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Client and Audience Analysis:

Killearn Lakes Elementary School

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Introduction

Killearn Lakes Elementary School needs its web site redesigned. The sponsors of this site include administration at the school, specifically the school's Principal. Other indirect sponsors include teachers and support personnel at the institution. The audience of this web site includes teachers, parents, and students connected to the school, as well as the community at large. This includes current students, their parents, and current school teachers, as well as parents considering enrolling their children at the school, and teachers considering applying for jobs there.

The wants, needs, and expectations of each client and audience group vary greatly; sometimes these preferences conflict.   Differences will be handled in the following way: opinions of the administrators, as the primary sponsor, will be given the highest weight, while the opinions of other sponsors and all users will also be considered. The goal is to please as many people as possible while delivering a product that communicates information well.

Clients - Administrators

School administrators, like business executives, often have long lists of things they want in a web page. Usually, few of these items are true needs. As they are expected to keep their schools operating smoothly and foster a learning environment, principals want to showcase student work and push new programs. Because they are expected to keep safety and security a priority, they want to make contact information and emergency procedures readily accessible as well. They may also want to validate their work at the school by making available a personal message and picture of themselves. The problem with these wants is that there is not enough "prominent space" for all of the requested information. The home page cannot contain extensive

emergency information, a student work showcase, and a personal message. Some of these things

will need to be placed in more remote areas of the site.

In addition to these wants, administrators have needs. These needs are sometimes

overlooked. The most important parts of the page, from an administration standpoint, are critical

information and contributor usability. School location, hours of operation, and contact

information (phone numbers, email addresses, street address) are critical elements for the home

page. Usability refers to both the navigation and layout of the site and the backend portion.

Administrators will see both sides. A simple and easy-to-use navigation interface is required so

that principals can quickly learn the site and be able to reference it later, while the backend must

be user-friendly because administrators often produce emergency information that needs to be

communicated on a mass scale. In short, the site must be easy for the client to learn and update.

Clients - Teachers

Teachers are the other major "client" group, as they are site content producers and they

use the site to reach "consumers" (parents and students). The teachers have wants similar to the

administrators: they want to spotlight their classroom, their learning programs, and their teaching

history. Their needs differ: they need to have a web space for posting lessons, calendars, and

other information to communicate with the parents. They need a system for posting content that

is quick and easy to use, requiring little more effort than clicking the "save" button. They also

need an automated design system—teachers do not have spare time to spend laying out a page

and designing a color scheme, and they are not trained in web design. Templates or content

management systems are good options for meeting these needs.

Finally, teachers need to have collaborative tools to communicate with parents about student progress, field trips, and other classroom happenings. Many new web technologies such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, surveys, and reports may help serve these needs. Teachers should be given a user-friendly system for submitting information and attachments to the site, and templates for interactive content. Teacher pages should be accessible through a common menu system, and they should be isolated from the main site.

Users - Teachers

As users, teachers can use the school site for keeping up to date with current school-related events. Newsletters and calendars can help teachers find the dates of these events in order to help them better prepare. The site can also help teachers who teach the same grade level share information and lesson plans. Information on school wide programs is also accessible through a section of the site.

Teacher users can use the site as a tool for teaching the children in their class. The site allows for external links to be posted on the various grade level sections as well as individual class pages. This allows teachers quick easy access to any web sites that may be needed during class. The teachers may also use the site to see what their peers are teaching. This way they can collaborate or possibly find a better way in which to utilize technology in the classroom.

Through the site teachers can also convey messages to students and to parents. This can be anything from a friendly thank you to and important announcement. In this way, teachers use the site as a communication tool. They need a system for easily adding new announcements and posting new content.

Perspective teachers also have wants and needs concerning the site. As professionals searching for a job, they need to know what facilities and programs the school offers and how they would fit in there. They want to get a view of how the school runs. To meet these needs and wants, the site should communicate an overall view of the school through an events calendar, a newsletter archive, information about current faculty and staff, and an overview of the facilities. Seeing how close knit the school is as well as how they work with curriculum interactively is important to teachers who are evaluating the school.

The school mottos and songs are available online in addition to the future outlook for school improvements. These are important thing for a future faculty member to know. The former convey school spirit and unity among students, teachers, and staff. The latter shows the school seeks to improve upon itself, a goal potential teachers should relate to.

To the perspective teacher, information on both school and classroom goals should be available. Classroom goals should be classified by curriculum, for both entire grade levels and individual classrooms. Class progress and current classroom topics should be posted to give perspective teachers a sense of what material they would be required to cover if hired.

Users - Parents

Parents are the most important client group affected by this project. The parents need the site to communicate what is going on at the school, which includes many aspects of school operations. The most valuable aspect is individual student progress tracking. Parents need to see assignment grades, upcoming projects, and standardized test scores. They use this information to help the student at home, enforce better study habits, or schedule a conference with the teacher. Another important aspect that parents require is information about school functions, such as

events and operations. For example, sporting events should be posted on the site, and holiday

celebrations should be communicated as well. Times and locations for these events should be

listed. Other school information, such as lunchroom policies, transportation systems, and

security protocols should be made available.

Parent users also have several wants that may or may not be met by the site. An extended

calendar, while requiring a lot of maintenance, would be a very useful tool for parents. Online

conference systems would reduce the time parents need to spend on the school campus, but they

may also reduce personal interaction and impede the communication process. Such a

communication system may have far reaching implications for other meetings, including faculty

meetings and collaboration groups. Another thing parents might want is a search tool built in to

the site. This would be very effective for all sponsors and audiences, but it can be difficult to

implement. It would be good to explore outside search options (such as Google) as well as

organize the information effectively enough that the need for search is minimized.

Users - Students

Perhaps the least important client group is students. While they are too young to fully

appreciate the site or have developed wants for it, there are some needs of student users that must

be addressed. Some wants of the student users include a student work showcase, games and

entertainment, and social networking-type options. Student work showcases can be difficult to

implement because they quickly become overloaded and confusing to navigate. If this is

implemented it should be organized and show only the best projects. Games and entertainment

have little place on a school web site, unless they offer some sort of educational value. This

want could be addressed by providing links to learning entertainment sites. Finally, although the

students will want to be able to use the site to communicate with each other, this is difficult to implement in a secure environment. It would probably be best to avoid individual student accounts, profiles, or personal communication as the students are too young to make such personal information available on the Internet.

While the wants of the student users at the school are difficult to implement, their needs should not be overlooked. Students need easy access to assignment information, a calendar of events, school news and updates, orientation to the school and teachers, and a site that teaches them more about computers. Students should be able to easily find their teacher's site and download assignments and supplemental material, while noting due dates and upcoming topics. Calendars should show school holidays, lesson plans, and important events. The home page of the site should offer news relevant to students since they see the page every time they open an Internet browser at the school. Prospective and new students need interactive content that introduces them to the school and its various buildings, their assigned teachers, and school administration. Finally, browsing the site should provide these young minds with a kinesthetic learning experience, teaching them the basics of web site browsing and hyperlinks.

Matching Wants & Needs

After careful analysis of the wants and needs of each client and user group, it seems that many of the goals overlap. All groups need a site that is easy to navigate, includes only basic information on the home page, and makes an overview of the school readily accessible. Another commonly requested feature is a calendar of events. Finally, some sort of showcase of student work or school-wide projects was requested by every group.

Navigability is the key to communicating information effectively via a web site, so it is good that all groups agree on the importance of this component. It may be debated which information is important enough to be included on the home page. An overview of the school is important to administrators who want the school to look good, to prospective teachers who are considering working there, and to parents and students who want to get oriented to the new environment. The calendar should be easy to read and should include all upcoming events relevant to the whole school. If possible, it should include filters for grade levels and subject areas. Finally, like the home page content, the examples included in the showcase are highly debatable and will vary between the groups.

Diverging Wants & Needs

In some ways the client and audience groups diverge from each other. The administrators want too much information about their initiatives, while the teachers want their classroom programs featured more than is necessary. The parents want functionality such as search and teleconferencing that is complicated and not requested by other groups. More importantly, both the client and audience groups have some expectations that diverge from the principles of good design. The clients have too much information to feature on the home page. They do not understand that users rarely scroll and that large volumes of text make a site look boring and cluttered. The teachers want videos, file attachments, and other features that fill up disk space quickly and load slowly for end users. It is important that the site is designed in a way that includes as much of the wants and needs as is possible without going against standards of good design.

Site Goals

A careful analysis of the wants and needs of the clients and users of the Killearn Lakes Elementary School web site reveals several things about the necessary goals of the site. The site should accomplish the following things: facilitate communication between parents, students, teachers, and school administrators; provide information about the school and classroom and shared curriculum and lesson plans in an easy to navigate format; offer a computer learning experience to student users; provide access to a calendar of school events; showcase student talent and special programs in a concise format; and present all elements in a logical and appealing way.

The following things, while requested by at least one client or user group, should be avoided in the site: intense focus on an individual or unnecessary emphasis on a program; cluttered layout or too much information on a single page; games, graphics, colors, or other elements that do not serve the educational and communication purposes of the site; and extra content or archived material that overwhelms the user. This analysis of the wants and needs of the clients and users and the purpose of the site will aide in the site's redesign and facilitate the creation of a professional web space.