Dear parents and guardians,

As you may know, the pilot project in ELA, *The Kingdom of Diddorol* game overlay, has already attracted a great deal of attention. It has been mentioned in both an education blog and a podcast for the gaming community, it's made the front page of *Foster's Daily Democrat,* it will soon be featured in a statewide newspaper for NEA members, and I've already been offered a chance to present a workshop about it. While all this is interesting (and frankly, surprising), my primary concern remains to ensure that the children are getting the instruction and the writing practice needed to fully prepare them for high school and beyond.

Over the course of this first trimester, I identified several problems with the program's format and its mechanisms. Many of these were significant primarily to me--eg, workflow issues. A couple other issues were relatively minor and were tweaked "on the fly." I am relieved that nothing significant or concerning arose; all of the issues needing addressing have been rather easily attended.

For trimester two, I'll be enacting a set of changes that will hopefully make things easier for you to support your child's work in ELA. Here are a couple of the concerns parents have expressed to me, along with some quick answers:

- *How do I know what my child should be doing in order to stay on top of things in ELA?*
  Each trimester will be a bit different. In trimester one, students could use the class time to complete writing assignments, or could choose instead to do alternative work in class, saving the writing for homework. This new trimester, XP will be earned primarily through activities in class. There will be two major assignments this trimester—revisions of previously written pieces—and you will be given advance notice of those due dates. Read on for more....

- *I don't understand how to tell where my child is in terms of a grade! Could you explain how I can know?*
  XP is updated regularly in Powerschool...but as you likely know, Powerschool is not configured for cumulative grading, and so it misleadingly labels any given score with an inaccurate letter grade. I generally put notes in the assignment description to help you make sense of what's posted.

  For Trimester Two, the grading/level system has been streamlined, and will hopefully be much easier to understand and follow. See the back of this letter for an XP "growth chart;" while this may change a bit, it will give you a sense of what I'm aiming toward.

- *I see my child doing a lot of writing, but I haven't seen much revision or proofreading happening. Will these be addressed in class?*
  In trimester one, writing regularly, focusing on generating ideas and organizing one's thoughts, was the main objective. This trimester, sharing and revising work will be emphasized. As such, much more of the instruction will center around word choice, voice, and sentence fluency. We will focus more on editing, proofreading, and presenting/publishing in the last trimester.

I have a request to make of you, if I may : **Would you please complete an online survey for me?** Your concerns and thoughts are of great importance to me; I want to make sure that this pilot is successful in giving students all the instruction and practice they need...in this new, more enjoyable, way.

Please visit this URL and share your answers: http://tiny.cc/T1diddorolparentsurvey

There's a spot to ask any questions you may have; I'll do my best to respond as promptly as possible. The survey section itself, which has fewer than 10 questions, should only take a minute or so. **Thank you!**

What was the most commonly voiced concern from both parents and students during Trimester 1? *How can I know whether a student is on the right track?* As a parent, I've completely understood the frustration some of you have expressed. Indeed, I'd known that this would be an issue when I designed the overlay, but I could not think of a strategy to make the answer to that question more clear. On Tuesday, though, I was talking to a colleague about this, and he mused about the parallels to data being displayed on a growth chart—such as those pediatricians use. Of course! An XP growth chart!

Below is my first attempt to create such a thing. The columns numbers 1 to 13 represent each of the weeks in the trimester; the numbers further down in those columns show approximately how much XP might be expected by the end of that week. There are also two major assignments scheduled (dates TBA); those are shown separately in the graph, in the columns to the right of the 13 weeks (Revisions #1 and 2, and XP for turning them in on time). I followed the path to a D- (passing); to the minimum XP for an A+; and, between them, to a B.

End of Week #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Rev #1	Rev #2	Rev OT	
XP																	
1050													1057	270	270	100	1697
1000																	A+
950												969					
900																	
850											881						
800																	
750										793							
700									719								
650																	
600								647					625	135	135	100	995
550							575				529	577					B
500						503				481							
450																	
400					431				433								
350				353				385									
300							337										
250			265			289											
200					241						200	217	235	40	40	100	415
150		177		193					163	181							D-
125			145				127	145									
100						109											
75	88	97			91												
50			55	73													
25	48	37															
0	18																

XP GROWTH CHART for TRIMESTER 2

Note: Please remember that a student may fall behind or get ahead at any point in the trimester. For example, a child might be at 145 XP at the mid-point, but may rally and still end up with a high grade in the end.

Also, I must put in a caveat that this might be tweaked, but I don't foresee the likelihood for a major overhaul. If changes are made, they will be linked to on the main site: www.diddorol.org

More info about Trimester 2 will be posted on the site as soon as I'm able. Finalizing grades will likely consume the weekend, so please allow an extra week or so!

Larry Graykin