

Interview with Jim Zellmer of Schoolinfosystem.org

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Weekly from Madison, Wisconsin, Jim Zellmer emails a selection of links to fifty or so education-related news stories, essays, blog posts, and other relevant sources. It's my favorite, and most edifying, source of education information. I wanted to learn more about Mr. Zellmer and his web site schoolinfosystem.org and so requested an interview. Here it is.

Q1. What first motivated you to create schoolinfosystem.org and what motivation has kept it going for over ten years?

I attended a school board candidate forum, where perhaps 15 people were in attendance. I noticed a local TV station recorded a bit of the event. Later, I was curious about their story. The video served as a “plug”, that is the anchor simply said “there was a school board candidate forum this evening” while a brief clip played... I found this disturbing, in the internet era. So much more is possible.

Perhaps, my civic interest began much earlier, in my high school civics class. My teacher, a Vietnam vet, drilled us on the Bill of Rights, Constitution and the Federalist Papers. Drilled, Drilled!

More recently, I have been blessed to meet many people who share an interest in public education. They are the real story. You can find many of their stories on schoolinfosystem.org

Q2. I assume that you receive little or no monetary compensation for your work with Schoolinfosystem.org? Moreover, you have no direct personal vested interest in education policies?

Indeed, there is no money in schoolinfosystem.org . Rather, I've been blessed to be able to support the hosting fees. Hosting the site means that we all avoid the data mining policies that facebook, google and others impose as their price for “free”.

With respect to a “direct interest in education”, we as a society have a long-term interest in an educated population. Parents, too have an interest in a rigorous education. I have been blessed with a wonderful wife and wonderful children.

Q3. Each week's selection of information sources seems uncommonly and refreshingly wide. You

include sources that would not typically appear on the first page of education policy internet search results. Is the wide range sought purposefully, or do you simply utilize an unusual search algorithm?

I have, over the years, developed a useful “river of news”. My goal is to provide a series of articles that readers find informative for their depth and breadth. I hope to succeed, occasionally.

Q4. I find schoolinfosystem.org remarkable for the vastly greater range of source material than one finds in the link lists from professional news outlets. Is that difference just a coincidence?

I try to do the best I can, given limited time and resources.

Q5. Part of the reason your sourcing is so wide-ranging, I believe, is because you draw the boundaries of “education information” more widely. The information we should consider is more than just what people working in education organizations are up to. Have I got that right?

Yes, education is life long journey.

Q4. There seems to be little information in the schoolinfosystem.org web pages about you. Can you provide a few tidbits about yourself? Favorite color? Dog or cat person (or neither)? Anything you might be willing to share?

The story is truly not about me. There are so many people and stories to be shared. I try - and often fail - to follow Christ’s admonition: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

It is my desire that schoolinfosystem.org provide an easy to use archive for people interested in education from a parent, governance or practitioner perspective.

Q5. Please add any relevant and important points that I have not addressed.

Please share the site freely.

Best wishes – Jim

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