

## Week 2 - Discussion EDUC 666

### Virtual School Visits

In order to familiarize PAVE students with Webpage formats and navigation issues surrounding them, we were tasked with evaluating several cohort member campus homepages and offer suggestions and observations.

S.B. offered the following in reference to remarks about our respective campus Webpages:

“Rudder MS URL is <http://www.nisd.net/rudder/> . I am ashamed I admit I never really looked at our site much until now. Oh my! I don't mean to be negative or critical but...it hasn't been update since god was a teenager. I am the Read180 teacher so naturally visited that page. No one had ever conferred with me on it; I assume that that CIT wrote it I don't know. That page has not been updated since 2002! Needless to say very little of it is correct since my program has continued to change every year. I assure you I will have input this year, WOW I'm learning so much, I love it!”

To which I responded:

S: – It was good to meet you the other day, finally a face/name association... You are going to have fun with your Mr. LeBlanc! Updates to the Rudder website would be good. Your CIT has been making periodic changes throughout 2004 and as late as May 2005 reflected as “this page last updated” and “Webpage being constantly updated.” Updates are actually the least of the distracters that stuck out to me. Most pages have a two tone blue textured background with relatively small blue text. The contrast is hard on the eyes. If you check the Library Page, the background is still textured blue, but much lighter allowing text to shine through legibly. Some of the info on the “homepage” seems scattered or out of place. For example “Rudder Food Drive” may fit more logically under “General Store” and “Box Tops for Education.” The Campus Information page is rather bland. It sort of screams that something is missing – most

pages have pictures, this one does not. Consistency with text color does not reign supreme, although the textured background seems to apply to all CIT-generated pages (for example, the AUP info is black text). Speaking of links...under "Education Links" there are lots of history and science; but in an age of language arts and math focus, there are no reading links and only one each for English and math. Departments and Teams are split. Perhaps Teams would be better as part of departments...Under "Departments" there is no link to Special Education, yet "Golf" has one. Team pages are not consistent: some have mascot or logo pictures, others have very dark, shadowy front view of school. Again Special Education stands out as "Local Curriculum Team" whereas all other teams use a team name (Thoroughbreds, Mustangs, etc). And the Local Curriculum Team page is titled "Broncos."

Sorry, Susan. I could go on. I've looked at several school websites the past couple of years, just browsing around, and Rudder's has always stood out as an "ouch" for me. There are lots of good information on your campus Web site, but it is not well-organized, and rather hard on the eyes. Then, I added to S.G. and S.R. these remarks in reference to their new school's Home Pages: Sandra, you and Shawn need to double team your CIT. First of all, when attempting to access your campus Webpages, a parent is going to run into an "Introduction Page" which serves only as a roadblock to your "homepage." On the Intro page, a rather bland graphic breaks into two criss-crossing stars and then text invites you to "enter here." There is reference to Longhorn Pride, but no longhorn, cheering students, school logo, or picture of "newest middle school in NISD." Once one starts clicking pages, a multitude of graphics and gizmos result in what military folks refer to as "hurry up and wait." The homepage "photo link" to a slide show, may not result the viewing public actually getting a slide show of pictures. Older technology gets loaded rather quickly with pictures and gee-whiz graphics that eat up "working memory" and

leave folks curious as to "what was that all about" and "why can I not access this?" Some screens open to very wide pages with text that is easy enough to read, but extends beyond the normal limits of one's view, requiring the curious to use the horizontal scroll bar for each line of text. Navigation between pages are agonizingly slow while viewer waits for graphics and pictures to load. There are lots of great ideas (Parent Center, for example), that should allow the casual browser to click and view interesting material. But, alas, "downloading images" and "11 more files to load" messages are the sole entertainment as one ponders what lies ahead and how much longer is this going to take? Once you get to the "Parent Center," the font changes by a magnitude of ten or so, further exacerbating the need to horizontally scroll back and forth. In short, "shortcuts" are not that short. On the Principal's page, there are several typos. She says she sees a "sea orange," rather than a "sea of orange" cheering in the stands. And secretaries are prone to ask "How many I help you?" rather than "How may I help you?" Some of the pictures have no "meaning" in regard to "school", "students", "teachers", or Longhorns for that matter: what is the image on the Administration Page? Flower? Immortalized road kill cartoon character? The basic conceptual structure appears to be sound with promise of lots of interesting links to good information - or good links to interesting information. The linking needs some work; it is slow and distracting. Pages need to be scrunched to fit the screen, rather than extending around the side of computer, this is rather aggravating. And more consistency needs to be made with font size. You have a golden opportunity to become the CIT's best, best friends! Have fun.

To open discussion on my campus Web pages, I offered the following information: I am one of several in this cohort who are somehow attached now or have been in the past to Pat Neff Middle School. The URL is <http://nisd.net/neff/> or can also be readily accessed through NISD

homepage <http://nisd.net> (CLICK on either the SCHOOLS tab or "Select a School (middle)" and scroll to "neff." As several of you have already pointed out with their own campus Web pages, the Neff pages are also out of date and lack a certain sense of appeal. There is actually a lot of interesting and useful information available here, but house-cleaning is in order.

E.A. pointed out, "Neff does have a lot of interesting history. It has beautiful tile murals displayed around it that give Neff character. Although the Website could use new graphics to give Neff an updated technology appeal. There is a lot unused white space on several of the pages. Also extracurricular activities could be posted to make the school more community friendly. The site is easy to navigate through due to the lack of extras it does not have."

S.B. offered the following response: "Neff has a very nice web site. It was visually appealing and easy to navigate. I especially liked the drop down menus on the buttons on the home page. Those were the most helpful on the website. I believe that all three audiences, parent, teacher, and student would feel very comfortable navigating the site. I enjoyed see the pictures of the teachers with their small biographies. The moving graphics perked up the home page but was not distracting. When I visited I had no problem with the NISD button, it did take a fraction of a second longer than the other links but it was not a problem. I noticed when I opened the site it was left justified, and that there was a lot of space on the right. My only suggestion is that it be centered."

M.C. added: "I enjoyed my cyber visit to Pat Neff Middle School. It is a well done website. It makes information available for students, parents, and teachers in an easy to navigate and attractive format. I have always admired the murals on the campus walls. What a treasure!" She then introduced her own Web pages as a "work in progress." My response to her self-critical remarks was:

M.: Very impressive "work-in-progress." I like the contrasts; easy to read. Do you mean to keep present background colors, or eventually change all to light green or white with green trim? The homepage is green on white and hotlinks take one to green pages except for Admin Staff which is very blue. I clicked all the buttons and could not get Helpful Links, PTA, Library, Special Programs, and PE/Athletics to work - I took that as "future links - work in progress activity." Under Academic Teams, only the sixth grade teams have mottoes, and I couldn't get Homework Links to work. Sixth and seventh grade teams are green on white, eighth grade is solid green. Also, some pictures wouldn't display on my archaic screen. How do we ensure that graphic images will display for general public once we all get the super-duper up-to-date XP technology with all the toots and whistles? For now, nothing else really stands out, except for some text over-running some of the images (homepage hotlinks, and Academic Team page). You have a great start to a very appealing web site. She replied as follows:

“Thank you for the encouraging words, Rocklin. The links that are not active are the ones I am presently working on. the Helpful Links are a collection of websites by subject that I am working on. They are many and I am presently working with tables on that page. The PTA and Library pages are on hold for now. The librarian promises to get me the database password information for students and parents to use. I am waiting on the new PTA officers' information and their activities' dates. The Special Programs is the most current page I am working on. the Special Education, GT, TAKS Review and CIT pages will be links from there. The homework links will not become active until school starts and the administration and teams made a decision on what format we will use this year at Jordan for homework. Again thank you for your kind words and please check in again to see the progress.”