

Minnesota E-12 Schools and the Internet: A School Day in the Life of Lena Fernandez

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Find below a short narrative about a fictitious 7th grade Mankato Area Public School student, Lena Fernandez. Every use of the Internet that Lena, her mother, her teachers and others mentioned in the story is possible NOW in the district.

After Lena rinses out her breakfast dishes, she sits down and logs into the family computer. Lena's family has an inexpensive DSL connection through the local telephone company so the Internet is always "on" at a high rate of speed. This morning, as most mornings, Lena checks the local weather, headlines of the Mankato Free Press www.mankatofreepress.com, and her social studies teacher's homepage www.isd77.k12.mn.us/~ssamp1 to see if there is anything she needs to remember to bring to class. Good thing she checked – everyone is supposed to bring a newspaper or magazine article about current immigrants to share in class.

"Hey, leave the computer on," calls out Lena's mom. "I need to check a couple things as well." At the school's homepage www.isd77.k12.mn.us, Ms. Fernandez looks at the school hot lunch menu for the day and checks the location of Lena's older brother's hockey game. As a real estate agent, she also double-checks to make sure the school newsletter and "recognition" pages are working so she can show them to potential home buyers. The schools are a big selling point for attracting new residents and businesses to the Mankato area. "I almost forgot," she thinks, and puts money into Lena's school activity account using a secure webpage that takes credit card payments.

The bus gets in a few minutes before classes start, so Lena heads to the media center and logs on to a computer. She pulls up a paper from her online storage area and re-reads it before placing it in her English teacher's "drop-box." She just has time to check her email before heading to class. Her pen pal from Arles, France, has sent her a joke in French about an American politician in the news.

Almost every one of Lena's classes use the Internet as a resource during the year. Right now in math class, Lena and others who have been having a difficult time with a math concept are using a tutorial at Illuminations illuminations.nctm.org/index2.html, the NCTM website. The visuals in the iMath tutorial make the concept of factors easier to understand. In health class, the students are using heart monitors to determine their fitness levels and then email the results to the middle school across town where all the results will be aggregated, analyzed, and posted to the web. In social studies class, Lena has been interviewing by email a WWII veteran about his experiences in the South Pacific and with her team is creating a "living history" website www.isd77.k12.mn.us/schools/dakota/worldwarII/worldwarIIinterviews.htm. Her science class is participating in the Jason Project www.jasonproject.org. The rainforest becomes a real place when the students interact with working scientists in Panama.

Nearly all of Lena's classes have an information literacy (research) project that requires the use of both Internet and print resources. She had found that materials provided through the full-text magazine databases that are a part of the Electronic Library of Minnesota www.elm4you.org/descriptions/ are more reliable than those on the "free" Internet. She'll be frustrated if state funding for these useful resources is lost next year. Lena also finds, uses, and learns to properly cite graphics, sounds and videos for her reports.

Just as Lena's English class is ending, her teacher realizes that a number of students need more help understanding the rules about using "which" and "that" in complex sentences. "Listen," he tells the class, "I can't meet with you after school since I'm coaching, but I can be reached using Instant Messenger between 6 and 7 this evening for those of you who want help." Lena quickly jots down his IM username.

Lena's last stop of the school day is with the speech therapist. "Lena, I think we are almost done with your therapy," she says happily after checking Lena's online IEP. "I'm going to miss you, but I'm glad we were successful." Networking IEPs allows multiple specialists to work on a single student's file and to work on files from home. For over-burdened special education teachers, this has been a blessing.

Lena's school principal has called a short faculty meeting for after school. She has been reading the discussion on her professional association's listserv about Minnesota's new academic standards and how other schools have been successfully implementing them. She wants to share some of those ideas and give her teachers some relevant web addresses for more information. She also wants help in understanding a puzzling statistic a data-mining search has revealed. It seems that the 8th grader ESL students have been performing at a higher level than predicted in reading. (The database is large, complex, and hosted by an ASP that is accessible only via the Internet). Mike, Lena's math teacher, has been taking an online graduate school class on data-driven decision-making and volunteers to be on the "virtual" committee that will determine what is helping improve those scores.

Just before leaving work, Ms. Fernandez frowns as she reads an email automatically sent to her from the school's ParentConnectXP program. It seems Lena's older brother was tardy again for his class that meets right after lunch. She takes a minute to log on to the program via the Internet to check how her son is doing in American Literature where he has been struggling. "All assignments are in and he's getting passing grades on quizzes," she sighs, and is thankful for not having to wait until parent-teacher conferences to learn this information. She also notes that Lena has sent her a paper she has written and is rightfully proud of. She forwards the paper to both sets of Lena's grandparents immediately.

For Lena, her brother, and even for her hopelessly out-of-date parents and teachers, the Internet is now an unremarkable resource that they all take for granted in the Mankato School district. **Not** having secure, reliable and adequate Internet resources is simply **not** an option for today's learning communities.

MN and Mankato stats:

- Nearly 1/3 of the parents of our 7-12 students are using ParentConnect after _ year of operation
- 2001 Minnesota Student Survey reports that 89% of Minnesota 12th graders report using a computer at home and 80% use the Internet at home (64% reporting they use it for homework) cfl.state.mn.us/studentsurvey/