

# Lincoln School Foundation

*Sharon Hobbs's "Middle Matters" Parent Bulletin – June 7, 2013*

## **Going Paperless in 7th Grade Social Studies!**

By Keith Johnson, 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher, Hanscom School

During each of the past two units, students in 7th grade social studies were given the option of doing their homework using Google Docs instead of on notebook paper. This was made possible using the Google Drive accounts that the school recently assigned to students in the middle school. On average about 2/3 of the students went paperless in both units. In a survey recently given to students, 65% stated that going paperless made it easier to stay organized.

“Google Drive is available on many devices so you can use any input method that you would like to input text. Also, all of the documents are on the cloud, so they are easily accessible from anywhere. Additionally, it is impossible to lose, so that takes some difficulty out of the entire homework process.”

“I can get my notes anywhere and I can not lose them. It’s faster for me to type than to write. It is also neater, and I can reread it without the struggle of deciphering my own hand writing.”

“I like completing the Google Drive version of the notes packet more than the paper version, because it makes it much easier to keep track of your homework and keep things neat. I’m a pretty disorganized person but you can't lose everything you write if it’s on Google Drive, as it automatically saves and is always in the same place. Also, the paperless version is much better for the environment.”

After installing this new option for students I realized that those students were now completing paperless units. I wish I could say that going paperless was all part of a “master plan” but it just kind of happened.

Last summer the Lincoln School Foundation accepted my grant to “flip” my classroom. A flipped classroom is one in which students experience traditional class lectures for homework, and do more activities during class. In order to do this I make a series of video podcasts lectures, or “vodcasts,” that replace the textbook assignments students used to do. The vodcasts and Google drive ended up allowing students to do their homework assignments without using paper. In the survey 79% of students stated that

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they preferred doing the vodcast homework assignments, as opposed to traditional assignments with textbooks, workbooks, etc.

“I enjoyed watching the vodcasts more than reading in a textbook because I can learn better that way.”

“I liked how we didn’t use textbooks. I believe the vodcasts helped students become more interested with what they were learning because they could use technology.”

“I enjoyed the vodcasts we had as homework instead of taking notes straight from the book. I like how we got to have the lecture at home and were responsible for taking those notes because they had direct connection with our tests.”

A couple of years ago students started taking tests and quizzes online in this class. Many students preferred this to paper because as they stated “we can type faster than we can write.” This seems almost impossible for a lot of people over 30 years old, but with the access they have had to technology already in their lifetime, it kind of seems inevitable.

We estimate that between the paper used in the packets, on tests, etc. we easily used about 30 pieces of paper per student for each unit. That means a class of 70 students would use around 1,000 pieces of double-sided paper for one unit. Over the course of the year we cover eight units using about 8,000 pieces of paper. This means that if half of the 7th graders went paperless or semi paperless, during the past two units we must have saved about a 1,000 pieces of paper.

In the years ahead students will be given the option of going paperless, or semi-paperless, in 7th grade social studies. Clearly students benefit from feeling more organized, being more engaged by the new system of doing homework, and feeling good about saving paper!

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*How we differ from the PTO – The LSF enables our teachers and staff to reach beyond traditional programs and uncover new and innovative tools and techniques to bring to the classroom. LSF grants provide the seed money to make these programs a reality. The PTO plays an important role in funding long-standing programs that have become core elements in the curriculum, yet fall outside the school's operating budget. Together, these two organizations provide tremendous resources for our school community.*