

Top Ten Reasons to have A Classroom Website

- Ryan McCallum, Buffalo, Minnesota

10. It's an easy way to meet the needs of many students who have IEP and 504 plans

Having a classroom website provides students with special needs - from Autism to hearing and vision difficulty - access to notes, clear instructions, review materials, and specific assignment details. When a teacher is in the practice of uploading classroom materials, students, parents, and special educators can more easily follow the events in the class on their own and better handle extended deadlines and any trouble that a student may be having. You'll be surprised at how genuinely appreciative parents of all students will be with your site - but you'll be even more pleased with the response of the people who support your students with special needs.

Plus, special needs students aren't the only ones who benefit from clear communication about what's happening in your classroom.

9. You're creating an archive of your class - complete with the exact materials you've used

Not everything a teacher does fits neatly in a paper planning book anymore. With a classroom site, you can consolidate and make sense of files, links, multimedia sources, and prompts from anywhere into one place. Then, each time you teach a class, you can refer back to the last time it was taught and grow as an instructor. Most teachers already take time to write down and chronicle daily lesson plans. Putting this online takes the same amount of time or less, is more useful for you, and it serves a greater purpose.

8. A teaching website keeps you organized and on track

As you take time to post and reflect on what goes on in your classroom, you'll understand where you're class is coming from and develop a more clear plan for where it's going. You'll find that you're more accountable to your own plan and goals when they are clearly articulated each day or week and published online.

7. It's getting so easy to do that it can actually save you time

With options like WordPress, Moodle, Google Sites, Edublogs, and Weebly, you can create a site for free and instantly. Teachers can go from having absolutely no online presence to a complete classroom website within a couple of hours. Granted, creating and hosting a website used to be a lot of work, but now, if you can send an email with an attachment, you can make a website without breaking a sweat. Plus, these sites look good and come with enough options to be as large or small as you'd like. With a little front-loading of work, you'll find yourself creating content that enriches your classroom and your relationships with parents, educators, and students naturally and easily.

6. You have an easy answer to "What did I miss?"

With a classroom website, students who miss a day can stay in the loop and come back to class prepared to contribute and catch up. You'll save the time of preparing packets of homework for

students with extended absences or vacations, as well. Students who missed a learning target earlier in your class or who move in from another district will have a great place to refer back to to help get them back on track.

5. Helicopter parents have an off-site landing pad

With a classroom web site, you can communicate clearly with students and their parents. This informs parents of what goes on in your classroom and often gives them a chance to be more constructive with their feedback to you about their students' successes and struggles. They also can educate themselves about your policies, goals, subject matter, and style - which allows them to help their students do better in your classes.

Also, parents will think of you as an organized, competent, and open educator. This can never be a bad thing.

4. Your contributions go farther than you think

A well-done classroom website has global impact. One day, you may get an email from a teacher 1,000 miles away who would like to thank you for inspiration or who may want to borrow one of your lessons. You'll find yourself helping new and experienced educators locally as well, because you'll easily be able to share resources with them. Your whole curriculum or a single page is just a click and an email away.

3. It's okay to show off

You do amazing things in your classroom every day. Share what you do with the world. Include pictures of projects, announcements about major successes, and the impact of powerful learning experiences with your school, parents, grandparents, and the world. You can make your students into published artists, photographers, writers, and producers with a single click. Students get much more engaged as their audience grows.

2. It's a two-way street

A class website isn't just a way for you to communicate with others, it's a way for others to communicate with you. Your students can respond to prompts, give you instant feedback, reflect on learning, and ask questions.

1. It's your gateway to engagement

Having a classroom website is the best launching pad to using technology in truly engaging ways with your students. As you get in the habit of updating your site, you'll find yourself bringing in more resources and expanding the borders of your classroom far beyond the school grounds. As the process becomes natural and easy, you'll start thinking of teaching differently and begin searching for ways for students to create things with technology as well. Plus, you'll get better at finding resources and connecting with other educators, which will only fuel your encouragement with technology use in your classroom.