our school.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Mele