



Schools will stay connected with eChalk Web sites

By Mary Gorry Staff Reporter

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Thanks to the Tomorrow's Hope Foundation, all the Catholic elementary schools in the Rockville Centre Diocese will be online with eChalk Web sites within the next few months, connecting them to students, parents, and each other. Bishop William Murphy created the Tomorrow's Hope Foundation in 2005 as a way to raise funds from individuals and the corporate community to help support Catholic elementary schools around Long Island. Resources from the foundation are being used to support the diocesan education department in their efforts to assist the elementary schools not currently using eChalk with the initial set-up costs to develop their eChalk Web sites.

A Web-based communication provider for K-12 schools, eChalk has supplied the platform for the schools of the diocese to form one of the nation's largest online learning communities, consisting of 53 elementary schools and two diocesan high schools. All the eChalk sites have a consistent look, but each school has the ability to customize.

Vincent Albrecht, principal of Holy Family School in Hicks-ville, said Holy Family has been using eChalk for a few years, but when he arrived at the school last year, "we moved toward using eChalk as the main form of internal communication. This year, we've implemented the lesson manager, which helps teachers plan their lessons online and to specifically align what they are teaching to the New York State learning standards. This year we have also moved away from sending home written information to parents, asking them to think 'green' by checking our Web site for important information that comes up during the course of the school year."

Our Lady of Lourdes in West Islip has been on eChalk for two years. "I came from St. Ignatius Loyola in Hicksville, where they've had the site for several years," explained Louise Krol, principal of Our Lady of Lourdes, and where she had firsthand experience with "how user-friendly it was for students, parents, and yes, even teachers to use."
"I love the fact that each class has a Web page where all their classwork, homework, test schedules, and calendar are posted," she said. "Parents can access the homework from anywhere and know exactly what is assigned before their child arrives home. If a student has a question at night while working on a homework assignment, he or she can e-mail the teacher for an explanation. Most teachers check their e-mail several times during their off times."

SS. Cyril and Methodius School in Deer Park just started using eChalk at the end of August, but "in a little more than two months we have turned it into a useful communication and advertising tool," noted principal Victor Lana. "We put up daily announcements with pictures about everything that is happening in our school. As principal, I find it very user-friendly and I am able to communicate with our school family and broader community on a daily basis."

Making sure all the elementary schools in the diocese not only have Web sites but are using the same platform "is an excellent idea and is extremely logical," noted Lana. "Within our own site are links to other schools, the diocese, and beyond. With eChalk, we are all connected and there is a symmetry for users that is appealing, secure, and easy to use."

"I think it's an excellent way for all our schools to be networked together," said Krol. "It makes it easy to share ideas, lesson plans, and concerns. No more looking up telephone numbers trying to reach another school. It is also a great marketing tool to be able to navigate all our school Web sites in the same way. I believe that new families moving into a neighborhood 'shop' for schools online. Parents from one school do check out what other neighboring schools are doing, assigning, and achieving."

"I think eChalk is a dynamic application that over time will make the schools of our diocese an example for school districts across the nation," said Albrecht. "What eChalk does is show how we as a diocese can push toward the future with a system of Web sites that will increase our interconnectedness as a Catholic school community. Our teachers can communicate with any teacher within the diocese in special groups or by e-mail to discuss curriculum or new teaching strategies, and we as principals can communicate more effectively with each other. We are blessed in this diocese to have a group like the Tomorrow's Hope Foundation to help make projects such as this a reality."

Learn more about the benefits of thinking beyond the building. Contact eChalk at heretohelp@echalk.com or 1.888.809.3349 to speak further about your needs and goals.