School COMMUNITY NETWORK

Just Connect®

COMMUNICATION

Information Technology

Building Student Success within a Strong School Community ®

Information Technology in Education

Parent Portals

Online parent portals are an especially convenient and effective way for parents and teachers to communicate about student progress. Web-based student information systems, sometimes referred to as online gradebooking, offer a web host and portal system for monitoring student assignments, attendance, grades, school nurse activity, disciplinary, and even lunch information. Such systems are touted to increase parent involvement and raise student achievement. For parents whose work removes them from the home environment for days at a time, these systems allow frequent checking and monitoring of their child's academic activity simply by logging on to the school's secured information system.

These systems can also give parents insight into the subject matter in their child's classes at any given time and alert them to areas of difficulty while there is still time to make improvement during the grading period. Often times a link directly to the teacher is offered on the report summary page, providing an immediate avenue of communication to express concerns or ask questions about the information being viewed. The system also gives teachers the flexibility of responding to parent concerns as time allows during their busy day.

Having the ability to track student activity throughout each grading period and communicate conveniently as needed with school staff, many parents feel these systems could replace the old-fashioned, hard-copy report cards.

Information Technology Providers

A web search of Student Management Software will produce an extensive listing of software packages and providers for student management programs. Most software packages are available in modules with topics ranging from student registration to grade reporting, and from accounting to personnel management, making it easy to custom tailor a management service to the needs of the school or district. The provider websites offer a view of sample forms, reports, and virtual tours of sample schools.

Many are available, and this list does not indicate endorsement, just a quick sampling of products:

- https://www.blackboard.com/
- http://www.opensis.com/
- http://powerschool.com/
- http://www.renweb.com/
- http://www.skyward.com/
- http://www.teacherease.com/

School Websites and Email

School websites can provide easy access to electronic student progress reporting systems through a link on the school's main webpage. Even when a school doesn't have such a system, school websites can be a valuable source of information for parents and offer a convenient and efficient way of keeping communication flowing between parents and the school.

School websites often house useful information such as:

- Department and staff listings with links to teachers' and administrators' email
- School and sports calendars
- Breakfast and lunch menus
- Clubs and organizational information, activity announcements, and schedules
- Alumni information
- Homework assignments

All of these areas hold a great deal of interest for parents. However, in developing a website for your school, don't overlook Parent Resources. A Parent Resources webpage on the school site is an excellent way to keep important information readily available to parents.

A parent resource section could be used to:

- Post your school's parent involvement policy, compact, homework guidelines, and class-room visit procedures
- Post tips for parents on such topics as homework help, reading at home, building respect and responsibility, and knowing your child's friends
- Request volunteer helpers
- Provide links to parent resource websites
- Provide links to state and local educational agencies' websites
- Post student handbooks to be viewed or downloaded
- Post school discipline policies and procedures to be viewed or downloaded
- Post downloadable school forms such as:
  - Volunteer survey forms
  - School physical forms
  - Authorization to administer medication form
  - Permission to participate forms
  - Prearranged or excused absence forms
  - Free or reduced lunch forms

As children progress into and through the upper grades, communication with parents seems to become more challenging. Information technology in education can be helpful in bridging that communication gap. Parents can initiate and maintain contact with the school outside of normal school hours. No longer do parents need to rely on their children as the main source of information regarding school functions and activities.

Messaging and Mobile Applications

Many services are now available to allow educators and parents to communicate via text (SMS) and/or via mobile apps, either individually or in groups, while also protecting the privacy of the senders and the student's information. More and more families have access to mobile devices. These services are convenient ways to enable two-way communication, and some even offer translation services for families whose primary language is not English. Some also allow the sharing of photos or videos taken in the classroom. As with any other form of communication, make sure to begin the year with a cheerful and inviting message, and it is important to recognize at least one positive accomplishment of children when creating progress notes. Families want to hear about their child's good work!

Consult your district's technology policy first. Again, many services are available, and this list does not indicate endorsement, just a quick sampling of products:

- https://www.classtag.com/
- https://www.remind.com/
- https://www.classmessenger.com/
- https://kikutext.com/
- https://www.classdojo.com/
- https://www.edmodo.com/

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