

Rockwood R-VI School District



Saint Louis County, Missouri

www.rockwood.k12.mo.us



NSPRA Entry: Gold Medallion

eBackpack

Building the School-Home Connection

April 2012



eBackpack: Building the School-Home Connection

A mounting body of evidence finds that technology is changing the consumption of school communication. The shifting communication landscape is a challenge as school public relations professionals juggle multiple channels that stretch shrinking budgets and overworked staff.

The Rockwood School District discovered a solution through collaboration between two important components: **technology** using its systems approach and **public relations** with its strategic alignment of communication strategies to achieve district goals. The eBackpack concept manages content for the school and tackles key issues facing the district, while being delivered through communication channels that connect to the most important external audience: parents. The eBackpack provides parents an all-in-one, online news service, including the Rockwood App, with thoughtful consideration to information that will encourage a greater involvement in their child’s academic, social and character-building education.

As a result of the eBackpack, Rockwood online visitors jumped an average of 51 percent from January 2010-May 2011 as parents increased their awareness of school news and events through this new service. Most importantly, the district “moved the needle” on parent involvement. School climate surveys in late fall 2011 indicated that 86.4 percent of parents noted they were encouraged to be involved in their child’s education, and increase of 12.2 percent from 2008.

Rockwood is the largest school district in St. Louis County, Missouri, with an enrollment of 22,201 students. The eBackpack concept supports Rockwood’s [strategic plan](#), which identifies stakeholder involvement as a district goal. This commitment has pushed the district to develop indicators within its [vision scorecard](#) to measure levels of parent engagement. This partnership between technology and public relations supports Rockwood’s vision of continuously improving our performance.



eBackpack: Building the School-Home Connection

Situational Analysis

"I don't read the school newsletter. The school sends it out once-a-month with recycled information."

"The school website hasn't been updated in weeks, and I can't find what I'm looking for anyway."

"I only hear good news from the district. I want to know what's really going on."

These are some of the discouraging comments that parents and patrons shared about communication in the Rockwood School District. As the district faced growing demand from stakeholders for openness and transparency, it became critical to find opportunities to connect with parents and share content that would encourage involvement and satisfy the need for accurate news and information.

Research: Defining the Target

- **NSPRA Audit:** In January 2007, NSPRA presented the findings of its communication audit. Top recommendations included the incorporation of key issue and content management into the communication effort.
- **Communication Accountability Program:** CAP sent a clear message. School communication is a factor in parent involvement, and when involvement is high, students do better.
- **Audience Identification/Channel Opportunity:** Rockwood analyzed usage on its existing electronic communication channels. Tracking revealed that 98 percent of parents/guardians used either a home or work email account to access district electronic news and information.
- **School Climate Surveys:** Rockwood schools conduct biennial surveys to gauge satisfaction and preferred delivery options for school communication. In 2008, 74.0 percent of parents cited email as their most preferred method of communication, and 74.2 percent noted that the school encouraged involvement in their child's education.
- **Focus Groups:** 1) Administrators and staff provided input on necessary elements of school/teacher websites. 2) Parents provided feedback on content, navigation and user-friendly design. 3) Key stakeholders attended demonstrations of potential software tools, processes and plans to be a part of decision-making.
- **Smartphone Usage:** A 2009 PEW Internet study showed that the use of the Internet on mobile devices grew sharply from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2009, with 56 percent of Americans saying that have accessed wireless as a means for online access.

Analysis: Planning to Reach the Goal

Rockwood Communications developed a proactive public relations program that would achieve two communication goals: 1) provide key messaging in a consistent, timely manner in channels that parents use and 2) enhance the district's and school's reputation for encouraging parent involvement in schools and programs. From these broad goals, Rockwood planners identified the following measurable objectives:

- Implement eBackpack in August 2010 and create baseline data of 10,000 visits/month for the vision scorecard.
- Implement Rockwood App in August 2011 and create baseline data of 10,000 visitors during first six months of launch.
- Build awareness and increase levels of parent involvement by five percent as reflected in the results of the 2009 pre- and 2011 post-school climate survey results.

To achieve the objectives, Rockwood Communications created a tactical plan based on two strategic pillars:

- 1) A **school content management plan** offers a comprehensive approach to share information and promote the substantive involvement of parents in the educational environment.

- 2) A **district key issue management plan** focuses on correcting misinformation about the district by managing messaging closest to parent’s primary channel – the school’s online newsletter.

The primary internal audience included Rockwood administrators, teachers and support staff managing sites. The primary external audience included Rockwood parents at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Analysis continued with three planning phases prior to implementation.

Phase 1: Systems - The selection of Microsoft SharePoint provided the foundation for increased connection among the district – schools – teacher websites. Content management was the focus with consistent areas for district key issues management, and the addition of the eBackpack component for school content management.

Phase 2: Training - Managing content was the cornerstone of the plan. An in-house training program was developed and conducted with system users: communications and technology staff, principals and administrators, secretaries, teachers and PTO leaders. Approval processes were embedded within the system to ensure content meets Rockwood guidelines for accuracy and Web publishing.

Phase 3: eBackpack Template and Rockwood App- Each school developed an eBackpack page that aligned with their school culture, and includes the following components: **Principal Blogs, School Announcements, Online Teacher Gradebook, Calendar and Events, Teacher/Team Websites, School Photo Galleries, PTO News and Information, Community Resource Center, School Folder Systems, and AlertNow Replay**. The Rockwood App was developed using department resources and talent. The components of the school eBackpack are included in the App, which is available to parents through the iTunes App Store, Google’s Android Market and Blackberry’s App World.

Communication: Implementing the Plan

Phase 1: Transition - First steps included a six-step transition plan for principals to implement that would create expectations among the parent community. The once-a-month delivery of a pdf version of the school newsletter would shift to a variety of news service options: weekly eBackpack emails via AlertNow, updated online news services, the Rockwood App and RSS Feeds.

Phase 2: Building the eBackpacks – Build it and they will come. This collaborative phase required a partnership among communication, technology, school administration, PTO communication liaisons and school secretaries to create content that would involve parents and focus on strategic messages that promote the value the district offers to all community members.

Phase 3: Marketing the news service – Schools received materials to market their eBackpacks: eBackpack email templates linked to the components, fliers for back-to-school events and orientations, and presentations/videos for principals to use during meetings with staff and parents. In addition, the rollout of the Rockwood App and RSS Feeds were promoted in established district channels.

Evaluation: eBackpack has met and exceeded the objectives of the communication plan.

- During its first year, eBackpack averaged 14,930 visitors/month.
- During the first six months of the launch, the Rockwood App grew to 62,724 visitors.
- Overall school website traffic increased by 16 percent from Jan. 2010 to May 2011.
- Overall district website traffic increased by 10 percent from Jan. 2010 to May 2011.
- Overall teacher website traffic increased by 26 percent from Jan. 2010 to May 2011.
- School climate survey results indicated a 12.2 percent increase in parents who noted that schools encouraged involvement in their child’s education: In 2008, a 74.2 percent approval rating grew to a 86.4 percent approval rating in 2011.

RESEARCH: Defining the Target

NSPRA Audit: In January 2007, NSPRA presented the findings of its [communication audit](#). The audit provided Rockwood an important foundation for refining the district's [comprehensive communication plan](#). Seasoned communications professionals with many years of experience in educational public relations and communications performed this audit. The consultants for this communication audit were Richard D. Bagin, APR, executive director of NSPRA, and Susan Hardy Brooks, APR, NSPRA consultant.

The audit revealed that some distrust existed within our school community. Much of this distrust was attributed to the stress of implementing new mandates and requirements. Inconsistency in communication was a factor addressed in the top recommendations of the audit team.

Recommendation: Incorporate key issue content and management into your communication effort.

NSPRA noted: People appreciate hearing the “good news” about their schools, but you build trust and credibility through open communication about the business of your school system – both good and bad. The public is interested not just in what decisions you are making about the education of students, but also in the rationale behind the decisions, particularly in the area of funding and fiscal expenditures. It is important to foster open communication so that Rockwood School District is perceived as a system that shares all the news and goes beyond promoting your schools to create genuine trust, understanding, and credibility.

Recommendation: Develop key messages and talking points about Rockwood.

NSPRA noted: Your key messages should also support initiatives that RSD is undertaking for the year. This is the area where you talk about your success and your vision for RSD improvement. The public values your system and your leadership team is committed to making your school district even better. By defining these messages and offering a balanced approach to telling what’s great and what needs changing for the future, you will begin reducing the “fluff” descriptions we heard when we asked participants about some of your publications. You need to focus on key talking points about RSD, related to your strategic goals, which can then serve as the content for the tactics designed to reach your target audiences.

Communication Accountability Project: In 2006, NSPRA published the [Communication Accountability Project](#) to continue to document the vital link between school communication and student success. Research indicated that school communication is a factor in parent involvement, and when involvement is high, students do better.

Research: Strengthen parent and family involvement through communication.

CAP Noted: No longer can an educator get by just slipping a monthly newsletter into the backpack and ensuring that the local paper gets the sports schedule. In an age of instantaneous access and 24/7 demand, schools must be able to manage the flow of information not only from teacher to students sitting in a classroom, but also to parents at the workplace and home.

CAP Noted: Parent and community involvement are identified as factors in most studies that examine the research on effective schooling. Numerous school/family/community partnerships have produced dramatic and lasting increases in student achievement. A positive example included Joyce Epstein's School, Family and Community Partnerships Network in Baltimore (Epstein, 2001). Key characteristics associated with academic improvement include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, effective leadership, focused professional development, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, and parent and community involvement.

Rockwood upholds the importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful, direct, two-way communication between schools, parents and the community. The [Parent and Family Involvement](#) initiative helps define effective parent involvement in the district using Epstein's six types of parental involvement.

Research: Rockwood has access to parent email addresses.

Infinite Campus: Infinite Campus is Rockwood's web-based student system that provides parents with information about their child's academic progress via the Campus Portal. This online teacher gradebook is a source for contact information for parents, including multiple email addresses for primary (home) and secondary (parents work and personal) accounts. In September 2008, a system query revealed that 98 percent of parents/guardians in this affluent community had provided a household/personal/work email account.

AlertNow: AlertNow is Rockwood's automatic notification system that notifies parents by phone and/or email about school/district news, cancellations and activities. Since its launch in 2008, the district has emphasized the importance of accurate phone numbers and email addresses on students' Census Verification Forms. After the first year of implementation, a back-to-school parent poll distributed in orientation materials revealed a high approval rating (94 percent) for this communication channels and the push messaging via phone and email.

Research: Rockwood parents prefer email communication.

School Climate Survey: In 2008, Rockwood schools conducted an end-of-year school climate survey. The online, random-sample survey was distributed to parents and includes a communication component, as well as questions related to safety, parent involvement and character education. Respondents cited their levels of satisfaction with delivery options for school communication. District results from 2008 indicated the following:

Communication Channel	Most Preferred	Least Preferred
Email	74.9 %	.9 %
School Website	5.9 %	19.4 %
Phone	17.5 %	10 %
Materials Home with Student	2 %	43.1 %
US Mail	9.8 %	21.4 %

This Rockwood school climate parent survey in spring 2008 also asked respondents this question: **To what extent does my school encourage meaningful parent involvement?** Respondents indicated that 37.9 percent (411 parents) noted schools “somewhat encouraged” and 36.3 percent (394 parents) rated schools as “strongly encouraged” for a total satisfaction rating of 74.2 percent.

Research: Key stakeholders provide feedback on Web content, navigation and design.

Focus Groups:

1) Administrators and staff provided input on necessary elements of school/teacher websites. Focus group questions included the following:

- What is your current process for updating your school website? How can this be improved?
- What types of content do you expect to find when accessing your school website?
- What types of content do you expect parents to find when accessing your school website?
- Do updates happen in a timely manner?
- Describe a positive experience you’ve had with information posted on your website. What made it a positive experience?
- Describe a negative experience you’ve had with your website. What made it a negative experience?
- Each principal was provided school websites stats that indicated visitors, usage, and the most popular pages within the site. After the review, we asked what new information they had discovered and what they would like to change/incorporate on their school websites.

2) Parents provided feedback on content, navigation and user-friendly design. Rockwood Communications invited parents to a focus group in our computer lab. While navigating through the

district/school sites, they completing the rating system below as communication professionals peered over their shoulders to research clicks and processes.

Please rate school sites: 1 – 5 (1 is excellent – 5 needs improvement)
Specify areas and share suggestions for improvement

Overall Appearance	District	School	Comments
Site is visually appealing			
Site has a consistent look and branding			
Clean: not cluttered to too busy			
Message is student-centered			
Organization			
Content appears to be easily accessible			
Logical flow of information			
Parent involvement opportunities easy to find			
Calendar information has a clear focus			
Navigation			
Ease of use: move to pages easily and quickly			
Intuitive: content makes sense to follow			
User-friendly: features needed information			
Links well identified			
Other:			

Please share your overall impression of the new design, organization and navigation:

If you could do one thing to improve the Web site, what would it be?

3) Key stakeholders attended demonstrations of potential software tools and processes.

As Rockwood researched content management systems and Web designs, groups of administrators, staff and parents would be invited to Web review sessions where they could vote on specific management tools and rate visually appealing design templates.

Research: Multiplatform use of the Internet is on the rise.

Smartphone Usage: A [2009 PEW Internet study](#) showed the use of the Internet on mobile devices grew sharply from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2009, with 56 percent of Americans saying they have accessed wireless as a means for online access. The report also finds rising levels of Americans using the internet on a mobile handset. Almost one-third of Americans (32 percent) have used a cell phone or Smartphone to access the internet for emailing, instant-messaging, or information-seeking. This level of mobile internet is up by one-third since December 2007.

Research: Goals and objectives

Rockwood Communications developed a proactive public relations program that would achieve two communication goals:

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- 2) enhance the district's and school's reputation for encouraging parent involvement in schools and programs.

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Analysis/Planning

To achieve the objectives, Rockwood Communications created a tactical plan based on two strategic pillars:

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The primary internal audience included Rockwood administrators, teachers and support staff managing sites. The primary external audience included Rockwood parents at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

Rockwood Communications recognized the need for a three-step analysis prior to implementation. The planning combined the use of technology with its systems approach, alongside a public relations perspective to maximize the impact for stakeholder engagement.

Phase 1: Content Management Systems April 2009 – January 2010

Rockwood Communications focused on platforms to manage work flow within a collaborative environment. The district was using FrontPage, with a designated webmaster at each school location who received a monthly stipend for creating and managing content. This proved troublesome as the role was often given to a teacher whose schedule centered on the classroom. School websites went weeks, and sometimes months, without an update. The goal for the new system was to integrate and centralize management of some major Web components to frame key issues, while allowing for decentralization of some components to encourage the timely posting of school news and classroom information. As timely was the operative word, Rockwood Communication understood the need for multiple contributors to district/school websites. Evaluating software for usability and functionality was time consuming. The year-long analysis ended with the selection of Microsoft SharePoint as the foundation for increased connection among the district – schools – teacher websites.

[Rockwood School District](#): The home page of the school district website includes a visually appealing three-column design. The left column (latest news) is consistent on the district and all 30 school websites. This section shares key issues facing the district and the rationale for addressing those issues, as well as news to promote students, teachers and programs. The middle section is calendar specific with events that are inclusive of all stakeholders. The right section (announcements) is focused on program and department information. A promotional flash banner connects all three columns and shares the mission of the district.

[Rockwood Schools](#): The home page template for Rockwood’s 30 school websites is branded with the same three-column design. The left column (latest news) is pulled from the district website to ensure parents find the same key issues facing the district and the rationale for addressing those issues. The middle section is a calendar specific to the school with events that are inclusive for the parent and school community. The right section is instrumental in school content management as a key component of the eBackpack system. A Web ad is centered at the bottom of the column to lead parents to the eBackpack online school newsletter. A promotional flash banner grounds all three columns and shares the school’s points of pride and ends with the district’s mission.

[Teacher Websites](#): Educators are offered a template website that connects the classroom to the school content system, thus completing the district – school – classroom loop. Currently, 86 percent of all Rockwood teachers have created a website through the channels created by Rockwood Communications.

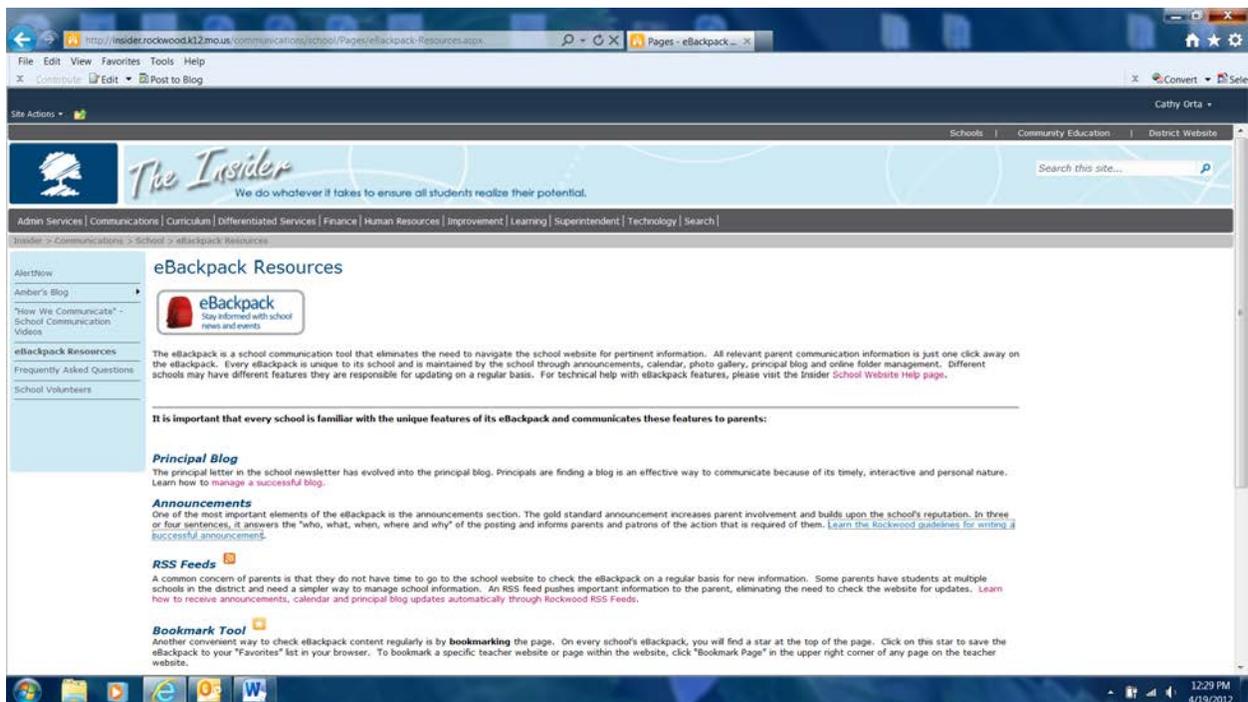
This year-long process of researching and analyze was the cornerstone of managing content is the foundation of the eBackpack. Without the careful detail to Web content, the eBackpack concept would not be an effective communication resource.

Phase 2: Training from November 2009 – April 2010

Managing content was the cornerstone of the plan. An in-house training program was developed and conducted with system users: Communications and Technology staff, principals and administrators, secretaries, teachers and PTO leaders. Approval processes were embedded within the system to ensure content meets [Rockwood guidelines for accuracy and Web publishing](#).

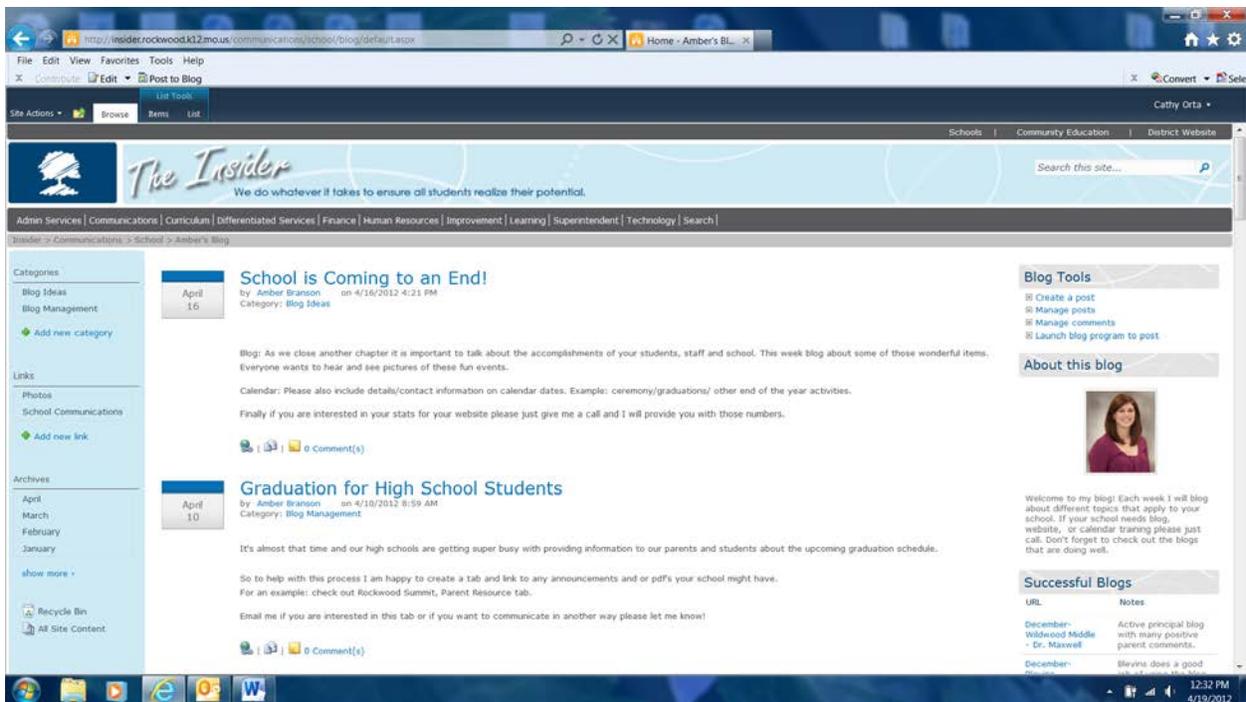
eBackpack Resources: It takes more than a computer login to be a good communicator. An eBackpack training site was established on the district’s intranet, the Rockwood Insider. (Because the intranet requires a Rockwood employee login, some the screen shots of the training site are embedded within this explanation, rather than a link.) eBackpack training teaches contributors how to write effectively in order to build upon the school’s reputation and increase parent involvement. Guidelines provide principals and secretaries the parameters for managing Web content and then pushing this content via eBackpack emails through the AlertNow automatic notification system.

- [Guidelines for Creating an Effective School Announcement](#)
- [Online School Calendars: Get More From CalendarWiz](#)
- [Community Resource Center: Step-by-Step Instructions](#)
- [Example of Customized eBackpack email template – adapt, cut and paste into AlertNow](#)

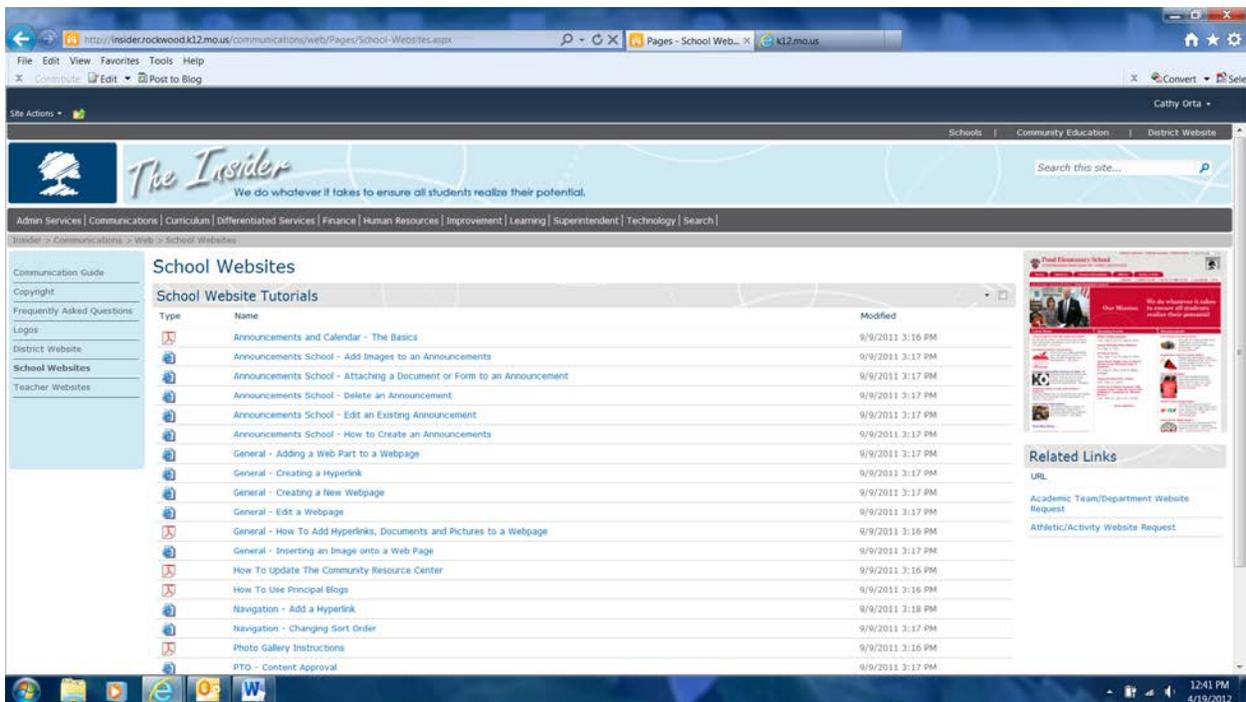


Rockwood Communications holds professional development session for our Web contributors. However, we discovered that many Rockwood employees were unable to attend due to school obligations. This created an obstacle. For years, the size of the department had shrunk from 13 employees in 2000 to 10 employees in 2009. One-on-one training was inconceivable given the restraints of the workforce.

Kim Cranston, Chief Communications Officer, requested the Board of Education approve an addition to the Rockwood Communications staff in MAY 2010. With the salary stipends of school-based Web administrators no longer needed, the extra savings from this fee were targeted to the hiring of a [Web Content Specialist](#) who visits schools, sits down with secretaries and principals, and shares best practices for school communications.



Tutorials for Web administration are included in a video library that is hosted on the Rockwood Insider, if employees need a quick refresher.



[Rockwood PTO Web Administration](#): Parent leaders manage their own school-based PTO web pages that are connected to the eBackpack. Rockwood Communications hosts parent workshops during the summer months and in those back-to-school weeks in order to provide technical training for these

Communication Liaisons, a new position developed for school parent-teacher organizations. All PTO content is approved by the school principal prior to publication. In addition, the [Presidents Forum Toolkit](#) provides strategies for building partnerships and increasing parent involvement.

Accountability: Principals, with the encouragement of Rockwood Communications, developed a eBackpack scorecard to keep our contributors on task. The quality of content, the frequency of content, and the technical proficiency are all important considerations. Schools determine the level they are currently functioning, as well as the target for where they would like to be in the coming months.

- 0 = No attempt
- 1 = Intervene
- 2 = Concern
- 3 = Baseline
- 4 = Progress
- 5 = Vision

Phase 3: eBackpack Template from January 2010-May 2010

An eBackpack catalog of features was developed for each school to consider as Rockwood Communications moved forward with content pages. Principals and their school teams develop an eBackpack web page that aligns with established channels and their school culture. School leaders will be provided options include the following components (links are provided to a variety of Rockwood school eBackpack components below):

[Principal Blogs:](#) Principals set the tone and provide the voice of leadership via this personal journal. Blogs are interactive to allow parents to comment and converse online with the principal. Comment guidelines are established, along with an approval process managed by the principal to ensure online conversations are on topic and appropriate for the school community. Principals are responsible for developing blogs with monthly prompts provided by the Communications staff to get the creativity flowing.

[School Announcements:](#) The school shares content and news articles for parents. The goal is to inform and promote. Schools include information about events and activities, as well as promoting student achievements, teacher contributions and programs that help the school community.

[Infinite Campus – Online Teacher Grade book:](#) Rockwood’s web-based student system provides parents with their child’s grades, assignments, progress reports and attendance. Currently, more than 75 percent of parents with students in grades 6-12 have a parent portal account. The component of the eBackpack incorporates this critical link to parent involvement in the classroom.

[Calendar and Events](#): Parents can find school events via the online calendar and download them to their own account or email a reminder to friends and family. The CalendarWiz software

[Team Websites](#): Rockwood middle schools use a team-block schedule format. Team sites help build upon student learning and teachers share important information about what's going on in the classroom.

[School Photo Galleries](#): Families enjoy seeing photos of their children learning at school. The Gallery provides this avenue for student and staff recognition.

[PTO News and Information](#): Parent leaders encourage involvement in the school parent-teacher organization through volunteering, fundraising and community-building events.

[Community Resource Center](#): It's a partnership! Non-district administered groups provide news and program information to the school community - after they submit the items to Rockwood Communication for approval to ensure it follows the district's advertising policy.

[AlertNow Replay](#): Parents who miss an important call or email from the school can catch it on the replay.

[Weekly Folder System](#): Many elementary schools were sending home some form of printed materials that were placed into a folder and stuffed in students' backpacks each week. The online folder system has minimized this practice to important curricular materials and classroom-related information.

[eBackpack Mobile App](#): The Rockwood App connects parents to school and classroom news and information. The components of the school eBackpack are integrated in the App, which are programmed and made available to parents through the iTunes App Store, Google's Android Market and Blackberry's App World.

[RSS Feeds](#): RSS Feeds are organized lists of eBackpack content. Parents may subscribe to a variety of RSS feeds connected to the school websites and get instant notification as soon as content is updated.

Communication: Implementing the Plan

The first step of implementation included a transition from the once-a-month, email delivery of a pdf version of the school newsletter to the timely, up-to-date eBackpack. School principals set expectations via the six steps noted below to encourage their staff members to post information and guide parents to use the school's eBackpack.

Step 1: Update the eBackpack

Ensure all information that was included in the old pdf version of the newsletter is represented in the eBackpack. All articles and/or event postings from the newsletter should be added to the calendar or announcements section of the eBackpack as soon as the information becomes available to keep parents in the loop immediately - instead of once every 30 days.

Step 2: Inform PTO and Staff Members during upcoming meetings

Inform the PTO executive board and staff members that the format of the school newsletter has evolved into the eBackpack. Let them know that your school communication is improving – and the once-a-month pdf newsletter is being improved with Web content and weekly/biweekly eBackpack emails.

Step 3: Inform Parents via the once-a-month pdf newsletter format

Be sure to include an eBackpack article to preview the new system in the final issues of the once-a-month pdf newsletter to transition parents to the new system.

Step 4: Inform parents via email

On the day schools send the final edition of the once-a-month pdf newsletter; principals also need to send parents the new version of the eBackpack email. The benefits of the eBackpack need to be explained to assure parents that all of the information in the old pdf newsletter could easily be found on your school website and eBackpack page.

Step 5: Inform Parents via School Events

Schools included a principal's letter and eBackpack fliers to share the pdf-to-eBackpack transition during those one-on-one time with parents.

Step 6: Continue Parent Communication throughout the School Year through eBackpack

Once principals set the communication expectations – schools need to deliver. The focus remains on keeping the information up-to-date and consistent.

[Communications Primer](#): To ensure parents know the communication channels available at their school, each school published a “how-to” section. This lets parents know how they can communicate with the school – and how the school will communicate with them. The eBackpack is the main feature.

The work began to create the eBackpack pages for all 19 elementary schools, 6 middle schools and 4 high schools, with the addition of the individualized learning center. The majority of implementation of the programming was completed during Jan. 2010 to April 2010, with the ongoing refinement of the eBackpack pages to ensure school satisfaction with the finished product. This staggered timeline allowed flexibility as we worked to get on busy principals' schedules and train secretaries.

Phase 1: Elementary Schools

School Site	Content Management
<u>Babler Elementary School</u>	<u>Babler eBackpack</u>
<u>Ballwin Elementary School</u>	<u>Ballwin eBackpack</u>
<u>Blevins Elementary School</u>	<u>Blevins eBackpack</u>
<u>Bowles Elementary School</u>	<u>Bowles eBackpack</u>
<u>Chesterfield Elementary School</u>	<u>Chesterfield eBackpack</u>
<u>Ellisville Elementary School</u>	<u>Ellisville eBackpack</u>
<u>Eureka Elementary School</u>	<u>Eureka eBackpack</u>
<u>Fairway Elementary School</u>	<u>Fairway eBackpack</u>
<u>Geggie Elementary School</u>	<u>Geggie eBackpack</u>
<u>Green Pines Elementary School</u>	<u>Green Pines eBackpack</u>
<u>Kehrs Mill Elementary School</u>	<u>Kehrs Mill eBackpack</u>
<u>Kellison Elementary School</u>	<u>Kellison eBackpack</u>
<u>Pond Elementary School</u>	<u>Pond eBackpack</u>
<u>Ridge Meadows Elementary School</u>	<u>Ridge Meadows eBackpack</u>
<u>Stanton Elementary School</u>	<u>Stanton eBackpack</u>
<u>Uthoff Valley Elementary School</u>	<u>Uthoff Valley eBackpack</u>
<u>Westridge Elementary School</u>	<u>Westridge eBackpack</u>
<u>Wild Horse Elementary School</u>	<u>Wild Horse eBackpack</u>
<u>Woerther Elementary School</u>	<u>Woerther eBackpack</u>

Phase 2: Middle Schools

School Website	Content Management
Crestview Middle School	Crestview eBackpack
LaSalle Middle School	LaSalle eBackpack
Rockwood South Middle School	Rockwood South eBackpack
Rockwood Valley Middle School	Rockwood Valley eBackpack
Selvidge Middle School	Selvidge eBackpack
Wildwood Middle School	Wildwood eBackpack

Phase 3: High Schools

School Website	Content Management
Eureka High School	Eureka eBackpack
Lafayette High School	Lafayette eBackpack
Marquette High School	Marquette eBackpack
Rockwood Summit High School	Rockwood Summit eBackpack
Individualized Learning Center	ILC eBackpack

As school content systems were implemented, the district partnered with key issue management. With the district news automatically being fed to every school homepage, the district now owned a direct channel to the parents, and carried out this four-step plan:

- **We tell our parents first.** All press releases and media advisories are published on the home page of the [district site as it feeds the information to our 30 school sites](#). We have a captive audience before sending [important information](#) with our local media.
- **We tell them how decisions are made.** Ask Rockwood staff and parents: How are decisions made in the district? You'll hear the overwhelming answer: [By Committee!](#) We created templates for Committee's to share their agendas, resources and recommendations to the Board of Education.
- **We share the Superintendent's perspective on issues.** We give our [Superintendent a voice](#) with action plans, focus areas and frequent Ask The Supt responses.
- **We stop the rumor mill.** [Fact or Fiction](#) has been an effective resource. We pull from the district Fact-or-Fiction site and give responses front-and-center position on the district/school websites.

Evaluation: Results and Opportunities for Continuous Improvement

eBackpack has met and exceeded the objectives of the plan:

- During its first year, eBackpack averaged 14,930 visitors/month. The [vision scorecard](#) set the standard as 10,000 – 11,999 as the midpoint for the 2011-2012 school year. We have already exceeded Level 5: Vision within the first year of implementation.
- During the first six months of the launch, the [Rockwood App](#) had 62,724 visitors. We projected a 10,000 visitor baseline from August 2010 to Feb. 2010 so we have greatly underestimated the communication channel.
- The district's [School Climate Survey 2011](#) noted that parents were encouraged to be involved at their school with 54.7 percent (1,540) completely agreeing and 31.7 percent somewhat agreeing with the statement for a total of 86.4 percent. This is a 12.2 percent increase from the 2008 School Climate Survey. The objective of five percent improvement has been exceeded.
- In addition, [Web statistics from Rockwood Communications](#) noted the following from January 2010 to May 2011.
 - Overall district website traffic increased by 10 percent.
 - Overall school website traffic increased by 16 percent.
 - Overall teacher website traffic increased by 26 percent.

[Communication Accountability Program](#): August 2011 results from the CAP survey noted the need for school districts to “continuously communicate in a credible fashion.” The data reflected in the need for school districts to evolve into their own news source – and eBackpack provides this resource.

[Pew Research](#): Nearly half (46 percent) of American adults are smartphone owners as of February 2012, an increase of 11 percentage points over the 35 percent of Americans who owned a smartphone last May. We have seen the Rockwood App accepted by the school community.

What's Next: Improving the eBackpack and building the school-home connection

- We have changed the Communication refrain from “Build it and they will come” to “Build it, maintain it, promote it and they will come.” Accountability of contributors is our biggest challenge moving forward. The [eBackpack scorecard](#) is a valuable tool in assessing schools and their progress toward improving the quality, frequency and technical skill of creating online information. The recommendation is to include this assessment as part of our contributor's evaluation instrument so it will be a key indicator of their communication efforts.

- With the mass eBackpack trainings completed, Rockwood Communications can focus on those [schools that have lost web visitors](#) to the home page of the school site during this transition. As parents bookmark the eBackpack news service, some of the district information on the home page of the school site may be getting lost. We are evaluating how to improve this district-school connection within the successful eBackpack template.
- Flash banners are included on the home page of the district and all 30 schools' home pages. The purpose is to promote the school to prospective parents; however, Flash does not translate well in mobile platforms. We are evaluating a different platform for this level of school Web promotion.
- Electronic communication can be viewed as impersonal. This summer, Rockwood Communications will include a video component in our eBackpack plan. Every lead school principal will be featured sharing the multiple ways parents can communicate with the school, as well as opportunities for parent involvement. We will launch this new video on the school's eBackpack with the back-to-school initiatives in August 2012.
- The growth of a Rockwood opposition group has challenged the reputation of the school district this year. Misinformation from this group has spread rapidly through social media, as well local reporters who are eager to see "the mighty fall." To ensure Rockwood continues with open, honest, transparent communication efforts, two new tactics have been implemented in April 2012 – with more research on key issue management at the district level coming in the near future:

[Board Focus](#): Board Focus provides updates on Board of Education discussions, actions and policy. Updated after each Board meeting, Board Focus is a way for community to learn about the key issues facing the Rockwood school community.

[Behind the Headlines](#): Rockwood launched a new video series to share news about our schools, programs and district. Episodes address timely topics and include resources for parents and patrons to gain a better understanding of the issues.

- Rockwood Communications wants to determine if there is evidence to support a more direct connection of the eBackpack concept and the increase schools are experiencing in parents citing their involvement. As we complete a full-year cycle of our content management system, we will include a school-based eBackpack survey in the school-based eBackpack email. We want to have research on the following:
 1. Are the components included in the eBackpack school templates most effective? Would other resources provide greater returns?
 2. Respondents in the school climate survey cited that their school encouraged involvement. Does this "encouragement" result in action and are they involved?
 3. Determine the level of parents' awareness of key issues facing the district.
 4. What communication do parents need that they are not receiving?