



Dunlap schools try Tweets, blogs

District wants to use new technology to keep the interested informed

By **SCOTT HILYARD (shilyard@pjstar.com)**

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DUNLAP — What do actor Ashton Kutcher and the Dunlap School District have in common?

Twitter accounts.

New Superintendent Jay Marino is implementing a variety of Web 2.0 technologies - Twitter, blogs, podcasts, interactive polls and other new and emerging forms of computer technology - to keep the people he calls "stakeholders" in the Dunlap schools informed on what's happening in the district.

"When I interviewed for this job, the board asked me how I can take this high-performing school district to the next level," said Marino, who took over last summer. "I told them it's not me, it's not what I can do, but what we can do - the staff, the administration, the board, the students, the parents - to tap into the expertise and all the perspective that is out there. That is what this is all about."

With a lot going on in the district - unprecedented growth, plans for new school buildings and additions and the development of a long-term, comprehensive strategic plan - Marino is looking for ways to keep people with an interest in the district's success informed and engaged. The **dunlapcusd.net** Web site seemed like a good meeting place.

"By now, most people have access to the Internet, and some of the technologies we have available give us an opportunity to interact with stakeholders who have ideas and opinions," Marino said.

The different methods of communication will serve different purposes. Twitter, for example, a service similar to text messaging on a cell phone, lets users in on what is happening immediately in the district in 140-characters-or-fewer bursts of information. A recent example informed users about the Thanksgiving break.

"We're experimenting with that," Marino said. "It allows us to blast out a quick message of importance, like a snow day or something immediate."

Marino is trying to post to the district blog as often as he can. Already he has engaged a group of people in a conversation about the district's facilities needs and let people know Dunlap schools made the Chicago Sun-Times' 2009 list of the top 100 schools in Illinois.

"People don't have to agree with everything we say. We'll post disagreements on issues and then also explain back our point of view on topics," he said.

The site will also include surveys that allow people to express their views. About 200 people responded to a recent survey that showed 78 percent prefer to start the school year in mid-August and end in around Memorial Day; 66 percent preferred a President's Day holiday to the traditional Lincoln's Birthday holiday; and 56 percent wanted to see parent-teacher conferences in both semesters, not just the first one.

Marino said he is making time to keep up with the Web demands.

"The big message here is that we value input," Marino said. "It's the stakeholders who collectively have the expertise and the perspective, and with that, we can all work together to make this an even stronger district. We're not just operating in isolation."

There is a bit of a disparity in the number of Twitter followers Dunlap and Kutcher have. About 20 people signed up in the first couple of weeks of the school district's operation; Kutcher has about four million followers.

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abm1985

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Welcome to the year 2000 Peoria. This made the news? It's as if the town just discovered and installed a sewer system or electricity. Blogs have been a part of pedagogy for over 10 years, but better late than never I suppose because students will be using twitter/blogs/podcasts constantly as part of course work once they enter college.

whitehairedcoach

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Just think....by 2021 Peoria District 150 will be following Dunlap and everyone else's lead, unless the union OBJECTS. I've heard thay (150) still is using rotary phones.
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