Assignment 2: Educational Online Community Analysis

EDTC 816: Advanced Building Online Communities

Himani Nigam, Sedar Pougaza, Winfield Thomas

Department of Educational Technology, New Jersey City University

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Online Community Analysis of the Irvington Public Schools Website

The Irvington School District has developed an online community through its website (irvington.k12.nj.us) to enhance communication, provide educational resources, and optimize administrative processes for parents, students, and staff on its objectives, and evaluation metrics.

The mission of Irvington Public Schools is to inspire students to think critically, creatively, and responsibly while embracing diversity and pursuing their goals with purpose. Creating a supportive community within the district fosters collaboration, open communication, and shared resources, all of which can help students develop the skills and values emphasized in the mission. A strong community also provides a safe environment where diverse perspectives are valued, students are encouraged to engage in meaningful discussions, to learn from one another, and to actively contribute to their collective success. Additionally, by creating a community where students, teachers, and families are interconnected, the district can offer ongoing support and guidance to help students achieve their personal and academic aspirations.

The website serves as a central hub for communication and connection within the school community, bringing together three important groups: parents, students, and staff. It is designed to enhance engagement and streamline access to important information for all the users as the site offers dedicated sections for each group. For parents, the website provides quick access to essential resources such as student grades, enrollment details, and important announcements, ensuring they stay informed and involved in their child's education. A user-friendly navigation bar guides all visitors to relevant content, fostering a sense of community and helping each group easily find the information they need. It has evolved based on user feedback, improving navigation and mobile accessibility. The district also employs Google Analytics and a Direct Feedback Help System to measure engagement and optimize functionality.

Kraut and Resnick (2016) emphasize the significance of setting goals for online communities in *Building Successful Online Communities*. Establishing clear goals can enhance member contributions, commitment, and focus (Kraut & Resnick, 2016). Through this online platform, the district aims to create an interactive, accessible and transparent environment where all members can stay connected and contribute to the educational journey of the students. It also seeks to streamline communication, enhance accessibility to resources, and foster engagement among stakeholders. These goals also emphasize that successful online communities prioritize clear objectives, user participation, and continuous improvement. Furthermore, it helps to understand the importance of accessibility in education because the educational community of Irvington Public Schools has an extensive experience teaching diverse student populations and is committed to inclusivity, critical thinking, creativity, and responsibility in the classroom.

This study seeks to examine the objectives of the Irvington School District website within its online community, the strategies implemented to achieve these goals, and the key metrics being used to assess progress and in guiding decision-making. It also offers valuable insights into the district's leadership and goals through an interview with its webmaster, Mr. Craig Felder. A webmaster is responsible for managing and maintaining a website. They track its performance in terms of search engine rankings, functionality, speed, and design (Flavin, 2018). Their duties typically include overseeing the technical aspects of the site, ensuring that it runs smoothly, and troubleshooting any issues that arise. Additionally, a webmaster may also manage user access, collaborate with developers or designers, and handle site backups or updates to keep the website up to date and functional (Flavin, 2018). Another interview was conducted with Mrs. Saphira Cooper, a parent and president of the Parent Advocacy Group who is a regular user of the website.

During the interview, Craig Felder, the webmaster responsible for the website's development, highlighted that the primary purpose of the district's online presence is to centralize access to academic and administrative resources. He stated that the website is designed to ensure that parents can easily access student grades, pre-registration details, and key school contacts (Felder, 2025). Additionally, the Irvington School District exemplifies these principles of online communities by providing clear pathways to essential resources for different stakeholders, utilizing analytics and feedback loops to refine the platform's usability, enhancing mobile responsiveness to accommodate evolving user behaviors. Kraut and Resnick (2016) emphasize that online communities thrive when they focus on purpose-driven interactions and data-informed design choices.

The discussion and development of the educational website reflect multiple strategies that align with fostering engagement and improvement. Three initiatives are highlighted that were part of the interview with the webmaster. Firstly, Mr. Felder actively structured the website with audience-specific sections, addressing parent, student, and staff needs. As requests and requirements become apparent a project document is created, the central office approves the change and then that change is initiated. Secondly, diverse perspectives from stakeholders are incorporated into site development ensuring that user experience analyses and collected feedback from users are considered. Thirdly, seeding discussions within a community helps foster participation and ensure shared ownership of the platform. By involving key stakeholders, the website team followed best practices in community-driven design. Kraut and Resnick (2016) highlight how community leaders can stimulate engagement by initiating discussions and incorporating diverse voices and this strategy is mirrored in the collaborative approach of the Irvington public school website.

The approach taken by Craig Felder and his team also aligns well with established best practices in online community management, stakeholder engagement, incentives for participation, and leadership through data-driven improvement all contribute to an effective and evolving online educational platform. His use of Google Analytics, customer satisfaction measures, and iterative testing demonstrates an empirical approach to website development that prioritizes user experience and accessibility.

Some recommendations for future improvement include increasing engagement mechanisms by incorporating forums or discussion boards for parents, students, and staff, expanding data collection strategies to include heatmaps and qualitative feedback to supplement analytics, and refining accessibility measures based on mobile design frameworks. By continuing to apply the strategies discussed in Kraut & Resnick (2016), the website team can enhance community participation, usability, and long-term engagement.

To measure the effectiveness of its online community, the Irvington School District employs several key metrics that assess website performance, user engagement, and overall accessibility. First, website traffic and engagement are monitored using Google Analytics, tracking the number of visitors, their interactions with different sections of the site, the time spent on key pages such as the parent portal and student resources, and the bounce rate, which indicates whether users find the site useful or leave quickly. Additionally, mobile usage trends are analyzed by comparing the proportion of users accessing the site via mobile versus desktop. Based on these trends, adjustments are made to improve mobile responsiveness and overall usability.

Another important aspect of assessment involves user feedback and issue reporting. The site tracks the number of reported issues, the time taken to resolve them, and common patterns in

user concerns that guide further improvements. A key indicator of success in this area is the effectiveness of the centralized data page in enhancing accessibility. Community interaction is measured through various community engagement metrics. This includes monitoring activity within the parent portal, such as login frequency and how often grades are checked. Furthermore, email and contact form submissions are reviewed to gauge user engagement and communication efficiency.

Looking ahead, the website may incorporate potential future metrics such as customer satisfaction scores, gathered through surveys evaluating ease of use and the relevance of information. Another proposed metric is lurker-to-leader conversion, which would track efforts to encourage passive users to become active participants. Lastly, the speed and quality of question response and answering may be assessed to evaluate response times and the accuracy of the information provided through the website. These additional metrics would help refine the website's effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement.

In a phone interview with Mrs. Saphira Cooper, a parent and president of the Parent Advocacy Group (a.k.a. Parents Teacher Association at the Rita L. Owens Steam School) Mrs. Cooper shared insights about her experiences with the Irvington School District, where her three children started and still attend school. Mrs. Cooper has been actively involved in the school district for approximately ten years, participating in various committees and advocacy groups, serving as the PTA vice president, and now holding the position of PTA president. Throughout the years, she has continuously used the district's website, witnessing its many transitions and changes. She recalls a time when there wasn't a dedicated webpage for parents; most of the information was condensed into the main page.

In her opinion, Mrs. Cooper feels that the district's online calendar has improved significantly over time, becoming clearer, more visually appealing, and updated regularly. As a parent of three high school children who are all active in sports, Mrs. Cooper finds it challenging to keep track of their schedules. She primarily relies on her children to inform her about their competitions, which almost never happens, and when it does, the information may not be accurate. Occasionally, she has access to their paper schedules, but she believes that having a master sports schedule provided by the district would be ideal.

Mrs. Cooper also uses the website to check her children's grades and current assignments via Google Classroom. Another important reason for her website usage is to confirm the dates and times for district and Irvington community events, as her active involvement in the Parent Teacher Association and the advocacy group often requires her presence at these events.
Mrs. Cooper and team member Winflied Thomas performed a quick run through of the Irvington Public School District Website with him being the drive.

The Parent tab on the website directs visitors to the Advocacy and Information Group, where the mission and goals are outlined. It also lists the Parent Coordinators for each school and the school district's Community/Family Advocate, along with their contact information.
The website features a Parent News & Notice section, which includes events and programs scheduled for specific days. These events encompass school, city, county, and state activities, and there are also updates on health and wellness events. Current, future, and past events are all listed. Additionally, there are quick links to various resources, including NJ Family, NJ SNAP, Wellness Support & Resources, Special Services Parent Resources, the Irvington Public Library, the Newark Community Health Center, the NJ DOE - Families Portal, NJ Family Health Care, the NJ Parent Teacher Association, the NJ Department of Community Affairs, and more. A

section for district forms is also available, allowing parents to complete forms online, such as Breakfast-Lunch forms, Board Notices and Policies, and Student Image-Voice Release forms. On the side, there is a subsection with links to the district's administration leadership, including the Office of the Superintendent, Business Office/Finance, Human Resources, and Curriculum and Instruction. For any problems or solutions, users can find assistance in the footer at the bottom of the page. By clicking on "For website issues please Contact Us," any website user can complete the request form or survey and submit it.

Mrs. Saphira Cooper's insights signify the role that the Irvington School District's website plays in enhancing parental engagement and communication within the school community. Her extensive involvement over the past decade underscores the importance of accessible information for parents, whether it's tracking their children's academic progress, planning for events, or navigating sports schedules. As the website continues to evolve, the updates and resources provided reflect a commitment to transparency and support for families.

Conclusion

The discussion highlights an iterative, data-driven approach to improving the educational website. By implementing metrics such as issue turnaround time, customer satisfaction ratings, user activity trends, conversion, and response efficiency, the webmaster Mr. Felder and his team can effectively gauge progress. These metrics align with Kraut and Resnick's (2016) framework for measuring online community success and ensuring sustainable engagement.

To conclude, the Irvington School District's online community is a strategic initiative aimed at improving communication, engagement, and accessibility. As they continue refining their platform, incorporating more interactive elements and engagement analytics could further enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of their digital ecosystem.

Collaboration

Name	Work done
Himani	● Reached out to group members about the project on Blackboard messages. ● Created a group chat on WhatsApp for all members to communicate regarding the project. ● Researched and identified potential online educational communities. ● Started a Google doc and shared it with the group members to start putting their views down. ● Discussed with team member (Winfield) to select a community to analyze. ● Researched potential candidates to interview. ● Developed interview questions for Webmaster as well as parent/user based on the three research objectives provided. ● Liaised with another backup community (Literacy, NJ) and reached out to office bearers for an interview. ● Emailed Elizabeth Gloeggler, CEO Literacy NJ for an interview. Was redirected by her to Ame Kuhl, Office Manager. ● Liaised with Ame Kuhl and Beth Hathway, Program Services Director & Master Trainer for possible leads for Interview. ● Emailed interview questions to Beth Hathway and Tamar Samuel - Seigel, Program Coordinator, West Hudson. ● Checked in with group member (Winfield) on the progress of the interviews. ● Wrote the introductory first two pages for the paper. Also contributed to the body and conclusion. ● Proofread and edited the paper. Adding inputs wherever needed. ● Compiled a collaborative report detailing the contributions of each member.
Sedar	● Responded to group members about the project on Blackboard Ultra messages and WhatsApp. ● Researched and identified educational communities with their names, websites and categories for analysis. ● Added ideas to the online community analysis of the Irvington Public Schools Website. ● Proofread and edited the project.
Winfield	● Joined the WhatApp group created and discussed the assignment to understand the objectives of the project. ● Researched and identified potential online communities ● Discussed with team member (Himani) to select a community. Originally selected CSTA. ● Identified personnels from CSTA to interview. Emailed two people for possible leads. ● Identified another community to work with after not hearing anything from

	CSTA. ● Set up interview with Mr. Craig Felder, Webmaster of Irvington Public School website ● Transcribed the interview. ● Set up phone interview with Mrs. Saphira Cooper, ●

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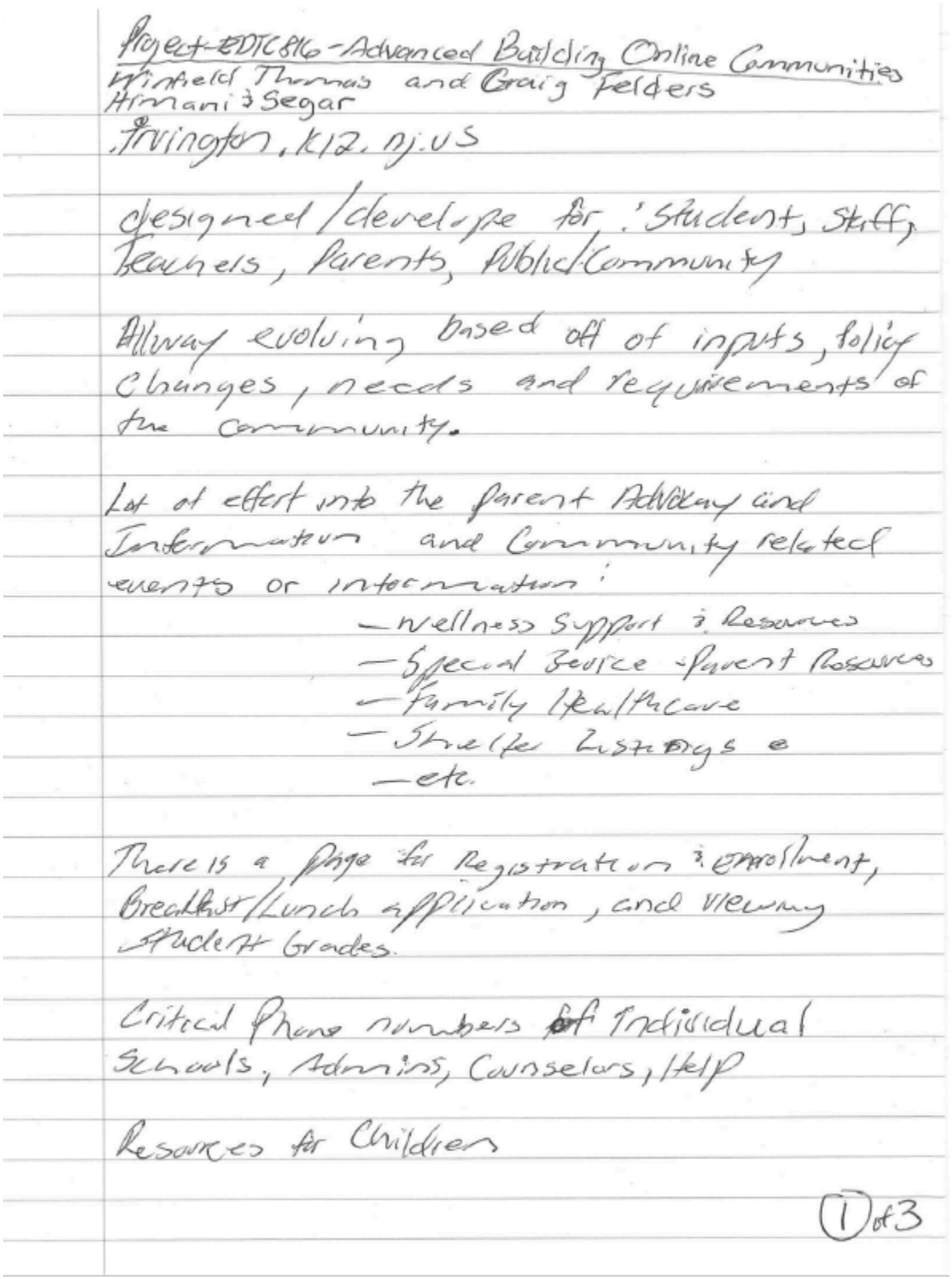
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Appendix A – Field Notes From The Interview With The Webmaster (Mr. Craig Felder)



Project-EDTC 816 - Advanced Building Online Communities
Winfield Thomas and Craig Felders
Himani Segar
Irvington, K12, nj.US

designed / developed for: Student, Staff, Teachers, Parents, Public/Community

Allway evolving based off of inputs, policy changes, needs and requirements of the community.

Lot of effort into the parent Advocacy and Information and Community related events or information:
- Wellness Support & Resources
- Special Service - Parent Resources
- Family Healthcare
- Shelter Listings e
- etc.

There is a page for Registration & Enrollment, Breakfast/Lunch application, and viewing Student Grades.

Critical Phone numbers of Individual Schools, Admins, Counselors, Help

Resources for Children

(1) of 3

The "I WANT TO TAB" ~ provides ~~new~~ links to the most popular/requested resources. The tOACS include KNOW-About, View/Download, and Apply/Register.

Teachers/Staffs uses website to access district applications and training. There are 11 applications used through the district by teachers.

Teachers/Staff News & Updates provides staff with information to themselves and/or to pass along to their students.

The District Calendar can be installed on your iPhone or Android phones.

Part of the Goals for this website development and Change are to make sure its AESTHETICALLY PLEASING and RELEVANT

METRICS: Web-Master uses Google Analytics and Direct Feedback from mostly Parents and Administrators.

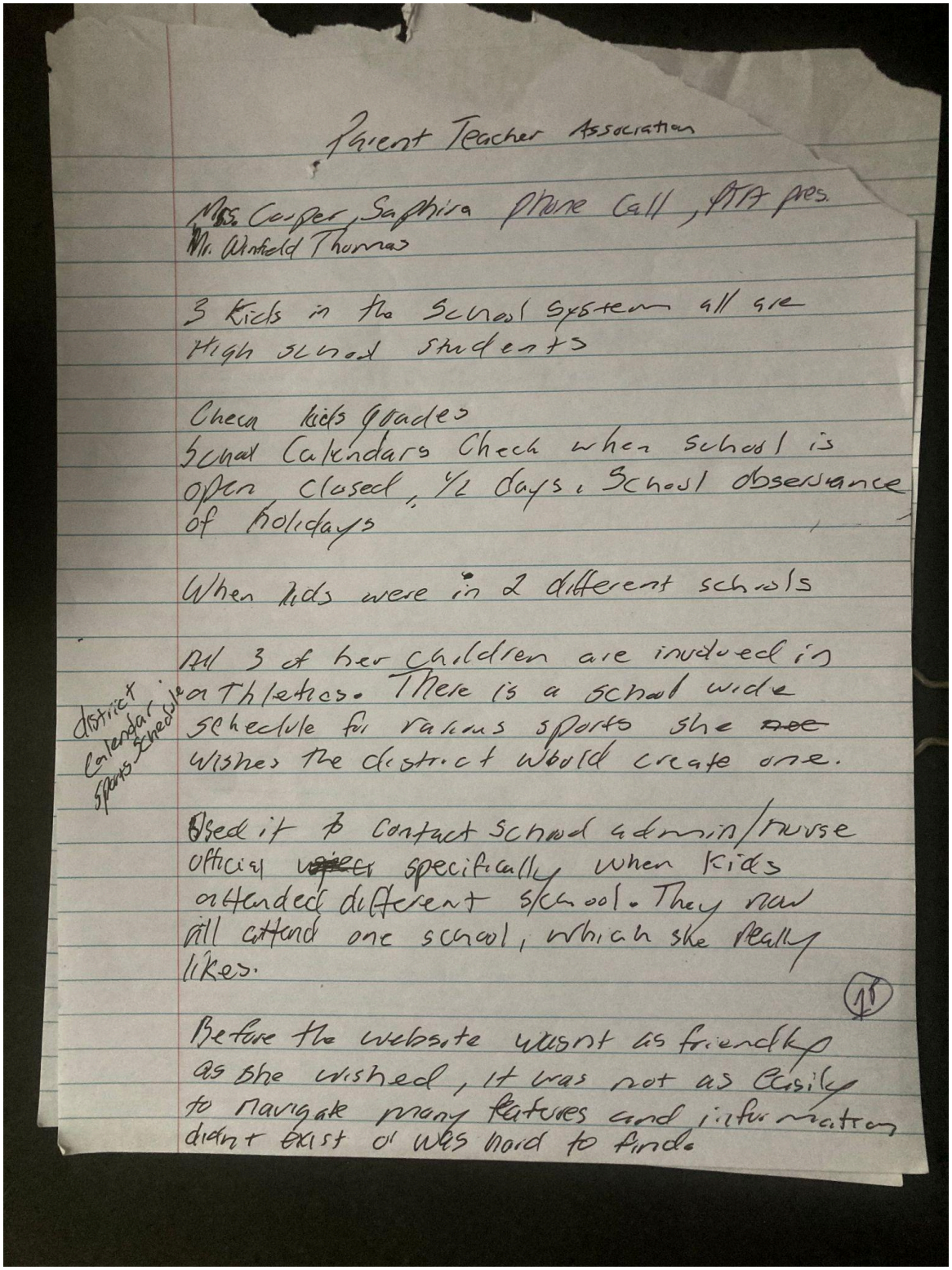
On Course Application → is attached
for Curriculum → State Learning Standards

Links for outside entities for the
Districts Reports, ~~and~~ Student+
Assessment, and other Public Docs.
Can be filtered also.

Help Page / Contact Forms provides a
small survey for the user.

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Appendix B – Field Notes From The Interview With The Parent Advocacy Group President (Mrs. Saphira Cooper)



Parent Teacher Association

Mrs. Cooper, Saphira Phone Call, PTA pres.
Mr. Winfield Thomas

3 Kids in the School System all are High school students

Check kids Grades
School Calendars Check when school is open closed, ½ days, School observance of holidays

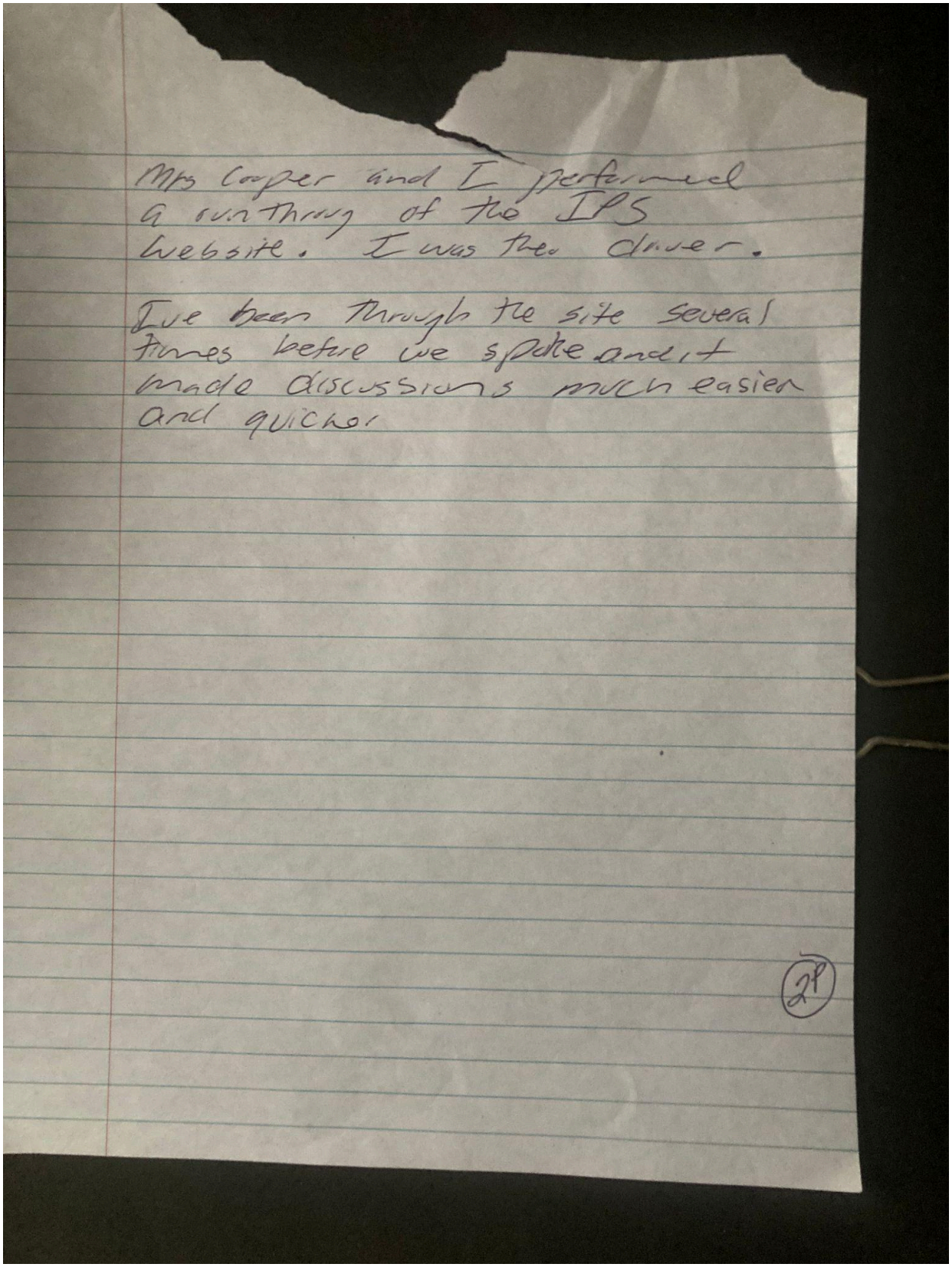
When kids were in 2 different schools

All 3 of her children are involved in athletics. There is a school wide schedule for various sports she ~~does~~ wishes the district would create one.

district calendar sports schedule

Used it to contact school admin/nurse official ~~voice~~ specifically when kids attended different school. They now all attend one school, which she really likes.

Before the website wasn't as friendly as she wished, it was not as easily to navigate many features and information didn't exist or was hard to find.



Mrs Cooper and I performed a run thru of the IPS website. I was the driver.

I've been through the site several times before we spoke and it made discussions much easier and quicker.

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