

PRELIMINARY REPORT

The “Digital Disconnect”
*Disconnected Communities Are Impeding
District, School and Student Success*



STEIN ROGAN + PARTNERS

RESEARCH



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“The natural consequence of involving the community will be that schools will need to be more connected to the community and the community to our students. In turn, our schools will become central enterprises within the community, contributing to its vitality and longevity.”

Alan November, *Author of Web Literacy for Educators*

Study Objective and Methodology

In June 2008, Stein Rogan + Partners, an independent market research firm, conducted an online quantitative study in order to better understand how, why and to what extent K-12 school districts are using online solutions to connect their communities.

The study was designed to assess whether districts are moving toward connecting their communities – as well as the pace at which they are doing so. The study also was intended to determine district leaders’ views of the benefits of connecting their communities, along with the technological capabilities required. Stein Rogan + Partners was commissioned by Schoolwires, Inc. to conduct the study.

245 participants completed the survey. At the 90% confidence level, the data is reliable +/- 5.25%.

Composition of Sample

The study was fielded nationally among public school superintendents, assistant superintendents, CIOs/CTOs, IT managers, public information executives and principals.

Over two-thirds of respondents were either superintendents/assistant superintendents (33%) or principals (40%). IT titles comprised 16% of the sample; public information executives totaled 7%. Small, medium-sized and large districts were all represented in the study.

Key Findings

While the “Digital Divide” May At Last Be Narrowing, A “Digital Disconnect” Pervades the K-12 World

Much has been written about the “digital divide” – and much is being done to narrow that divide. Now, despite a growing imperative to connect their communities more closely, K-12 districts have much to do to make these critical community connections a reality.

According to findings from this first-of-its kind study, while K-12 school districts aspire to create stronger connections with their communities, a “digital disconnect” clearly exists.

In fact, 95% of respondents say connecting and communicating with district communities is a particularly significant issue, and 87% say it is important in relation to all other district initiatives.

Yet, 53% of respondents report that they do not currently have a strategic solution for connecting their communities. This is despite the fact that respondents state, almost universally, that community collaboration and communication are of utmost importance to a wide range of district constituents, including administrators, teachers, parents, students, taxpayers and the media.

Respondents also pointed to a number of specific communities within the overall district communities that warranted their own community connections. In order of importance, these include:

1. District-wide communities
2. Teacher/class communities
3. School board portals/communities
4. Individual school communities
5. Parent portals/communities
6. Athletic department communities
7. PTA portals/communities

The Importance of Community Connection

When asked why connecting their communities has become so important, respondents cited a number of key reasons:

- School district success is completely dependent upon the community; therefore, connection with that community is key.
- This is true not only in terms of achieving buy-in for key initiatives and budgets, but also in terms of ensuring that the education being delivered is the education the community needs and wants

- There is a sense that without optimal communication, activities will be misunderstood and even aborted and that progress will be impeded
- For many respondents, community connection ensures a positive district image, dispels rumors and prevents dissemination of incorrect information
- Additionally, connected communities provide an extension of the school into the home – shoring up the ability of the teachers, school and the district as a whole to perform well
- Of note, some respondents believe the advance of technology has greatly increased expectations around the level, quality and immediacy of communication a school district provides

Given this importance, what’s preventing districts from connecting their communities? Verbatim responses from respondents reveal that the reasons are primarily 1) lack of knowledge; 2) costs and funding; and 3) time and resources.

As a result, districts are resorting to what they consider work-arounds and ad-hoc solutions. The lack of effectiveness of these solutions is evidenced by the fact that *only 8% of respondents feel they are doing a very good job of enabling closer, more continuous connection with their communities.*

Key Benefits of a Strategic Solution for Connecting Communities

Study results point to a number of key benefits that, together, comprise what respondents consider important in a strategic solution for connecting their communities. These include:

- The ability to enable faster and more effective communication between the district and its constituents
- The ability to provide teachers and students with more engaging, immersive 21st century teaching/learning tools
- The ability to enable teachers to communicate with parents more efficiently, so they spend more time teaching
- The ability to engage parents in everyday education process and progress

From a technology solution standpoint, respondents pointed to easier, more customized website implementation, email alerts, web-based databases, highly reliable hosting, secure digital file store/file sharing and online data security/privacy as essential component parts of a strategic solution to connect their communities.

Full study findings will be made available in mid-July 2008. To request a free copy, please email research@schoolwires.com.

About Stein Rogan + Partners

Stein Rogan + Partners (www.steinrogan.com) is a full-service research company that specializes in the education market. SR+P conducts qualitative, quantitative and ethnographic research to help companies in this marketplace understand trends, develop strategy and stake out thought leadership positions. In recent years, SR+P has conducted dozens of studies for emerging and established brands including Achieve3000, Blackboard, Discovery Education, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, Peoples Publishing Group, SchoolNet, Schoolwires, Timecruiser and others. Stein Rogan also provides branding and integrated marketing communications services to companies in K-12 and higher education.

About Schoolwires

Schoolwires, Inc. (www.schoolwires.com) is a leading national provider of strategic online communication, community-management and productivity solutions that result in stronger school communities, more effective schools and greater student success. With the launch of Centricity™, Schoolwires delivers the first strategic solution for connecting K-12 communities. Centricity brings together robust and flexible website management, community management, and web 2.0/social network capabilities in a single, user-centric solution. Schoolwires also delivers Synergy™, a digital file sharing solution, Assist™, a service request solution, and Share, an online client community and support center.

Schoolwires solutions are deployed at more than 3,500 schools serving an estimated three million students, parents, teachers and administrators throughout North America. Schoolwires is ranked as the #174th fastest-growing private company in the nation and the third fastest-growing within the education sector in the coveted Inc. 500 list.



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