

Designing a School Website

Electronic communication is the most common way for people to stay on top of information in our busy and technologically changing world. Websites have become common sources of information for governments, private sector companies and not-for-profit agencies. Schools have moved in the same direction. If you have a school website, or would like to develop one, here are some ideas and suggestions that might help:

- Websites are only effective if they are kept up-to-date. In busy schools, this is often the biggest challenge. Although a school website should be a group project, assign one person (teacher, student or parent) to be responsible for keeping content current. The site should be checked at least once a week to add, delete or change material as needed.
- Encourage everyone on staff to contribute information to the site.
- If you have an Information Technology (IT) expert within your school community, ask them to offer a basic tutorial for all staff on how to create or post new material.
- There are some pieces of information that should always be available on your site's home page such as
 - o School, safe arrival and bus company phone numbers
 - o Office hours
 - o Staff list
 - o School day schedule
 - o School year calendar
 - o Attendance policy
 - o Reports on school closings due to weather conditions
 - o Upcoming events such as curriculum night, parent-teacher interviews, school council meetings, concerts, theme days, assemblies, guest speakers, school holidays or special events. Be sure to delete these dates after the event has taken place.
- Encourage each teacher to develop their own page on the school site. The teacher page could include information such as homework, upcoming assignments, classroom expectations, test and exam dates and how to contact the teacher.
- Graphics add to the visual experience of a website. However, parents are usually interested in the content, not the artwork. Add the graphics if you have someone experienced in this field, but don't sacrifice the information for the pictures.
- If your school (or someone in your school community) has experience taking photos, post pictures on your site of events that take place at school. Remember to follow your board's privacy policy provisions when posting photos of students. There is also software available that makes it

difficult to copy pictures off a website. This helps to prevent the inappropriate use of school photos.

- Use plain language. The site will be visited primarily by parents, most of whom do not understand education jargon such as pedagogy, rubric, or identified student or acronyms such as IEP or IPRC.
- If possible, add a “search” function so people who aren’t familiar with the site, or who are uneasy about website technology, can enter a word and quickly find the information they are looking for.
- When designing your website, think about the best way to set up the information so that it is easy to access. Also, be sure to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) guidelines to make your website accessible to everyone.
- Consider adding a short survey to the home page of your website. Websites such as [Survey Monkey](#) make it easy to produce surveys and track results. Ask users how useful they find the site, what else they would like to see and how often they visit. Use the feedback to keep your website relevant.