

Communication PRinciples for Principals

SEPTEMBER 2009

WEB CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



IDEA

Today the web is the first tool parents use to learn about our schools and our school system. It has become the first impression maker or breaker for many new and returning families.

The DoDEA website and Communications

Our districts and schools have done an admirable job working with the limited resources they have had to establish “first generation” web sites for our DoD schools around the world. Although this creative freedom served us well during the initial years of the internet, the inconsistency in the quality of our sites today works against the organization as a whole and presents a hurdle to our parents and students as they move through our sites to locate information. The disunity of design presents a less than professional face of our organization to our customers, our military communities, and the world.

This tip sheet will provide background information to school administrators on the future direction DoDEA will take to improve our web presence.

Our Current Status

We have roughly 210 public facing sites including our area, district, and school sites. At present, each of these sites can be seen as islands.

- Even in the case of Area sites that may be physically located on a single server, there is little or no connection in how each is managed.
- There is no unifying navigation or visual identity that would help a site visitor know that they are on a site that is part of a larger whole.
- There is no way for site managers across the organization to share content, images, video, etc. except by duplication.
- If a school site links to a page on the Area site and later that page is moved or deleted there is no way for the school website link to be automatically updated.
- There is no way to maintain navigational consistency from school to school or organizational links to move up through the school, District, Area, and HQ levels. The sites are almost always built from an organizational aspect. Rarely do they reflect what our chief customers (parent) hope to see when they come to the site. In many cases we have built it for ourselves as an organizational or storage tool.



DoDEA HQ Communications Office

4040 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203
USA

Telephone: 703.588.3030
Facsimile: 703.588.3000

Frank O’Gara: 703.588.3260
Frank.O’Gara@hq.dodea.edu

Elaine Kanellis: 703.588.3265
Elaine.Kanellis@hq.dodea.edu

Visit the DoDEA website
for more information.
<http://www.dodea.edu>

The implementation of a Web Content Management System (WCMS) is critical in order to facilitate information dissemination, and better serve our primary customers. Content Management Systems organize, manage, distribute and publish web content. The DoDEA website must undergo a transformation in order to ensure that the site offers DoDEA's primary customers the most up to date and relevant information.

DoDEA's current goal is to align our web presence so that our primary customers are presented with a unified and coherent view of the organization that clearly and effectively demonstrates its vision, mission and commitment to providing an exemplary education. We want to make the DoDEA web presence more unified, useful and effective in communicating its mission to its primary customers by empowering Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the Area, District and School offices to manage their web sites. The WCMS will ultimately allow SMEs to manage and share content more effectively, collaborate with each other, and disseminate information quickly and efficiently to their customers (parents, students and staff) in one global environment.

CommonSpot is our new WCMS

In August 2009, DoDEA awarded a contract to PaperThin for its flagship WCMS -- CommonSpot. Area webmasters, HQ staff, and a district ET were part of the selection team. Some establishments that use this system are: American University, Cornell University, Mayo Clinic, National Park Service, Stanford University, US Senate and United Way of America. We will soon begin the implementation of that system. It will not be an overnight process.

The WCMS will facilitate access to creating and maintaining content for the DoDEA website for our subject matter experts (SME) and remove the technical hurdles currently in place. Our intention is to establish a web system using a Content Management Systems (CMS) CMS that distributes access to creating and maintaining content for our website out to those who know their subject matter best and to remove the technical hurdles currently in place for them to do so. If a person can handle web-based email, they will be able to become successful participants in this system. By separating content and display we will maintain control over the larger visual, navigational, and site architecture issues while letting our content editors make sure the information displayed is timely and accurate. In doing so we will be building a library of searchable/sharable resources based on "content tagging" that can make content items available to the rest of the website community.

What Principals Can Do

- Keep morale high and keep an ear out for any rumors or misleading information, we need your support in this effort. Remind others that it is for the benefit of our staff, parents and students.
- Be ready to help us when we reach your level.
- Direct questions or concerns to district and area webmasters



Now the real work begins. Our goals in implementing the CMS are:

- Create a dynamic content driven website
- Unify agency content by creating a standard information organization template. Structure content so that all items include global elements; i.e. title, abstract, keywords.
- Create intuitive audience based navigational elements
- Create a collaborative environment and use content as a resource for all levels of DoDEA – repurpose, share content

Our Recommended Approach:

- Pilot a program that would lay the foundation to potentially bring our website family together both technically, visually, navigationally. Initially we would like to start with one area site, one district site, and that district's schools as a test case. We want to show to the rest of the community proof of concept and the benefit to becoming part of this effort.
- During the development stage both the old and the new website would run concurrently. The new website would be kept in a "test" environment during the transition. The current site would not be retired until the new suites of sites are approved.
- We envision a growing family of professionally designed district and school website templates that site managers can choose from. Options can be given for image selection, color schemes, and layout. We want each school and district to have a level of control and choice in the way their site is displayed and reflective of their location and community.
- Identify and understand who DoDEA's our audiences are. Doing so will ensure that we deliver the right content to the right users when they need it.
- Perform a comprehensive content audit.
- We can broaden the group of content contributors by allowing our site managers to grant permission to specific pages or sections of our sites. This relieves the bottleneck of who can post information but still leaves control in the hands of the site managers.
- The net effect will be that our communities and customers will be exposed to more vital and timely information than previously possible.

The DoDEA Office of Communications has looked closely at the current state of its web presence. It is critical that we find a way to help schools and districts improve their presence on the web while also improving HQ and area sites so they are parent friendly, useful, and current.



- We can use our current system login technology to give rights to specific individuals to assist in maintaining parts of each site. Conceivably a teacher can be given a page on the website to make information directly available to parents on class activities and plans. A principal can be given access to a specific page to make timely or emergency information available immediately.

What This Means To You:

- The WCMS will empower the actual content owners so that non-technical users can update the sites. An approval process will ensure content falls within the DoDEA Web Publishing Guidelines. Furthermore, the WCMS will allow for content repurposing, so that one content item can be displayed and used across the spectrum of DoDEA web sites.
- When an update is made to a specific content it will automatically be updated on all the sites.
- Cleaner more professional websites with consistent navigation and content organization and branding.
- Will bring visual unity to our sites and reinforce the DoDEA “brand”.
- Allows content to be shared across organization. Can easily share resources for the web.
- Each site can have customized colors, mascot and other design elements, the importance of the school culture and region will not be lost.
- Content will be dynamically delivered to serve our primary Audience – parents.
- Enhanced search capabilities that will bring back relevant and related results.

What We are Doing Right Now:

- HQ & area webmasters are taking part in a 3 day out-of-box training and planning sessions.
- HQ & area webmasters are creating content templates. The navigation and content will be organized in the same manner for all DoDEA sites so that parents with children in more than one school, or families that are moving from one area to the next will know how to find the information they need.
- The content templates are being created by considering student, parent and staff/admin perspectives. Content will be located on the proper site and in the right place.
- Webmasters are brainstorming marketing ideas to create excitement for the new sites. Area webmasters are conducting site reviews of all district and school sites and will keep district ETs and school webmasters up to date and involved with the process.

What You Can Expect:

- The first sites to be moved into the WCMS are the HQ and Area sites.
- After this a “slice” will be taken from each area -- one district and one school site. This will allow kinks to be worked out and gives an opportunity for problems to be addressed. This will not be a quick process. It may take us 2 years to fully transform all of the 210 sites.
- The district ETs and webmasters will be key people in this transformation and we will provide training and support for them down the road.

Moving DoDEA websites into the WCMS is the best thing we can do for our organization. It will keep content up to date and organized across DoDEA in an efficient manner. It will most importantly be beneficial to the military, DoD civilian and Non-DoD families we serve that use our websites.

If you have questions about the WCMS, call us at (703) 588-3263 or at webmaster@hq.dodea.edu. We welcome your feedback and support.