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## COMMUNICATIONS PLAN IMPLEMENTATION OF GRADESPEED FOR GRADES 4-12

### Introduction

This communications plan has been developed to introduce and inform parents, teachers, and students about the new GradeSpeed program – an electronic program that allows teachers, administrators, students, and parents to interact on-line regarding student's grades. GradeSpeed will be implemented system-wide throughout DoDEA in School Year 2008-2009 for grades 4-12.

The plan contains Background Information, Talking Points, Key Messages, Qs and As, and sample communications tools to use in disseminating information to a variety of audiences. It also outlines communication responsibilities from the Headquarters level to school level.

### Background

Communication between teachers, students, and parents is critical to student success. With this as a fundamental principle, DoDEA is continually looking for tools and processes to make communication easier, more effective, and timelier.

In 2005, a new Student Information System (SIS), Chancery SMS, was implemented but it was determined that the teacher grade book included with the product did not meet the needs of DoDEA teachers. Since that time, DoDEA-HQ selected, tested, and procured a replacement electronic grade book and parent portal product – GradeSpeed -- that best meets identified school needs.

During SY 2007-08, schools were able to participate in a test of the product. The test was a resounding success. Eighty nine percent of the respondents to an online survey stated that they were "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the program. Based on these results and face-to-face conversations with participating teachers, DoDEA proceeded with the full implementation of GradeSpeed for SY 2008-2009 in grades 4-12.

Teachers will have secure access to GradeSpeed using an Internet web browser. Teachers use the grade book portion of GradeSpeed to enter assignments, grades, and to maintain grade calculations. Teachers are also able to email progress reports to parents. The grade book database will be connected with SMS to exchange data. Although teachers will record attendance in SMS, attendance data will be available to them in their grade book as well.

GradeSpeed also provides secure parent access via a web portal. After logging in, parents will be able to view grade and attendance data for their children only. They will also be able to view school announcements and calendar events. There is a note feature in GradeSpeed that parents can use to directly contact their students' teachers. Dialogue can go back and forth between the teacher and parent.

GradeSpeed will be the only authorized and supported grade book used by DoDEA employees in grades 4-12.

### **Objectives**

- Build awareness, understanding and support for GradeSpeed among DoDEA's internal audiences (students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators).
- Explain the implementation of GradeSpeed.
- Set expectations for parents concerning the capabilities as well as the limitations of GradeSpeed regarding turn-around times and responsiveness.

### **Key Themes and Messages**

Themes and messages should contain the following basic content and be tailored to each audience level:

#### **Communication is Critical**

- Communication among teachers, students and parents is critical to student success. DoDEA is continually looking for tools and processes to make communication easier, more effective, and timelier.
- Two-way communication between teachers and parents fosters greater parent involvement in their student's education.
- GradeSpeed is a powerful tool to help parents stay connected to their student's educational progress.
- Frequent communication between teachers and parents enhances understanding of how educational needs can best be supported at school and home.

#### **Deployments/Transitions**

- Education and care of military families is critical to operational readiness. A Soldier/Marine/Airman/Sailor can't focus on the mission if he/she is preoccupied with family concerns.
- Helping military families stay connected during deployment benefits all members of the family. GradeSpeed is a great tool to enable communication on educational aspects of a child's life no matter where the parent is located.

#### **Limitations and Expectations**

- A teacher's primary job is to teach! While communication with parents enhances the educational experience, expectations on responsiveness must be reasonable.
- GradeSpeed is not intended to replace face-to-face communication between parents and teachers.
- While students may have concerns about how much information parents will have, the truth is students with parents who are involved in their education have a much greater chance to be successful.
- GradeSpeed, and similar systems, have worked well for many public school systems.

## Audiences

	<b>Headquarters</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>School and Community</b>
<b>Internal</b>	DoDEA staff, Deputy Directors	Area staff, superintendents, principals, advisory committees or boards	DSO staff, administrators, parents, advisory committees or boards	School staff, faculties, parents, students, advisory committees or boards
<b>Command</b>	DEC, ACDE, Service Reps, PAOs	Theatre commanders, CCACs, PAOs	component commands, school/command liaisons (SLOs)	installation commander, senior enlisted advisors, school liaison officer, PAOs
<b>Media</b>	AFIS, Pentagon Channel, <i>Stars &amp; Stripes</i> , the Web, <i>Military Times</i> ,	<i>Stars &amp; Stripes</i> , AFN, newsletters, the Web	Newsletters, the Web, DDESS cable access channels, command channels	Community newspapers, newsletters, the Web
<b>Other</b>	Unions, NFMA, MCEC	European PTA, unions	unions	PTA/PTO, unions

## Strategies/Tools:

- Key Messages
- Communications products for internal and external audiences (fact sheets, letters to parents, articles for installation newspapers, web site presence, etc.)
- Tools specifically tailored to meet audience needs, incorporating audience appropriate key messages
- Fact Sheet
- PowerPoint Slide presentation on GradeSpeed

## DoDEA Headquarters Communication Responsibilities

- Communications Plan/Public Affairs Guidance
- Align messages with the MOUs signed by the teachers' associations
- Newsletter and newspaper article
- Letter to parents template
- Web site presence
- News Release and follow-on coordination with targeted media.
- "Chat Room" Show with Dr. Miles
- One-page Fact Sheet
- PowerPoint Slide presentation
- Radio PSA Scripts

## Area Communication Responsibilities

- Brief employees on the new system and training planned prior to implementation.
- Localize communications plan and communications tools for audiences within the area.
- Incorporate Key Messages into communications.
- Make subject matter experts available for interviews.
- Interface with media representatives as appropriate.
- Disseminate communications information to districts and schools.
- Develop and maintain a web presence for GradeSpeed and link it to the DoDEA site.
- Develop a method to evaluate communication effectiveness.
- Develop a mechanism to accommodate feedback from administrators, teachers and parents.
- Align messages with the MOUs signed by the teachers' associations.

### **District Communication Responsibilities**

- Brief employees on the new system and training planned prior to implementation.
- Localize communications plan and communications tools for audiences within the District.
- Incorporate key messages into communications.
- Make subject matter experts available for interviews.
- Interface with media representatives as appropriate.
- Disseminate communications information to schools.
- Develop and maintain a web presence for GradeSpeed, linking it to the Area and DoDEA sites.
- Develop a method to evaluate communication effectiveness.
- Develop a mechanism to accommodate feedback from administrators, teachers and parents.
- Make personnel available to brief at schools and talk with principals' associations, teachers and parents.
- Align messages with the MOUs signed by the teachers' associations.

### **School Communication Responsibilities**

- Brief employees on the new system and the training planned prior to implementation.
- Localize communications plan and communications tools for audiences within the School.
- Incorporate key messages into communications.
- Make subject matter experts available for interviews.
- Interface with external and internal media representatives as appropriate.
- Disseminate information to parents via letters, school newsletters and installation newspaper articles.
- Develop and maintain a web presence for GradeSpeed, linking it to the District, Area and DoDEA sites.
- Provide presentations and opportunities for hands-on experience with GradeSpeed at Open House and Back to School Nights.

- Develop a method to evaluate communication effectiveness.
- Develop a mechanism to accommodate feedback from administrators, teachers and parents.
- Make personnel available to brief at schools and talk with parents.

### **Evaluation**

Conduct communication audits at all levels to determine the success of the communications plan in meeting the stated objectives.

### **Qs and As**

Below is an anticipated list of questions and answers that administrators, principals and teachers can use to help communicate effectively with parents, the community and the news media. While the list of questions below is not meant to be exhaustive or all-encompassing, it does provide a foundation to guide and support effective communication.

#### **Q1: Who will use GradeSpeed?**

A1. The program will be implemented throughout DoDEA. For the 08/09 school year, 4<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers will use the program. Initially, parents and teachers will participate, but eventually a new component will be added which will enable student participation in the program.

#### **Q2: Why is this being implemented?**

A2: Two-way communication between teachers and parents fosters greater parent involvement in the education of their student. Parent involvement leads to better opportunities for student achievement – the shared goal of everyone involved.

#### **Q3: What are some of the advantages of using GradeSpeed?**

A3. In addition to providing a way for parents to have more information regarding their student's academic progress, this program gives busy parents and teachers a great way to have open communication. Instead of waiting for a parent/teacher conference, a parent who has a concern can contact the teacher and begin dialogue about whatever the student may be facing.

#### **Q4: What are some of the disadvantages of using GradeSpeed?**

A4. The only perceived disadvantage we're hearing about is that some students are worried about parents having too much access to school information. However, everything we know tells us that parent involvement in a student's education is a critical factor in how successful the student will be.

#### **Q5: How will GradeSpeed work?**

A5. Teachers will have secure access to GradeSpeed using an Internet web browser. They can use the grade book portion of the product to enter assignments and grades and maintain grade calculations. The teacher will also be able to email progress reports to parents.

GradeSpeed also provides secure parent access via a portal. After logging in, parents will be able to view grade and attendance data only for their children. Parents will also be able to view school announcements and calendar events. There is a note feature that parents can use to directly contact their students' teachers. Dialogue can go back and forth between the teacher and parent.

**Q6: How does GradeSpeed improve monitoring of student progress?**

A6. Monitoring student progress toward mastery of DoDEA learning standards can be accomplished by using the performance and achievement grades given in each subject area through the year. The report card, coupled with frequent communication between teachers and parents, enhances understanding of how educational needs can best be supported at school and home.

**Q7: How will this system specifically help families with deployed parents?**

A7. Since GradeSpeed is a web-based program, it can be accessed from anywhere. Parents who are deployed will be able to stay informed and involved in their student's academic life regardless of location or how long they are away. This is a powerful tool for deployed parents since it allows two-way communication with the teacher – something we've never been able to offer before.

**Q8: Who and/or what agencies and individuals were consulted in the purchase of the system?**

A8. We offered DoDEA schools the opportunity to test this "off-the shelf" system. Of the 1,012 people who participated, the response was overwhelmingly positive. We also consulted with several local education agencies to learn how happy they were with the system.

**Q9: Why was this particular system chosen?**

A9: During SY 2007-08 schools were able to participate in a field test of the product. This test was a resounding success. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents to an online survey stated that they were "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the program. This particular system already has a proven track record of interface with our current grade system – something very important for busy teachers because they won't have to input data twice.

**Q10: How will teachers be trained to use the new system?**

A10. An initial training session will be provided for teachers. Additional training will be provided on an "as requested" basis by the school ET, District SIS ET, or Area SIS staff. Schools are encouraged to use mentor users as a resource to help novice users become comfortable with the software.

**Q11: How will students and parents know about the new program?**

A11. Parents will receive individual letters and an informational brochure from their student's school. We're also encouraging schools to launch their own awareness programs for parents and students, primarily through Open Houses, Back-to-School Nights, Parent-Teacher Conferences, base newspaper articles, school newsletters. As

with any matter, parents are encouraged to contact their student's teacher or school principal with any questions they may have about the new system.

**Q12: How will parents access this program?**

A12: Every school website will have a link to the program. There will also be a link from the DoDEA homepage. Parents can log in from anywhere they have internet access.

**Q13: Will GradeSpeed replace face-to-face parent/teacher conferences?**

A13: No. This program is meant to enhance parent/teacher communication. Face-to-face communication will always be encouraged by DoDEA.

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## **SAMPLE ARTICLES AND LETTERS:**

### **Letter to Parents**

Your School Name and Address  
Date

Family Name  
Address

Dear Parent:

We are very excited to tell you we're implementing GradeSpeed with a goal of making communication between parents and teachers easier, more effective and timelier.

Through this web-based program parents will be able to log in and see grade and attendance data for their children. The teacher will also be able to email progress reports to parents. After logging in, parents will also be able to view school announcements and calendar events.

We know the importance parents place on their child's academic success. We also know that when parents have timely information about student progress, the entire learning environment is improved.

GradeSpeed will be implemented throughout DoDEA at the beginning of the 2008/09 school year for grades 4-12.

We appreciate your commitment to your child's education. Working together, our combined efforts as a school-home team, will help your child achieve success this school year. Please feel free to contact me or your child's classroom teacher with any questions you have about GradeSpeed.

Sincerely,  
(Principal's signature)

## **Article for School Newsletter or Installation Newspaper**

### **GradeSpeed will be implemented within DoDEA**

When students return to school for the 2008/09 school year; they should expect that their parents will be better informed about what happens at school.

DoDEA is implementing GradeSpeed, a web-based program that allows parents and teachers to interact electronically – sharing grades, and attendance data.

Implementation for grades 4-12 will take place throughout DoDEA at the beginning of the 2008/09 school year.

“GradeSpeed is a powerful tool to help parents and teachers share information about student academics,” said Richard Gamble, DoDEA’s Instructional Technology Integration Branch Chief.

Gamble said DoDEA looked at 36 alternative grading programs before choosing GradeSpeed.

“We chose GradeSpeed because it’s been road tested,” he added. “It’s been around since 1986, and there’s a proven track record of interfacing with programs we already use.”

By accessing GradeSpeed, parents will be able to view grade and attendance data for their own children. The teacher will also be able to email progress reports to parents. Announcements and calendar events can also be viewed.

Although public schools throughout the U.S. have been using programs like this for many years, one concern some students have raised is the feeling that parents are given too much information.

“I would tell students that your parents care about you and they want you to be successful,” Gamble said. “That’s really the goal of all of us at DoDEA – student achievement – and GradeSpeed is one more tool we can use to keep parents and teachers in touch.”

## **News Release**

### **DoDEA Implements GradeSpeed to help Parents and Teachers Communicate**

When students return to school for the 2008/09 school year; they should expect that their parents will be better informed about what happens at school.

DoDEA is implementing GradeSpeed, a web-based program that allows parents and teachers to interact electronically – sharing grades, attendance data and other information.

Implementation for grades 4-12 will take place throughout DoDEA at the beginning of the 2008/09 school year.

“GradeSpeed is a powerful tool to help parents and teachers share information about student academics,” said Richard Gamble, Instructional Technology Integration Branch Chief at DoDEA.

DoDEA’s unique mission of educating the children of service members – many of whom deploy during the school year – makes communication especially critical.

“While programs like this are helpful for all parents and students, imagine how important it will be for a servicemember who is in a place like Iraq,” said Gamble. “We can help a parent stay connected to their child’s academic progress, regardless of where they are in the world – that’s powerful.”

Gamble said DoDEA looked at 36 on-line grading programs before choosing GradeSpeed.

“We chose GradeSpeed because it’s been road tested,” he added. “It’s been around since 1986 and they have a proven track record of interfacing with programs we already use.”

After logging in, parents will be able to see grade and attendance data for their own children. The teacher will also be able to email progress reports to parents. School announcements and calendar events can also be viewed.