

What is social media?

The interaction among people as they create, share, and exchange information and ideas over the Internet

Social Media

What can social media do for your school, your students, and you?

Across Sonoma County, we're seeing many examples of the creative use of social media by local educators. Teachers and administrators are turning to social media with greater frequency to promote programs, communicate with parents, engage students, and learn with colleagues. Although education doesn't yet mirror the worldwide shift to social media platforms, our forays into this new genre are proving useful—and powerful.

This issue of the SCOE Bulletin shares our county's growing interest in using social media tools to support and further the goals of local schools. Each image and all underlined text in this publication link to a live resource, so click to learn more or to follow, like, view, discuss, and comment.

PROMOTING THE POSITIVE

After years of blocking sites like Facebook and Twitter, schools are now realizing that these and other social media platforms provide highly efficient ways to disseminate news, promote their successes, and get important information to parents. While Friday Folders, newsletters mailed or emailed to students' homes, and robocalls can be successful communication tools, these "old style" methods are proving less effective in today's fast-paced, technology-rich world.

One of the problems with the old tools is that information is often outdated by the time it's distributed. How many January newsletters have included pictures from an October field trip? That said, newsletters may have a place in your school, but you might also find that social media can significantly strengthen your outreach.

Herbert Slater Middle School principal Jason Lea set up a school Facebook page in June 2012 with a goal of highlighting news and events at his school. "I started to use Facebook because we didn't have a school website and I wanted a way to get information out about the great things happening at my school," he says.

He created his Facebook page as a public relations tool and now has 623 "likes"—not bad for a school with 819 students. Since over three-quarters of Facebook users log on at least once per day, they are more likely to see a school's Facebook post than to visit a school website—or read a newsletter.

Like many educators using social media, Lea has learned that he needs

Facebook



facebook.com/HerbertSlaterMiddleSchool

▼
Reading this as a printed document? You can find the interactive version at scoe.org/bulletin.

to incorporate social media “tasks” into the school day rather than thinking of them as something to do if he has extra time. Keeping the information current and ongoing is important, but posting to Facebook can be much less time-consuming than producing a newsletter.

“I’ve worked posting into my normal workday and have seen great results. I have had posts reach over 1,000 people organically. It has helped keep parents, students, community members, and alumni connected to Herbert Slater Middle School,” he says.

Another school experimenting with social media is **McKinley Elementary** in Petaluma. They joined Facebook in October to share the innovative projects taking place in their self-contained grade 4-5 GATE classes, where every student has access to an iPad during the school day. This school serves a student population that is 90 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged. With these students now learning in an educational environment that is very different from what their parents experienced, the school wanted to share what the students were doing. McKinley’s Facebook page is still developing, but the descriptions and photos of student projects are giving families a glimpse inside the classroom.

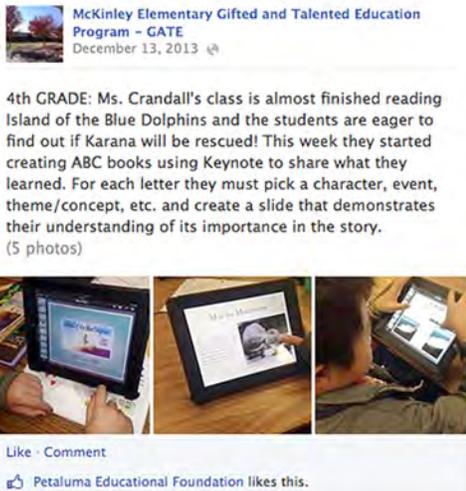
Twitter provides another approach to school communications, allowing schools to send short text messages (known as tweets) of up to 140 characters. Communication experts tell us that [Twitter is no longer optional for public schools](#); it is an essential tool. One reason: it is the most effective way to communicate breaking news in the event of a school emergency. Administrators can use a smartphone to post news and updates to their school Twitter feed, which parents—and students—can immediately access.

Amy Fadeji, principal of **Penngrove Elementary School**, sees Twitter as an easy and effective way to communicate with her school community. “As an instructional leader on my campus, I love telling the story of Penngrove for all to see,” she says. “Twitter allows me to make heroes out of our students and staff on a daily basis by sharing the awesome things happening around campus. With the help of my iPhone, I can share pictures, reminders, and podcasts with our community in seconds.”

Her Twitter feed is also featured on the home page of the school’s website, so it’s accessible in a variety of ways. Fadeji makes school announcements via Twitter, reminding parents that it’s a staff development day or thanking the local Rotary for a donation. She also reinforces her school’s positive culture through her tweets by sharing effective work in the classroom, showcasing teachers and students, and encouraging active learning across the campus.

Eric Sheninger, principal of New Milford High School in New Jersey and a recognized leader in the use of Web 2.0 technology in education, shared his perspective on social media during a [presentation at SCOE](#) in October. He encouraged local educators to use Twitter to create a “news stream” for their classroom, school, or district. Because Twitter feeds can’t be edited or filtered

Facebook



facebook.com/mckinleygateprogram

Twitter



twitter.com/pennpanthers

What's a hashtag?

A word or phrase preceded by a pound sign (#) that is used to identify messages on a specific topic

Why not blog?



“As soon as my students posted their journals on a blog, they dove right in to discussions via the comment feature”



Got photos of students?

► Most districts have policies requiring **parent permission** for the use of photographs and videos that feature students. As posting photos via social media becomes more common, schools still need to ensure that parent consent is secured.

Many California school districts now use an **opt out policy** for student photos. They clearly inform parents that, unless notified in writing of an objection, photographs and videos of their children may be posted in district-produced print and electronic materials.

Parents who don't want their children photographed must complete an opt-out form.



by others, it provides an opportunity to speak directly to stakeholders and drive messaging about education.

“What we've learned,” says Sheninger, “is that if you flood people with information about all the good work you're doing, they aren't going to be second-guessing or complaining” about education programs.

ENGAGING STUDENT LEARNERS

Social media can also be a tool for classroom instruction. Bill Whitaker, a third-grade teacher at **Healdsburg Charter School**, has actively engaged his students in blogging. “We use the website [Kidblog](#) every week. I usually pose a question or problem and the students respond, both to me and to each other. I try to design the questions so that they must form an opinion and back it up, which is not always an easy task for third graders!”

Laura Bradley, an eighth-grade teacher at **Kenilworth Junior High**, explains why she considers blogging to be far superior to the traditional pen-and-paper literature homework.

“There is tremendous benefit to readers and writers if they participate in a community with other readers and writers,” she says. “Unfortunately, it is difficult to facilitate those communities in a junior high classroom.... But as soon as my students posted their journals on a blog, they dove right in to discussions via the comment feature on the blog. They complimented each other's writing, corrected each other, questioned the literature, challenged their analyses, and even reached out with sympathetic responses when their peers shared personal connections to the literature.”

Bradley finds that blogging has other instructional benefits as well. Using the comment feature of the blog, she is able to write longer, more constructive feedback in response to student work than she would otherwise jot down on paper assignments. Because their work is “public” to classmates and they care about peer opinions, her students spend more time writing and proofreading their work.

Teachers are using Twitter for classroom instruction, too. For example, students in social science classes are monitoring current events in real time by aggregating tweets using hashtags—and they are getting first-hand accounts and pictures of events from around the world. Two recent examples are the tweets regarding [Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines \(#haiyan\)](#) or the worldwide reaction to the [death of Nelson Mandela \(#mandela\)](#).

Another use of Twitter can be seen in kindergarten classrooms. Here, teachers work with students at the end of the day to compose tweets about “what we learned today.” With just 140 characters, the tweets reinforce the learning for students. Shared with parents, they are a strategy for ensuring that lessons are also reinforced at home.

JOINING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Jennie Snyder, superintendent of **Piner-Olivet Union School District**, has created a large professional learning network on Twitter. Her tweets,

shared with some 2,500 followers, often contain links to blog posts or articles on improving education. Like many other 21st century educators, Snyder has turned to social media as a resource for quickly accessing information, sharing ideas, and locating new resources that support and enhance her work. She follows the tweets of other educators—and they follow hers—in an ongoing conversation about improving education.

Organized Twitter-based professional learning opportunities are also available. Many teachers are interacting via Twitter [edchats](#). Edchats are weekly conversations on specific topics that take place at a set time using a unique Twitter hashtag. Two popular edchats are [PBL Chat](#) and [Ed Tech Chat](#).

[Edmodo](#), a free social media tool often described as Facebook for schools, offers another avenue for educators to interact with each other

in text-based conversations. The platform allows teachers to join—or create—virtual communities focused on different areas of learning.

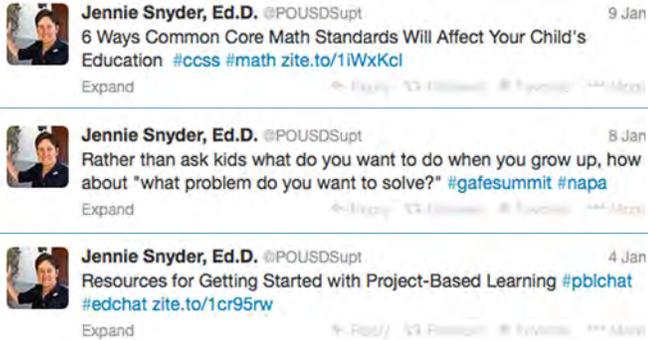
One very popular Edmodo group is the [Basal Alignment Project \(BAP\)](#), which now has over 35,000 members. It contains free, teacher-developed, Common Core-aligned lessons for the most commonly used basal reading series. Other writing, close reading, and English-language arts lessons are also available, and all are aligned to the new standards. Hundreds of teachers worked collaboratively to develop these “replacement lessons,” working in a large Edmodo community. This nationwide example is a model for how social media can support teacher-to-teacher interaction, leading to professional growth and enhancing student instruction.

SCOE’s Educational Support Services department has been using Edmodo to provide resources and host discussions associated with the professional development opportunities offered to local educators. Here, teachers and administrators access resources during SCOE seminars. They are able to download presentations, link to Internet resources, submit questions and comments to the presenter, and interact with others attending the session. They can also return to these resources when they are back at their own sites.

“We shifted to Edmodo this year because we wanted to share resources paperlessly,” explains Mickey Porter, SCOE’s assistant superintendent for instructional services. “But we saw it as a way to introduce local educators to the power of social media and to model how it can be used for school communications. We’ve incorporated Facebook and Twitter into our practice here at SCOE. Twitter, especially, has become an essential professional learning tool for Educational Support Services managers. We hope to encourage all Sonoma County educators to join the learning conversation!” ♦

About this publication: Content for this issue of the SCOE Bulletin was provided by Matt O’Donnell, [twitter.com/21cmatt](#), and Rick Phelan, [twitter.com/SonomaEdTech](#).

Twitter



[twitter.com/POUSDsupt](#)

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- ▶ *Connect with SCOE’s Educational Support Services department at [twitter.com/scoeESS](#).*
- ▶ *Use the [#scoe21c](#) hashtag to discuss and share information about 21st century learning in Sonoma County.*

Find SCOE on Facebook at [facebook.com/SonomaCOE](#).

