

EDUCATION K-12

Are you a teacher looking to increase parent involvement — without adding to your existing workload? Or perhaps you're an administrator seeking an opportunity to build or strengthen your campus community? Pine Island School District first-grade teacher Josh Westphal has discovered the answer to both educational quests: in budget-friendly, easy to use Ustream. Broadcasting performances, field trips and more — Westphal keeps busy parents connected with and engaged in their children's learning environment (and has administrators and school board members taking notice, too.)

"I'm a huge advocate for Ustream in the classroom — I have just seen awesome things happening." As an educator, Westphal's core teaching philosophy is rooted in the idea that parent involvement leads to more engaged learners. It was finding a way to share class activities with working parents, which first led to his exploration of video streaming as a classroom tool. "My philosophy has come from the standpoint that students with parents and families who are supportive — not just academically, but who showed up for sporting and other events — generally perform better in the classroom, overall."



"Most of our families have two working parents and grandparents who are far away, so they can't attend every event . . . Of course the parents would love to be there but people don't have days off to spare."

After doing his homework and researching multiple providers to identify the most affordable, robust platform, Westphal selected Ustream. "A huge factor was the ease of use. We have parents watching from iPads, iPhones, computers and Android devices. I looked at some of the other live streaming sources when I was doing my research and Ustream is just so simple."

Getting his administrators on board wasn't difficult, as Westphal's supervisors understand the value of integrating streaming technology with campus activities. "They just wanted to make sure it would be done with quality, and they wanted to ensure the children's privacy was protected. Finally, they asked if it all went well, if I'd be willing to show the other teachers how to do it, too."

"For our first streamed kindergarten performance we had 100-150 family members viewing and our school board thought that was awesome. Immediately following the performance, grandparents and aunts and uncles who watched were able to call and tell the kids what a great job they did. For the children to have that gratification of grandma and grandpa saying, 'I wasn't able to be there, but I watched you live and I thought you were great,' really means a lot to the kids and to parents. We received tons of emails asking for us to keep broadcasting."

Westphal urges his fellow educators to connect with busy parents by experimenting with streaming, as he did. "I started out small, parents just love watching the kids doing what they do. I saw a ton of success, so then I started doing live streams of our field trips. And Westphal's advice for schools interested in streaming? "As with anything, start out with something fun and small and just build upon that. Build a following with the parents and they will get addicted. Be creative."

"It's been wonderful and my excitement can't even match the excitement I'm getting back from parents. They've fallen in love with Ustream and what it can do and now they're asking 'How can I do this?' because they're making connections with how they might be able to use it in their own lives."

"I love doing it and it goes along with my philosophy of getting the families involved — I see it as a win-win-win. We've had zero negative feedback."

What savvy educator wouldn't want to take advantage of an affordable, easy tool with virtually limitless possibility for learners of all ages? "There's tons of ways to use Ustream in the classroom — things will just pop up." Take it from Westphal, who already knows what he'll be doing during his semester break — "My dream is broadcast our school sporting events . . . so my summer project is to write up a proposal to the school board!"

