

TI2 – MPS “Dear Abby” Room

Functional/Technical Specification Draft 1.1

The “Dear Abby” room requested by MPS will be a standard public room with a “Dear Abby” room attribute indicating special functionality for that room. The owner of the room will have special “Abby” privileges.

The use of the names “Dear Abby” and “Abby” is just for the purposes of communicating this idea and will not be used in practice.

General changes in room functionality:

- The “Discussion” menu item on the room menu will be replaced with “Post A Question” (promptAddThread) and “See Answers” (listDiscussion)
- “Post A Question” will take the user to a form to start a new discussion topic
- “See Answers” will take the user to the list of discussion topics

Changes in discussion board functionality:

- Replying:
 - Only Abby can reply to an existing message
 - An e-mail to subscribed users is NOT sent out
- Discussion listing:
 - All posts that are not made by Abby are displayed as posted by “Anonymous” to all users except Abby
 - Abby (only) can view hidden discussion threads
 - Abby has “hide”/”show” links as appropriate for each thread
- Posting a new topic:
 - The new thread is initially marked as hidden
 - An e-mail to subscribed users is NOT sent out
 - Abby is notified by e-mail and saved message
 - When posting a new topic, the user can click a checkbox to make the sender appear as “Anonymous” to Abby in addition to all other users (tech note: DiscussionMsgAttribute or sender be the “Anonymous” user)
- Hiding/Showing threads:
 - Abby (only) can “show” a hidden thread (with confirm screen)
 - When Abby “shows” a thread, an e-mail is sent to subscribers for each message in the thread except the original post
 - Abby (only) can “hide” a thread again after it has been shown
- Editing individual discussion messages
 - If a discussion thread is hidden, Abby (only) can edit any post in that thread (including messages she did not post)

Unchanged discussion board functionality (of note):

- Subscription works normally aside from changes noted above
- Abby cannot delete individual posts
- Abby can post a new topic just like any other user
- Abby can copy and paste question e-mailed to her as a new topic
- Only Abby can create/edit/delete (non-discussion) room items

Granting “Abby” privileges to others:

The owner of the room can grant and revoke “Answerer” (Abby) privileges to other users from “edit room”. Someone with answerer privileges to a “Q&A” (Dear Abby) room can do everything the owner can do with respect to the discussion board. Any person with answer privileges can go the See Answers section of that room and rescind their answerer privileges at any time. Users with answer privileges get notified of new questions.

E-mail from Mark Schlager 2/7/03

One of the things we need to implement for MPS (with their money) is what we're calling Dear Abby room. Teachers will be able to submit a question to Abby (with name or possibly anonymously) and she will respond to the person. The question is how best to support this in TI2?

We're thinking that:

1. there will be a DA room on the MPS second floor.
2. teachers will be able to submit questions in one or both of the following ways
 - (a) via a special email address (dearabby@milwaukee.k12.wi.us)
 - (b) via a "private message" form in the DA room (right now, the private msg feature reveals the sender, so we'd need to modify it to allow anonymity.)
3. Abby would post questions and answers on the discussion board in the DA room BUT
 - (a) only Abby can post on the board (so we'd need to modify it.)
 - (b) people who want to, can subscribe to the board to receive postings via email.

E-mail from Judi Fusco 2/11/03

Hi Sharon,

We met to talk more about "Dear Abby" today so that we can get our programmer to create the room and the functionality that you'll need for answering questions and having people post the questions. I'll write up what we discussed and you can tell us what you think, but first, we had a question.

What would you like to call this service? We've been calling it "Dear Abby" as we've been discussing it so that we all get on the same page to think about it, but we don't think we should use that as the actual name since it's most likely trademarked and protected. Please let us know if you have a new name you would like. I've used Dear Abby in this message as a place holder to describe things, but we will need to change it.

The functionality we discussed which we hope to have but might change a little in details:

-You will have a "Dear Abby" (or rather whatever name you come up with) Room on the MPS second floor (New teacher Support Floor).

-Teachers will be able to submit questions via a special modified discussion board in the Dear Abby room

The discussion board will be modified so that, when a teacher submits, the message is hidden and only visible to Dear Abby. The poster can choose to post completely anonymously or to let Abby know their identity.

Dear Abby can go in and edit the questions that were submitted (to remove any identifying info or to re-word/correct spelling errors), and then Dear Abby can reply to the message. When Dear Abby replies, the message and the reply is still hidden until Dear Abby decides to Publish the message. Abby can continue to edit until she publishes.

We figured that this reply versus publish feature would be nice so that Dear Abby could have some time to think about a response or even ask someone else to read it over before publishing it.

When Dear Abby decides to publish the message, she gets a screen to confirm the posting (give it one more proofing) and then the incoming edited submission and the reply will appear to any one who enters the Dear Abby room on the discussion board and also get emailed out in email form to all who are subscribed to the Dear Abby Discussion board.

If there need to be any changes/additions to letters Dear Abby can do an addendum and add another reply on to the discussion board and it will be archived there.

Dear Abby will be able to see all submissions, all published and non published replies and be able to manage the board. For example, it may be that messages that are published one month may not be applicable 4 months later and Abby may want to take them down for a while from the discussion board. She will be able to do that and also "re-run" the letters and the replies later if she wishes. (We'll need decide if "republishing" would send another e-mail out or if it would just reappear on the discussion board.)

Any comments on this functionality? Remember, this is our initial brainstorming session about the functionality and the details may have to change a little as our programmer gets in there and creates this functionality. Also, we will need to have a special "Dear Abby Character" in Tapped In that Sharon will use when she wants to answer questions and post on the reply board. No one character (regular MPS teacher or other member) will be able to see the board in the special edit mode described above.