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A Web-based program implemented this year allows Hannah Boswell, seventh grader at MVK Middle School, and principal John Runkle to look at Hannah's grades on the Internet. Parents can use the site from home. (Herald Photo/Jeanne Millsap)

Area students look to 'Net good grades

By Jeanne Millsap Herald Correspondent

Parents of children attending two area schools can now go on-line to see their children's school grades, attendance reports and teachers' comments.

Mazon-Verona-Kinsman Middle School and Minooka Community High School have both instituted Web-based interactive programs that allow parents, students and administrators access to students' academic progress and other school activities.

Both schools began the programs this school year.

M-V-K's program is called "The Maverick Reporter," and is run with software called "TeacherEase." It's used with grades five through eight.

Superintendent Dr. Lynn Bertino-Neville said the system was put in place to help communication between the home and school — a goal of the district.

"We truly are trying to improve communication between home and school to support kids as learners," Neville said. "This day and age, giving parents on-line accessibility is the direction to go."

Neville describes the Maverick Reporter as a tool between school and home that helps parents stay aware of student progress. It also supports teacher-parent communication, she said.

MVK Principal John Runkle said teachers in every subject post on the network students'

grades, as well as their own comments on the student's progress. Some may give written pat-

on-the-back, while others may need to comment on why a student received a lower grade than he or she was expected to receive.

Teachers post assignments and grades weekly. Attendance is recorded as well.

Parents are given passwords and can check on their children's progress from the convenience of their homes if they have computers with Internet access.

Parents without Web access can receive hard copies of their children's progress reports in the mail.

During an at-home review of their children's records, parents can click on links to teachers to send an e-mail asking for clarification or to set up a face-to-face meeting.

"The comments have been really positive," Runkle said. "Kids have responded well to it, too."

Runkle said he uses the system to keep an eye on students who are getting low grades. He said he makes sure to keep in contact with them to see what's going on.

"We are really pleased," Neville said. "Parents are checking into the system, and we're seeing some nice e-mailing back and forth between parents and teachers. Parents are telling me they really like it." Neville said she, like Runkle, has been using the reporter to offer encouragements to students. "For me, too," she said, "it's been really nice."

MVK paid for the program through a federal Rural Education Achievement Program, or REAP, grant.

Minooka Community High School students and parents have been logging on to a similar Web-based interactive program called "PowerSchool." The Minooka High program was instituted this fall. Debbie Dobson, assistant to the technology director, said, like MVK's program, PowerSchool keeps track of grades, attendance and progress.

"Parents can log in and see their kids' attendance and grades to date," she said. "They can also see what assignments led up to those grades."

Parents and students have their own separate user names and passwords.

"We are getting a lot of positive parent comments," Dobson said. "It's really kind of a neat thing."

She also said students can benefit from periodically checking their grades. The program can be particularly insightful, Dobson said, for students wanting to know their participation grade. Many teachers give grades on how well students participate in class.

"They can't say, 'I didn't know I was doing that bad,'" Dobson said.

Even students who aren't on-line at home can check out laptops at the school during study times or before or after school.

Parents can also request to receive weekly e-mail updates from teachers on their children's progress.

Dobson said the program is very teacher-dependent. The district doesn't require teachers to log grades and comments in daily or even weekly. They must have their records updated on the system only by progress-report time.

Dobson said the record-keeping is not very time-consuming for teachers.

"A lot of them have used computers to keep grades in the past," she said. "It's as simple as typing in a grade."

Some teachers in Channahon Grade School Dist. 17 have opted to purchase Web-interactive software themselves.

Channahon Junior High School Principal Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant said that although the district hasn't implemented a program, eight or nine of her teachers use a program called "mygradebooks.com."

The program automatically notifies parents by e-mail of changes in student grades. Tarrant says teachers tell her the program has helped them, as well as the parents.

"Parents can see a problem before it gets too big," she said.

Area schools that do not have Web-interactive parent-teacher programs include Saratoga, Minooka grade schools and Morris District 54 schools.