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Six Steps for Planning a Successful Project

by Kathy Baron

Sure, King Middle School has some amazing projects, but the Portland school has been refining its expeditionary learning projects for nearly two decades. David Grant, who guides the school's technology integration and curriculum development, has put together a six-step rubric [2] for designing a project. He says Fading Footprints [3], which became a model for King and Expeditionary Learning Schools, doesn't take an entire school, or even a team of twelve, to plan and carry out; one or two teachers can tailor this one to fit their time and resources.

Six Steps to Planning a Project

The Fading Footsteps project is a twelve-week interdisciplinary ecology unit centered around the guiding question: How does diversity strengthen an ecosystem? Using this project as an example, see how King Middle School creates an action plan around each step.

Step 1: Develop a compelling topic that covers state standards, has an authentic connection to the local community, and provides opportunities for every student to do meaningful, independent research.

How they do it:

- When it came time to study ecology as part of the science and technology standard, King Middle School teachers agreed that a compelling topic seemed to flow naturally from their local environment. They decided to study indigenous animals that are endangered and threatened, focusing on the animals' habitats and why the animals are in danger.
- A number of local experts visited the school to help kick-off the project; other wildlife experts took the students on an outdoor expedition to see firsthand how living things depend on one another and on non-living aspects of the environment.
- It was a powerful subject that engaged the students in doing something with a real world value. Students selected the animal they wanted to study, researched its life cycle and habitat, learned why it was in danger, and identified possible steps that could reverse the animal's decline.

Step 2: Develop or design a comprehensive final product that each student will have a role in creating, and could be used by local residents or professionals in the field.

How they do it:

- The 1-to-1 laptop program was a bonus when it came to creating a comprehensive final product. Each student used a variety of media to report his or her findings, including writing, producing scientifically accurate field guide illustrations, taking digital photos, shooting video, and working on websites. After each individual project was completed, all students worked together to produce a single CD-ROM [4] representing the entire ecology curriculum. The CD-ROM and their individual work were posted on line [5] on the school website, along with additional resources, including a glossary of terms.
- Students were motivated to produce a professional quality CD-ROM because the teachers had arranged to have the discs placed in Portland's elementary school libraries and to be on sale at the Children's Museum of Portland. In addition, the students' artwork went on display at the museum and at the Maine Audubon Society. In addition, students analyzed professionally published field guides.
- Teacher teams designed and built an exemplar model themselves before assigning it to the kids to make sure it was possible to do in the time frame allotted and with the number of students involved.

Step 3: Involve professional organizations and professionals from the community to connect the academic study with the real world, and have students assume these professional roles during the expedition so they

get a sense of what it would mean to be professionally engaged in meaningful work.

How they do it:

- Recruiting professionals began early on with teachers reaching out to various organizations and researchers for assistance and resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided information about the Endangered Species Act, pollution, habitat management and restoration. An expert from the Maine Department of Wildlife visited the school to talk with students. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife provided information on state species populations. The Allied Whale Program at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, hosted a class trip.
- Once they heard and saw how the experts do their work, the students assumed those professional roles for the duration of the project. They became investigators, researchers, artists, and policy advisers. One part of the project had students caring for salmon eggs with the goal of releasing the fish into the river after they hatched.

Step 4: Identify and organize the major learning resources for the expedition, and make sure they're available. (This one is critical and is often left out by schools).

How they do it:

- Well before all the pre-planning is done, teachers have to shop around so they know that there are enough developmentally appropriate resources to go around so every student has a chance to do meaningful research. If those things don't exist, you can be two, three or four weeks down the road on a project and discover there aren't enough learning resources for the students.
- King Middle School avoided what could have been a frustrating experience when teachers started to map out a project to examine the effects of ship wrecks off the coast on the local marine life. They found out that there weren't enough sunken boats in safe locations for each student to conduct meaningful independent research.

Step 5: Coordinate calendars. (This may be the hardest piece of all.) Expeditions are interdisciplinary and require a lot of planning to ensure that each piece flows smoothly from one to the next. They require enough time for each component to be done well, for students to get time in the field, for experts to come in at the appropriate place, and for the final product to be high quality.

How they do it:

- Fading Footprints was a twelve-week unit. The final product was very complex; students couldn't be developing tech skills at the same time they were processing content information. The project was broken down roughly into three digestible, meaningful, month-long chunks.
- The first month was dedicated to developing comprehension via direct instruction, reading and research, field trips to the Maine Audubon Society and the College of the Atlantic, and presentations from guest lecturers. All students received formative assessment during this time through journal checks, quizzes and tests, as well as interviews with teachers.
- During the second month, students conducted independent species research and produced a prototype product.
- In the third month, students worked on and refined their final projects. They also critiqued each other's work.
- Tech learning was scaffolded out so students weren't learning the technology at the same time they were creating their individual final products and the CD-ROM.

Step 6: Plan a final experience or culminating event. Showcase student work to the public or outside of school.

How they do it:

- All students received a copy of the CD at the culminating event at the Children's Museum of Portland before their parents, community members, and experts. The CD is available in Portland's elementary school libraries, and was sold at the Maine Audubon Society and the Children's Museum in Portland. In

addition, all of the original artwork in the CD was displayed at the Children's Museum.

Adapted from an article in SEED Packet: Spreading Educator to Educator Developments [6], by King Middle School teacher David Grant, based on King's six-step rubric [2].

(For more information on the Fading Footprints project, check out our article, "Laptops on Expedition: Embracing Expeditionary Learning." [7])

Source URL: <http://www.edutopia.org/maine-project-learning-six-steps-planning>

Links:

[1] <http://www.edutopia.org/kathy-baron-content>

[2] <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-stw-maine-project-learning-six-step-rubric-planning-successful-projects.pdf>

[3] <http://king.portlandschools.org/files/onexpedition/expeditionproducts/footprints/frameset/frame.htm>

[4]

<http://king.portlandschools.org/files/onexpedition/expeditionproducts/footprints/resources/fprints/concepts/vidpage.html>

[5] <http://king.portlandschools.org/files/onexpedition/expeditionproducts/footprints/>

[6] <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-stw-maine-project-learning-fading-footprints.pdf>

[7] <http://www.edutopia.org/king-middle-school-expeditionary-learning>

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Expeditionary Learning at King Middle School

June 18, 2009

1. Develop a compelling topic:

- ✓ that targets the content and skills that students need to know at their grade levels;
- ✓ that is engaging to students;
- ✓ that addresses community issues or is meaningful to the community;
- ✓ that provides opportunities for in-depth investigations by all students;
- ✓ that provides opportunities for students to identify with or consider multiple perspectives (on gender, race, ethnicity, social class, or controversial scientific issues);
- ✓ that has guiding questions that synthesize the big ideas and require students to engage in complex thinking.

2. Design a comprehensive final product:

- ✓ that requires each student to create representations of the targeted knowledge and skills;
- ✓ that addresses the guiding questions;
- ✓ that includes accommodations for differentiation;
- ✓ that has an exemplar model and product descriptors created by the house or by other houses that can evolve during the expedition;
- ✓ that is adapted from a current professional product;
- ✓ that includes high quality writing and craftsmanship from each student;
- ✓ that includes a plan for students to archive their finished pieces and reflections digitally for portfolio.

3. Choose the professional role(s) that students will assume during the expedition:

- ✓ so that professionals can be scheduled to work with students;
- ✓ so that students can develop the skill set(s) associated with the profession(s) and expedition;
- ✓ so that students can present their final product to the appropriate audience.

4. Identify and organize the major learning resources for the expedition:

- ✓ that are developmentally appropriate for all learners;
- ✓ that provide opportunities for all students to pursue independent research;
- ✓ that are made available in an on-line index, in the classroom, and/or in the library.

5. Get the expedition on a shared team calendar:

- ✓ to schedule major learning activities and due dates;
- ✓ to block out a number of days in the final weeks of the expedition for student and teacher critiques and revisions.
- ✓ to schedule school specialists and community experts;
- ✓ to share school resources;
- ✓ to block out testing dates and other events;
- ✓ to book 2 - 3 field experiences.
- ✓ to block out additional time for the expedition manager.

6. Plan for a culminating event:

- ✓ that includes the exhibition or evidence of high quality work and writing from each student;
- ✓ that provides opportunities for every student to talk about his or her learning with a significant adult or audience.
- ✓ that includes a narrative of the expedition produced by students.

<p>accommodations for differentiation</p>	<p>Several strategies have been developed at King to help all students to stay meaningfully engaged with the content and skills of an expedition for the length of the expedition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Designing a multi-tiered final product</i> in which each student is required to produce a discrete portion that demonstrates targeted knowledge and skills. Students who finish ahead of classmates are expected to take on additional production responsibilities and / or develop other portions of the product such as: additional research topics related to the expedition; documentary video, audio or other media chronicling the expedition; additional graphics, etc. For students who need support to produce the required portion of the product, individual modifications are developed by the team. • <i>Providing differentiated learning resources and experiences</i> to match the interests, abilities, needs and styles of all students including multiple anchor texts, multiple student roles, and a variety of learning activities that match a variety of learning styles. • <i>Planning with specialist to provide differentiated instruction and support</i> for students with IEPs, for English language learners, and students with other learning needs.
<p>appropriate audience</p>	<p>The people who can evaluate, appreciate, and / or benefit from the final product. Usually, these people have been involved in the expedition along the way as professional experts, community resource people, etc., but may also include students who can benefit from learning about the expedition topic.</p>
<p>archive finished pieces and reflections for portfolio</p>	<p>The team identifies the common pieces that will best represent learning in the students' portfolios, and creates a process for archiving the work digitally in students' accounts.</p>
<p>community experts</p>	<p>Expeditions involve expert members in the community. Sometimes the experts are fulfilling their professional roles, sometimes they are relating their experiences, etc.</p>
<p>community issues</p>	<p>Community issues lend purpose and meaning to students' learning experiences. Community issues can create the human interest element, and can lead to natural opportunities for service and presentation of learning to the public. Community issues can mean local or global issues.</p>

compelling topic	The compelling topic captures the content of the learning expedition, links the content to big ideas, and specifies the real world context (setting, event, time, issue) in which that content will be studied. The compelling topic is chosen in consideration of the content that students need to learn. It is compelling to students in that they can develop a vested interest in gaining knowledge and skills related to the topic.
complex thinking	Students will employ higher order thinking strategies (comparing, classifying, deduction, induction, analysis, constructing support, abstracting, analyzing, perspectives, etc.) to address the guiding questions and major learning activities of expeditions.
comprehensive final product	A comprehensive final product conveys the big ideas and the discrete learning of each student in the expedition. The product is appropriate to the topic studied, reflects the students' best abilities (via many revisions), is adapted from a professional product, and is designed to be shared in a public forum.
craftsmanship	Student work demonstrates ownership and pride through attending to detail, making work aesthetically pleasing, and meeting high standards. As much as possible, students use professional tools and formats, and master the conventions of the medium.
critiques and revisions	<p>Critiques and revisions are on going processes throughout the duration of expeditions. However, additional planning consideration should be given to blocking out days in the final weeks of an expedition to ensure that all students are supported in producing their best work for the final product.</p> <p>Critiques and revisions include self-editing, peer critiques and editing, teacher critiques and editing, and several revisions.</p>
culminating event	<p>Expeditions end with culminating events. These often take place off site. Every student has a role at culminating events, which includes discussing his or her learning. Culminating events address the guiding questions, showcase the final product, and provide appropriate forums for expedition community experts to interact with students about their learning and products.</p> <p>Procedures and skills for the culminating event are taught and practiced before the event.</p>

engaging to students	Students understand the expedition's connection to the real world and are motivated to engage in real world applications of new knowledge and skills as part of the expedition experience.
exemplar model	<p>Exemplar models are planning tools created by the teachers prior to the expedition so that teams can anticipate and manage the workflow of the expedition. Building the model prior to the expedition enables teachers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organize the product resources; • sequence skills and knowledge instruction; • plan the project backwards on the calendar; • anticipate the time needed for student revisions; • plan for differentiation; • identify what quality work looks like; • and make connections with experts in the building and / or community; • discover stumbling blocks. <p>Exemplar models take time to create. Teams are encouraged to request coverage to schedule a day to develop their models.</p> <p>Exemplar models are distinct from exemplars. Exemplars are products produced by students in previous expeditions that the teachers use to inspire students and develop / communicate ideas about quality.</p>
expedition manager	The expedition manager is a rotating role among the four core house teachers; over the course of two years, each core teacher has the expedition manager role once. The role of the manager is to ensure that the logistical needs of the expedition -- from planning to execution to debriefing -- can be met. The expedition manager does not need to be the person who is taking the academic lead.
field experiences	Expeditions include a minimum of 2 – 3 field experiences. Fieldwork is used to build both curiosity and background knowledge and to do in-depth investigation. Fieldwork has a clear purpose that furthers the work of the learning expedition: students collect data, conduct interviews, or do structured observations. Procedures and skills for fieldwork are taught before the event and data collected are analyzed and used back in the classroom. As much as possible, fieldwork is modeled on the authentic research of professionals in the field.

guiding questions	Expeditions have two or three open-ended guiding questions. Guiding questions convey an expedition's starting point and trajectory. Often they indicate the roles that students will perform. Guiding questions are complex and investigative in nature, and can best be answered by combining knowledge with experience; the answers to guiding questions cannot be looked up in a book. At the end of an expedition, all students will provide appropriately sophisticated answers to the guiding questions, implicitly or explicitly, through their work.
high quality writing	Writing that has been developed through the writing process, including self-editing, peer editing, teacher editing, and several revisions.
in-depth investigations	Expeditions emphasize depth over breadth. Students are given the time, resources, and purpose to deeply investigate a topic. Students engage in research, hands-on investigations, field work, connected learning activities, and product development to gain deep understanding and experience of the expedition topic.
independent research	<p>The independent research process includes surveying a variety of resources to build background knowledge, followed by targeted inquiry. Independent research is a core component of learning expeditions. Independent research happens in two general ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) When each student has a unique topic in a learning expedition, students pursue research individually and include their findings in their portions of the final product. In this case, the final product can be used to assess an individual's research performance. 2) When an expedition has students assigned in teams to topics, each student is still responsible for pursuing independent research on the topic, and developing his or her own conclusions. Subsequently, student teams can share their research and findings and collaborate on shared conclusions. Individuals are assessed, however, on their independent work.
major learning activities	Events that provide experiential opportunities to develop understanding of targeted knowledge and skills for an expedition. Most expeditions have 4 – 6 major learning activities which include fieldwork, research, product making, and continuous development of a skill or area of knowledge.

major learning resources	Text, mixed media, and human resources that are the predominant sources of information for the expedition.
multiple perspectives	<p>Every student should be able to see him or herself in the context of the expedition. Teachers can be mindful of choosing topics, experts, professions, products, etc. that provide all students with opportunities to make personal connections to both the content being studied and the roles being performed.</p> <p>In addition to identifying with the expedition, topics and learning experiences should include multiple points of view and provide students with opportunities to challenge and expand their sense of self.</p>
narrative of the expedition	<p>Narratives of the expedition can include student presentations, video and multimedia displays, or text and graphic displays.</p> <p>The expedition narrative helps students and the audience understand what students learned and how they learned it.</p> <p>Student media crews can be developed at the beginning of an expedition to capture media and produce the narrative along the way.</p>
on-line index	A variety of on-line tools and resources are available for teachers and teams to collect, organize, and deliver resources. All teachers have access to blogs and web-based server spaces. On-line classroom sites are also available.
product descriptor	Product descriptors are produced by teachers, usually with input from students, to identify and define the key components of expedition products.
professional product	<p>Expeditions products are professional in two ways.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Products are based upon actual professional products modified to match the developmental levels of students. As much as possible, students use professional tools and formats, and master the conventions of the medium. 2) Products require students to demonstrate professional work habits, including attention to detail, a sense of ownership and purpose, a commitment to quality, the ability to collaborate and manage time, and the practice of continuous improvement.

<p>professional roles</p>	<p>Students take on professional roles in a variety of ways.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students learn about how professionals perform tasks that address the problems and issues related to the expedition. 2) Student tasks are modeled upon professional tasks and students are taught how to perform those professional roles. 3) Students demonstrate professional work habits, including attention to detail, a sense of ownership and purpose, a commitment to quality, the ability to collaborate and manage time, and the practice of continuous improvement.
<p>school specialists</p>	<p>People in designated roles (special ed, ELL, literacy, technology, world languages, health, library and media specialist, related arts, and custodial staff) as well as staff who are experts in areas that are not identified with their subject area.</p>
<p>shared team calendar</p>	<p>Teams are expected to keep a shared expedition calendar to support collaboration and resource sharing within teams, among specialists, and among houses. Teams are expected to post fieldwork dates and major learning events to the King Middle School on-line calendar.</p>
<p>targeted knowledge and skills</p>	<p>Targeted knowledge and skills correspond to grade level learning standards but are more specific to the expedition's context. The targeted knowledge and skills are taught so that students have the resources to explore the expedition topic; engage in meaningful fieldwork and other roles; address the guiding questions; and produce and present the final product.</p>

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Family Handbook 2009-2010

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Welcome

Dear Parents and Students:

Welcome to the fifth edition of our CBHS Family Handbook. **With the arrival of the Class of 2013, we begin on version 2.0 of Casco Bay High School. Last year, we graduated our first class, and 100% were accepted into college.** This year, we launch the task of revising and re-visioning Casco Bay High School to further narrow the gap between our vital, ambitious aspirations – and our daily practice. This handbook represents our best thinking, blending the design principles of Expeditionary Learning, the philosophy and policies of the Portland Public Schools, and our lessons learned from the first four years.

As the expedition of creating an outstanding high school continues, it is what is constant that grounds us, that guides us, and that makes us a great option for any Portland teen. We start with a profound commitment to our 3R's: **Relationships, Relevance and Rigor.** And our goals remain clear, ambitious and essential: **a community of learners where the wonderful in each student is known and nurtured, where learning is catalyzed by student inquiry and academic adventure, and where every graduate is prepared for college, work, and citizenship.**

I want to once again thank all of the educational entrepreneurs - all of the CBHS families, students and staff - who have helped to write (and re-write) this handbook. Your contributions have shaped who we are and will shape who we become. May the expedition before us lead to as much growth and learning as the expeditions that have already transpired. May it lead all of us involved towards the best version of our selves.

Derek Pierce
Principal

The CBHS School Logo was created by Allie Heller, Class of 2009.

The MISSION of the Portland Public Schools is: “Ensuring That All Students are Learning for Their Future.”

The Vision for Secondary Education is that:

- 1) Each student is known well by at least one adult in the school.
- 2) The curriculum is relevant, challenging, and engaging.
- 3) Each student has input into decisions that affect him/her and his/her learning.
- 4) Each student will engage in a variety of learning experiences.
- 5) Students, staff, and parents are expected to treat each other with respect.
- 6) Parents, community, staff, and students establish and maintain positive and productive relationships that improve student achievement.
- 7) The school utilizes assessment and evaluation systems that inform teaching and promote high quality learning.
- 8) Staff and students have high expectations of/for themselves and one another.
- 9) Each student consistently experiences equitable academic and social opportunities.
- 10) Each student is prepared for college, work and citizenship.

Family Involvement

Supporting Success

At CBHS, we don't just enroll students; we enroll families. We look forward to partnering with parents and families to help our students to achieve their best. Here are some recommendations for how you can help:

...creating an effective learning environment at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a schedule and structure to support your teenager's study, completion of homework, and meeting of standards. • Limit TV and recreational computer time and engage your teenager in other educational activities. Keep books and other reading material in your home. • Set aside a reading time each day. • Let your child see that you are committed to lifelong learning.
...learning about and supporting our school's values and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow your teenager to participate in fieldwork and extended trips. • Be familiar with and discuss with your child the content of this handbook. • Attend school events and parent meetings as you are able. • Join our parent e-mail list (e-mail kiersd@portlandschools.org) and parent yahoo group (e-mail cbhsparents@hotmail.com) so you can receive CBHS news and updates. • Let a Portland friend or neighbor know about CBHS and Expeditionary Learning.
...staying informed about your child's progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend your child's student-parent-teacher conferences. • Attend events where your child's work is publicly exhibited. • If possible, use online resources to stay informed, such as the Powerschool, the CBHS website and teacher blogs. • Read teacher communications and respond promptly when asked for input.

Volunteer Opportunities

Parent volunteers both enrich the life of our school and provide vital support for our programming. We appreciate any time you spend supporting our school. Please note that classroom volunteers must complete the Portland Public schools volunteer screening process. Contact Partnership Developer Kathy Cole for more information (colek@portlandschools.org).

School Projects	Parents at our school may lead or help with volunteer projects ranging from manual labor to school governance. Their contribution is key to our school's success. Please contact Principal Derek Pierce if you are interested in learning more.
Classroom/Library/ Tutoring Help	If you would like to help out in the classroom or library, or if you could volunteer as a tutor, please contact Kathy Cole.
Fieldwork	We are often in special need of help on fieldwork days. If you are able to volunteer, please contact your child's relevant teacher or crew leader.
Crew Parent/ Hospitality	Each crew has a designated parent who works with the crew advisor to contact or organize the crew families when appropriate. Contact your child's advisor for details. Additionally, parents are sometimes asked to support events by providing food, drink, or related supplies.
Professional Services/ Expertise	Oftentimes, a parent's special skill, expertise, experience, hobby, etc., can be brought into the classroom or contribute to a school-wide project. Examples of classroom contributions include a nurse's aide providing feedback on a student's health care presentation, an artist teaching animation skills, an immigrant discussing their native culture or a war veteran discussing his or her experience. Please contact Kathy Cole or Teaching Strategist Leslie Appelbaum if you have

	a service or expertise that you would be willing to share.
Parent Advisory Group	<p>The Parent Advisory Group (PAG) meets monthly with the principal and is open to any interested parent. The purposes of the Parent Advisory Group are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To advise the principal on select issues. 2) To facilitate communication between the school and the parent body (and the broader community). 3) To promote parent involvement at Casco Bay High School. 4) To lead efforts to appreciate CBHS staff. 5) To provide feedback on governance proposals. 6) To assist with fundraising and securing resources that will improve teaching and learning. 7) To support one another as parents of teens. <p>Meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month from 5:30-7:00pm. Please contact Principal Derek Pierce or CBHSparents@hotmail.com if you would like more information.</p>

Parent Information

Early Release Days

On Early Release Wednesdays during the 2009-10 school year (October-May), the student day will begin at 7:45am and end at 12:55. Additionally, on the following Wednesdays, CBHS students will be dismissed at 11am to allow for staff development: October 28th, November 18th, December 16th, January 27th, February 24th, March 24th, April 28th, May 26th.

Emergency Information Forms

Please promptly return the Emergency Information Forms so that school staff are aware of your child's medical information and know how to reach you during the school day. Please let us know as soon as possible whenever you have a change in address, telephone number, place of employment, or emergency contact person. Thanks!

Immunizations

Maine law requires all students to receive the following immunizations: three polio (one after the first birthday); three DPT (diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus); rubella (German measles); mumps; and measles. Non-immunized students are not permitted to attend school unless the parent/guardian provides a written statement from a physician that immunization against one or more diseases may be inadvisable, or the parent/guardian provides a written statement that immunization is contrary to their beliefs. The Superintendent and/or public health officials may exclude non-immunized students from school if there is a health threat to the student or others.

School Cancellation or Delay

In the event of emergency or weather-related school delay, cancellation, or early closing, announcements are made on local radio and TV stations, including Channel 3. Please do not call the school as telephone lines are very busy during these times. School delays or cancellations are announced beginning around 6:00 am. Early school closings may require announcements during the school day.

Student Records

Students' rights of confidentiality and protection from improper disclosure of their records are respected by Portland Public Schools in accord with the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 and with Maine law. Contact Deb Kierstead if you would like more information about the specific rights of students and families under these provisions.

Messages for Students

To minimize classroom disruptions, when a parent/guardian calls with a message for a student, the message will be given to the student during lunch. If the message is of an urgent nature, the student will be called to the office.

