

July 16, 2009

Dear Parents,

This year, our students will be participating in a variety of activities that involve the use of World Wide Web-based digital tools. These tools provide highly interactive and engaging opportunities for students to reinforce the knowledge and skills that they are developing in the normal classroom setting. Here is a brief description of each of the digital tools that we will be using:

**Blogs:** Blogs, or weblogs, are essentially online journals in which students or teachers post short entries, and others are allowed the opportunity to respond. Responses are moderated, and instruction will be provided in the appropriate way to constructively critique the work of another student.

**Wikis:** Wikis are easily editable webpages that will be used to allow students to collaborate on group work and collect content knowledge in the production of customized textbook online. Wiki pages will only be visible and editable by members of our team (Track 1 Seventh Grade). Our wiki will be located at: <http://sharkteam.wikispaces.com>. Students will be given usernames and passwords individually.

**Voicethread:** Voicethread can be described as an interactive scrapbook, but it has the potential to be so much more. Students and teachers can upload photos or video, and allow members of the class to comment on or respond to those images. Comments can be audio, video, or text, depending on the situation and the available computer hardware. It can be used to create an multimedia reflection on a field trip, or to study primary sources in Social Studies class, for example.

**Edmodo:** With the growing popularity of services like Twitter, the use of web-based conversations to facilitate learning is becoming more and more common. Edmodo provides a “walled garden” in which all communication between students is monitored, serving to reinforce appropriate online behavior and provide opportunities for students to collaborate on projects, peer tutor, and even fact-check.

**Discussion Boards:** These are similar to group chats in which a question or topic is posed by the teacher and students respond to the prompt, as well as the comments of other students. This is a unique opportunity for extended discussion and a great way for students to learn the practice of debate. Students must defend their opinions and show respect in their responses.

While teaching your children how to use these tools, we will also be teaching them critical Internet Safety skills and preparing them for a future in which this type of online interaction will be a part of their personal and professional lives. You can be assured that the security of your child will be protected at all times. At no time will photos of individual students be posted, nor will their full names be in the open. Students will only be allowed to use their first name and last initial, or an alias of their choosing.

Much of the work that students will do using these digital tools will take place outside the normal class time. Time will be given at lunch to use school computers, but please keep in mind that students may need other access to an Internet-connected computer. If you do not own such a machine, we will be happy to provide you will information about before- and after-school opportunities as well as public library locations.

We hope that you can see the academic and social importance of these tools as part of our state-mandated curriculum. These activities are not “extra” assignments, but rather a new way to provide the same high-quality instruction that teachers at Durant Road Middle School have always strived to present. By tapping into digital tools that get students excited and motivated we hope to reach out to all students, no matter what their learning style happens to be.

Before your child may participate fully in the planned activities, we ask that you discuss the points below with them. After you have gone over the statements, we ask that both student and parent sign to indicate your permission for the student to participate.

1. Students participating in the use of digital tools are expected to act safely by keeping personal information out of postings and presentations. You agree not to share your family name, password, username, e-mail address, home address, school name, city, country or other information that could help someone contact you in person.
2. Students using digital tools are expected to treat them as classroom space. Speech that is inappropriate for class is not appropriate for online forums. If inappropriate language is posted to these sites, it will be removed immediately and the student responsible will be punished.
3. Students using digital tools agree to take good care of computers by not downloading or installing any software to any computer without parent or teacher permission.
4. Students who do not abide by these terms and conditions may lose their opportunity to take part in this project.

I have read and understood these digital tools terms and conditions. I agree to uphold them.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this form to your child's homeroom teacher by Monday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009.**

Best Wishes,

*The Shark Team*

Lori Carson (lcarson@wcpss.net)  
Erica Speaks (espeaks@wcpss.net)  
Larisa Gilmore (lgilmore@wcpss.net)  
Paul Cancellieri (pcancellieri@wcpss.net)