

TEACHERS PUT TWITTER SKILLS TO THE TEST

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Passage Middle School's first gathering for faculty and staff happened in an unlikely place.

They met in theater 14 in Hampton AMC 24 at 9:30 Thursday morning. Their assignment: watch the film "Julie & Julie" and practice blogging skills using Twitter.

Twitter is a social networking site where users post messages of 140 characters.

Principal Kipp Rogers, who said he prefers films with car chases and action, asked the teachers to watch the film because one of the main characters blogs about her efforts learning to cook using a Julia Child cookbook.

All Passage instructional staff members who work directly with students will have blogs with student writing prompts and assignments, Rogers said. The goal is to link writing with every subject taught at Passage, which recently was certified as an International Baccalaureate school.

Other educators will also have blogs, said Counselor Donna Guinti.

"I'm looking forward to it," she said. "It's another way to reach kids."

Rogers said he hopes each classroom or staff blog has a minimum of one writing assignment each quarter. The focus is to help students improve their writing skills. The goal is to have every Passage student pass the state writing test, he said.

"That's my big thing," he said.

"That's why we're here in this building. ... I want students to realize, I don't only write in English. I write in science, in art, in P.E. There's a connection with writing across all disciplines."

The Passage Twitter site was projected on a side wall during the movie so teachers could see their tweets as they sent them to the site.

All but 19 teachers had opened Twitter accounts before the Thursday viewing, Rogers said. For those who were not posting, or tweeting, Rogers provided index cards and pens. Other staff members turned comments on cards into Twitter posts.

As Rogers ended his remarks, the lights dimmed and a series of coming attraction trailers began showing on the big screen. The group sounded like any theater audience, with the rustle of popcorn bags - the concession stand was open - and outbursts of laughter during comic moments. But teachers' eyes darted from the screen to their cell phones as they tapped in their messages.

During the early minutes the tweets included comments on a character's cat or the food. But as the movie progressed, tweets focused on the conversations between characters and obstacles and reversals they experienced. They talked of the importance of encouragement, support, toughness and resilience.

Conversations Rogers said he hoped would occur happened through text messages and Twitter, rather than via whispered exchanges. Rogers seeded the discussion with questions: What did the blog experience in the film offer? Does writing about events in your life help you understand and appreciate them better? Who was the blog in the

movie for, the writer or the audience? As the movie progressed, answers to those questions began to thread through the postings.

As the film ended, audience members said they were looking forward to using the class blogs and continuing their Twitter posts.

"I think it will be very instructional," said teaching assistant Barbara Pair.

"The tweeting created synergy," Giunti said. "I think it's wonderful."

ABOUT TWITTER

* Twitter is a social networking site, www.twitter.com

* Anyone can join. There is no fee.

* Users post updates on their status, share information and refer readers to other Web sites or news stories.

* All posts, called tweets, are limited to 140 characters.

* Passage Middle School's site is @passagem

SEE MORE ONLINE

To view a photo gallery of Passage Middle School's movie outing, go to dailypress.com/twitter

Staff photos (color) by SANG-JIB MIN; Jessica Goff, left, a seventh-grade teacher, and Kara Pingitore, an instructional assistant, tweet with their phones as they wait to do a live blog about the movie "Julie & Julia" on Twitter with other Passage Middle School teachers at AMC Hampton Town Centre 24 on Thursday. Teachers practiced skills on their phones in preparation for hosting classroom blogs.