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## SA school has no need for notes home

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By Rick Foster/Sun Chronicle Staff  
Sunday, September 17, 2006 11:27 PM CDT

ATTLEBORO -- Families of Hill-Roberts Elementary School students can now listen in to the school's morning announcements, learn about important historical events or hear a vocabulary-building "word of the day" at home thanks to the iPod generation.

Four third-grade pupils, under the supervision of Principal Matthew Joseph, began making daily morning podcasts this month to keep parents up to date on parent-teacher organization meetings, announce student birthdays and issue reminders about a mascot-naming contest.

Families can get the announcements each morning by logging onto the school Web site, subscribing to the podcasts on Apple Computer's iTunes network or by downloading them to their iPod.

It's a far cry from sending home a mimeographed sheet of paper in a student's backpack.

"We've had a lot of positive reaction from parents who like the fact that they get to hear their student or be able to find out what we're doing," said Joseph, a former Pittsfield educator who took over as principal this month. "It helps them feel connected to the school."



Students at the Hill-Roberts Elementary School deliver their daily podcast of information to classmates. They are, from left, Chantelle Montminy, Nicole Savoie, Amanda Stors and Grant Sherman. (Staff photo by Martin Gavin)

Four third-grade pupils -- Chantelle Montminy, Nicole Savoie, Grant Sherman and Amanda Stors -- were picked to organize the daily podcasts. They were taught by Joseph how to use the computer applications, operate a laptop and set up the microphones.

Students are chosen randomly from each grade to read the announcements each day.

Last Thursday, fourth-grader Courtney Daggett informed listeners with the "Fact of the Day" that on that day in 1716 Boston Light became America's first operating lighthouse. Jessica Alvarez read birthday greetings and Madelyn Sampson delivered the daily vocabulary word: "flexible."

School librarian Julie Cotsalas, whose son was one of the first to podcast, said listening in is fun and informative.

"On the weekend we had family in and we logged on to the school Web site so they could hear him," she said.

Cotsalas said participating in the program is also a good introduction for students to



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speaking in public.

Joseph, who in the past has used his technological expertise to introduce middle schoolers to laptops and to help teachers make the most of computerized learning tools, admits that he encountered skepticism when he said he planned to teach 9- and 10-year-olds the ins and outs of podcasting.

`` They do it all," Joseph said. `` The first day of school, I showed them. Since then, they've taken over."

Podcasts are first digitally recorded, then exported to the school Web site, as well as being broadcast throughout the school. The recording is converted to a podcast on the iWeb.

A password known to Joseph controls access to the school Web site.

To listen to morning announcements on the web: visit <http://hill-roberts.kannoncom.com> and click on `` Listen to the morning announcements."

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