

## FEATURE STORY

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Ahead of the Curve**

**Joseph Paolo, Vice-Principal, Weir Middle School, Hancock County**

Vice-Principal Paolo is always thinking ahead, and planning for future needs and ongoing growth opportunities. Never satisfied with simply remaining current, he anticipates what is on the horizon, and he insists that all who can identify and affect change in his school become involved. He facilitates personal and professional growth plans that are reviewed and adjusted on a continuous basis.

"I have a background in both business and education," says Paolo. "One of my strengths is the ability to communicate with all concerned parties, including but not limited to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. I use direct and concise communication to identify and clarify the process. I spend time with teachers one-on-one to establish early buy-in for new concepts and initiatives. I use a give-and-take format with a variety of technological tools. With parents, I find them especially supportive once they fully understand how a new process will benefit their child."

Weir Middle School received a two-year SEEDS grant from *The Education Alliance* for \$48,000. Paolo titled his project "Educate Beyond Traditional Boundaries." His vision for change focused on changing the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of all stakeholders. Through his SEEDS initiative, he imagined increasing student learning and achievement by reaching beyond the boundaries of "how and when we learn." In short, Paolo refused to accept that learning stops when the school dismissal bell rings.

Paolo's SEEDS initiative created, entirely from the ground up, a secure Internet tunnel so that students could access and work only within websites approved by the school. Each student received a netbook and a headset. The goal was for students to log-in to the new system from home and participate in a live online conference with fellow students and a teacher; the other students and a teacher were located either at school or another remote site. If students did not have WI-FI access, the grant provided cellular technology for an Internet connection. Paolo believes that Weir Middle School was the only school at that time in the state (and perhaps in the country) that accomplished a safe and secure environment for remote learning.

Dr. Louis Watts, Ph.D., from Marshall University and Tim Saab, Executive Vice-President with Centra Bank, partnered with Paolo to develop the project mission and goals. Dr. Watts communicated with Paolo on nearly a weekly basis via Skype during the first year. Watts was instrumental in developing measurable objectives and providing project guidance.

Making sure the conferencing technology worked consistently was a challenge. Despite this, Paolo says, "It was rewarding to see students smile, whether they were online and learning or viewing a live or on-demand video through Weir Middle School's *WMS Tube* that was funded almost entirely through our SEEDS initiative." The next challenge facing Paolo is to secure funding to keep the project growing and "ahead of the curve."

"Many people seem to believe that a school administrator's primary responsibility is static, one of scheduling or discipline management," says Paolo. "There can be the perception that what we do is react to various challenges as they are encountered. In reality, a school administrator's primary role is to create and support the best environment where students can learn and have what they need to be successful at the next level. An administrator must have vision and the ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment."

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