INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s, commercial use of the Internet has increased. Many schools have started to use this new technology for presentations and have been sponsored by several initiatives like “Schulen ans Netz.”

The eight ministerial service centres (Ministerialbeauftragte, MB) for the Bavarian secondary modern schools started to think about the use of the Internet, too. To get the best profit out of the Internet it was decided to combine the existing homepages of the MBs together on one platform for the Realschulen. The Bavarian Realschulen have a long tradition on IT as a subject, so a team of 24 teachers with special knowledge in creating websites and open source technologies (php, MySQL) was formed in 1999 to work out a concept for the Internet platform. In September 2000 the Bayerisches Realschulnetz (BRN) (www.realschule.bayer.de) went online for the first time. During the following 5 years, the project has developed into a one-stop-shop for all parties concerning the Bavarian Realschule.

BACKGROUND

School Development—A New Challenge to Improve Education

Thinking about the use of ICT at schools, the first thing that comes to one’s mind is e-learning. E-government doesn’t seem to be relevant for work at schools. But situations at schools have changed during the last seven to ten years and there are new challenges to deal with.

In 1999, Bavarian Ministry of Education started a project called “school-development with the aim to give all school types new challenges and to guarantee the highest standard of educational quality.

School development comprises three branches: organisational development, personnel development and educational development (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, 2004).

Organisational development means to open schools to the public in two ways: to win over local institutions, enterprises and educational institutions in the neighbourhood to use their resources and to enlist parents and pupils for cooperation.

Gaining public interest in schools and involving and engaging parents and the community into the learning process blurs the boundaries between school, home and community (Brooks & Brady, 2004). Students will get a feeling for what is meant by the term lifelong learning.

Educational development means new forms of instruction by using new media and ICT, training students in social and methodical skills and teamwork.

To be successful, teachers have to be able to use the new skills (e.g., the use of ICT in class) and to act as coaches in the classroom instead of being traditional teachers.

To support the school development an unfiltered flow of information is necessary. Every member of the school community has to get the information he needs for his work. This means providing information about the different types of schools, their school policies, their curricula and the possibilities of further training (e.g., continuative schooling, vocational training). Parents and pupils need a solid database to make the right choice for their school type. Information about relevant laws and decrees and their actual changes belonging to the type of school and information for teachers about further training offers and educational material have to be available, too.

School development causes big efforts for everyone, especially for teachers and principals who need additional time to realize the project. However, administrative work increases and therefore a simplification of administrative work will save money and time for educational objects. Change management at schools at all levels is necessary to achieve this aim.

Taking the two points—open information for everybody and an organisational changing—together the result is e-government at schools.

Paul Timmers (2004), head of Unit eGovernment at the Directorate General Information Society at the European Commission, defined e-government as the “use of ICT together with organisational change and the acquisition of new skills in public administrations, in order to improve public services and democratic processes”.

Giving free information to everyone, raising the possibility for all participants at school to transact and interact with others and to participate in decisions will strengthen democratic processes at schools. Especially parents and pupils can influence their school’s development and hence their schooling. In the end the public can