

# NORTH CENTRAL ILLINOIS

## Online report card tracking eases stress for some

### Parents, students can monitor grades all year at Putnam County

By Shannon Crawley-Serpette  
Putnam-Marshall Bureau Chief

MCNABB — Report card days aren't so scary anymore at the junior high and high school in Putnam County.

Many of the teachers at the two schools did away with their traditional gradebooks this school year and joined an online grading program called TeacherEase. This program allows students and their parents to check grades at any time.

Terry Warren, assessment coordinator at the junior high, implemented the program in his classroom when he was teaching fifth grade during the 2003-04 school year. Now Warren also serves as the TeacherEase administrator in the school district.

"I spent about a year trying to find a good online grade program that wasn't going to create more work than it was worth," Warren said. "Right away I had good feedback from parents and students."

One of the students who rely on TeacherEase to track his grades is Ryan Dempsey, who is in the eighth grade. Dempsey, who said he is doing well in school, checks his grades daily.

"You don't have to wait until mid-term to figure out what your grades are," he said.

His mother also logs on to check his grades periodically, he said.

Does he mind that his mother has daily access to his school performance?

"Sometimes," he said, with a sheepish smile.

Dempsey admits his grades wouldn't be as good as they are if it weren't for TeacherEase.

When his mother checks his grades, she sees if he isn't performing up to snuff.

Dempsey said his mother has

taken away his video game privileges on occasion — a move that never fails to motivate him to raise his grades.

Nina Jacobs, another eighth-grade student, said she checks her grades a couple times a week.

"I just want to know what my grades are and what I need to work on to get them up," she said.

Her mother also will check her grades once in a while to make sure she is staying on track.

"She doesn't really worry about me because I'm really good in school," Jacobs said.

Students can do more than check assignment, test and cumulative grades with TeacherEase, Warren said.

"The little icons show which assignments they are missing," he said. "Missed work in my classes did drop."

He attributes that to parents being able to find out if their child had work to turn in.

"We can even do behavior logs on this," he said, adding that parents could see that, too, if a teacher opts to fill it out.

The system is safe and secure to use, Warren said, adding that it is highly unlikely hackers could access it.

When a parent decides to enlist in TeacherEase, they must provide an e-mail address. They are then given a password they will use to access their child's grades.

People who want to sign up for TeacherEase can do so on the district's Web site or by calling Warren at the junior high.

Children who want to see their grades usually check on them from home, but Warren said they are allowed to check their grades at school.

As administrator, Warren knows how many people use TeacherEase at the junior



high, which has 287 students.

Currently, there are 232 accounts set up for parents and/or students. Out of those accounts, 202 people have checked their grades at least once.

Putnam County junior high teacher Nancy Hopkins, who has 28 years of teaching experience, wasn't sold on the idea of going to an online grading system.

Prior to implementing TeacherEase, Hopkins said the district had tried a few computerized grading systems. She always worried about losing her information.

"So I stuck with my old calculator," she said.

Hopkins decided to try TeacherEase and was surprised with how much she liked it. She said it has improved the communication between the teachers, parents



NewsTribune photos by Kemp Smith

and children.

"I think it is extremely teacher friendly and I am probably the one who didn't

want to do it the most,"

Hopkins said. "I don't have a grade book anymore. If I can do this, anyone can."

**Above:** Putnam County Junior High eighth-grade students Nina Jacobs and Ryan Dempsey check out their grades at school while the school's TeacherEase administrator, Terry Warren, watches. Jacobs and Dempsey said they check their grades frequently. If not for the program, Dempsey said he might not be doing as well in school as he is. **Left:** Terry Warren monitors the TeacherEase program from his office. Warren implemented TeacherEase at the junior high in McNabb. Warren first learned about TeacherEase in 2003 after searching for a quality online grading system. Warren said parents, students and teachers really like the system.

■ Shannon Crawley-Serpette can be reached at 339-2268 or nputnam@ivnet.com.

## Bureau Valley gains money; School deficit remains a problem

### Options 3, 4 call for school closings

By John Thompson  
Princeton Reporter

MANLIUS — The good news coming out of two Bureau Valley school board committee meetings Friday morning is that the district's estimated budget deficit through 2008 is less than what was estimated at the school board meeting on Jan. 16.

The bad news: It's still a deficit.

Superintendent Rick Stoecker told the finance committee, which met at 10 a.m. Friday in the district's administrative office in Manlius, that Bureau County supervisor of assessments Tom Sweeney said he should add \$1.6 million in estimated tax revenue for the 2006-07 budget year.

Instead of an estimated 3.2 percent decrease in revenue, the district is looking at a 1.5 percent increase, Stoecker said.

What this means is that rather than dealing with a two-year deficit of \$455,000, the district now only has a two-year deficit of \$330,000.

Stoecker said there were many factors for the change including the software used by the county to calculate assessments, a move to enforce compliance with Department of Revenue guidelines for assessing non-farm wooded tracts and Bulletin 810, which changes the multiplier used to

assess cropland.

The big question was how this news will affect the four options put before the board at the Jan. 16 meeting for dealing with the deficit.

Option one is to do nothing; option two is to cut programs and staff for a savings of \$1.36 million; option three is to move students from Manlius and Sheffield to Buda, move the alternative education to Manlius and close Sheffield and Wyand buildings for a savings of \$318,000; option four is to close the Manlius Elementary building, move the alternative education program to Manlius, close Wyand and move the third-, fourth- and fifth-graders to Walnut for a cost savings of \$217,000.

Building committee members, who met at 7 a.m. Friday, agreed that they could live with a deficit of \$150,000 and recommended taking option three off the table and moving ahead with option four and some of the cuts in option two if necessary.

The finance committee, however, could not come to a consensus.

"My first thought is it puts the balanced budget within striking distance," finance committee member Ken Siltman said. "If our estimates are close, then with option three we can have a \$317,000 savings, which puts it in the ballpark. If the deficit were still \$400,000 or \$700,000 we would have no choice but to cut programs. Now if we can get ourselves down to \$100,000 or \$150,000, that's fine with me."

But finance committee chairman Keith Bolin maintained that the change in the estimated two-year deficit proves that the

## Seattle guitarist plays Princeton

PRINCETON — Seattle-based guitarist Elizabeth Brown will perform a solo recital at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 29 at Prairie Arts Center, 24 Park Ave. East, Princeton.

Her program will span four centuries of music, starting with works by Spanish composers for the baroque guitar, and switching to the modern (classical) guitar for pieces from Latin America and the virtuosic Folia variations by Portland-based composer Bryan Johanson.

Throughout the performance, Brown will share stories about the composers, give historical context and provide insights on the music.

Brown is head of the guitar and lute program at Pacific Lutheran University and is active throughout the Pacific Northwest as a solo and ensemble performer.

She has given solo

*"This woman enjoys her music and her audience can't help but be swept along with her."*

— *Guitar Soundings*



recitals and performed concerts throughout the West Coast, and has been a featured soloist for the Seattle Bach Choir, the Northwest Chamber Chorus and St. Mark's Cathedral Associates.

Brown's first solo recording, "La Folia de España: Dances for Guitar," featuring works for baroque, 19th century and modern guitars, was recent-

ly released on the Rosewood Recordings label.

Also active as a chamber musician, Brown is a member of Baroque Northwest, Le Nuove Musiche and the Puget Sound Consort and has appeared with ArtsWest, Seattle ProMusica and the City Cantabile Choir. For more information visit [www.plu.edu/~brownec](http://www.plu.edu/~brownec).

## City to look for contamination at dry-cleaning site

### Mendota gets state approval to conduct Brownfield assessment

By Brock Cooper  
Mendota Bureau Chief

MENDOTA — The state approved the city of Mendota's use of an existing Brownfield Development Grant for assessment of former dry-cleaners.

"They approved enrolling the site into our grant program," economic development director Don Adams said.

The Campbell's Dry-cleaning site in Mendota's downtown, 805 Illinois Ave., has been vacant for more than 10 years. The \$45,356 Illinois Environmental Protection Agency funding through Opportunity Returns allows for a Phase I environmental site assessment and to initiate a site remediation program.

Mendota received a \$240,000 Brownfield Redevelopment grant in 2003, and only

\$117,000 has been used. The funding will leave the city with \$123,000 left over for future projects.

"This is our first downtown site," Adams said.

Dry-cleaners are notorious for contamination, according to Adams. The assessment will allow the city to apply for federal money if the site needs to be decontaminated.

Adams said once everything is completed, the site will be much more appealing to buyers. Adams said the best use of the property would be for the city to acquire it so the council can decide what new development will go there.

Brownfield Redevelopment Grants are awarded to Illinois municipalities for environmental assessments and cleanup of abandoned or underutilized properties in preparation for development, according to a press release from the governor's office.

"More and more, as the availability of afford-

## Dalzell school board reviews audits, finances

By Allison Ryan  
NewsTribune Reporter

DALZELL — The Dalzell grade school board met in a special session Wednesday night to discuss the last five years' audits and make projections for the next five years. Superintendent Jane Bauer said the board is looking to avoid future deficits by cutting \$15,000 in spending each year.

Bauer said even with unexpected expenses like this winter's heating bills, she expects the school will make it through the year without running a deficit, something it hasn't always been able to achieve in the past.

She credits a working cash bond and a tax increase from \$0.96 to \$1.71 per \$100 of equalized assessed valuation for the school's current healthy financial situation.

"Without that, it would be a different picture," Bauer said.

The board considered several ways to cut its spending, but committed to none.

"We're going to do some inventory and look closely at how we do our purchasing," she said.

The school also will apply for an Illinois Clean Lighting grant, she said, which would enable the school to replace every light in the building for a net cost of \$2,980, rather than \$10,925. Also, the more efficient lighting is expected to save the school about \$5,093 per year, according to Bauer.

"Those are smart dollars," she said.

"The five-year projections show some challenges, but it's nothing we shouldn't be able to handle," she said. "I think the Dalzell grade school community will be pleased."

Allison Ryan can be reached at 223-3206 Ext. 131 or at [srv-reporter@newtrib.com](mailto:srv-reporter@newtrib.com).

See 'Brownfield' Page A5

See 'Deficit' Page A5