

# STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

## Schools Collaborate on Project Transformed by Technology

As told by Lynn Lieberman, Oakland Schools, Waterford, MI to Suzie Boss

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Twenty-eight school districts serve the suburban communities of Oakland County, Michigan. Some schools are more technology-rich than others, and teachers' technology skills also vary. As a recent project demonstrates, teachers are willing to learn to use technology if it can help them build a stronger community of learners. Six elementary schools serving different communities participated.

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Second- and third-graders typically study their communities as a social studies project. By using technology to connect students with online resources, and to connect students with their peers at other schools, teachers have transformed a traditional project. What's more, students now see how they can use technology to build connections, conduct research, and create something of lasting value for their community.

Students went beyond the role of community reporter for this project. They gathered information online, shared their reports with students at other schools, then provided critical feedback to help their peers improve their work. Teachers and district technology coordinators helped students post their polished reports to the Web, then students became investigators. They used the community reports and comparative data to determine how their communities were alike and different.

Through this collaborative project, students discovered they were connected to their community, connected to other classrooms, and connected to other students who could be a resource in the future. Parent connections also grew. In one class, the teacher invited parents to learn from their students. A local newspaper featured the students' work. Parents not only learned more about their children's education, but also more about their own community.

Technology provided a catalyst in this project. Students took pride in creating a Web resource that benefits the larger community. Teachers saw that they could use technology, together with collaboration, to bring resources, a sense of inquiry, and authenticity to student learning. Parents saw that technology could enable them to be co-learners and supporters of classroom activities. What more can we hope for than to launch a teacher, student, and parent partnership in learning?

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