Parent Portals Help Schools Achieve Their Academic Goals

K12Excellence ParentView™ Benefits

This whitepaper details the importance of parent involvement in a child's academic success and how the use of a parent portal empowers the parent. Included is the analysis of over 170 different school districts' parent portal solutions. The paper also presents K12Excellence's approach to designing K12Excellence ParentView™ and how K12Excellence ParentView™ is different from other parent portal solutions currently available. K12Excellence ParentView™ will help schools increase parent involvement and student performance.

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Executive Summary

The current state of education is one of the most focused topics today in our society.   There is a clear need to educate our children to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce. Today's schools have more pressure than ever to increase graduation rates and standardized test scores.   One of the most important factors to increasing a student's achievement is parent involvement.

"According to the 31st Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, the public believes that lack of parent involvement tops the list of obstacles facing education today. "Parents/lack of parent involvement" was listed as the second most important element to improving public schools; finances and funding headed the list."
http://www.nea.org/tools/14659.htm

Parents can play an important role in changing their child's education and in turn they have the power to transform school achievement results. In order for a parent to support their child in their academic goals they need the following:

- **Complete view** of the child's academic record
- **Clear and visual assessment** of current performance and trending in all academic areas
- **Ability to identify and track** academic behavior changes, allowing to react immediately to negative or positive behaviors
- **Easy Communication** with teachers
- **Custom alerts** for attendance, assignments and grades
- **Engagement** with the child's day to day activities and progress at school
- **Tools to** assist their children to achieve academic goals.

Most schools have all of the above information available within their systems, however parents do not have access to this information on a timely basis, if at all. Teachers are accessible to parents, however teachers do not have the bandwidth to provide all of the data needed to all parents on a daily basis.

A parent portal solution that provides timely relevant data empowers parents and by all accounts makes a difference in their child's academic achievements. With today's technology, solutions can be very affordable even for the smallest of school districts. Often times funding can be secured through grants that offset the entire cost of the solution. Using cloud services a school district can provide parents complete access to their child's academic records and progress without the overhead costs associated to developing and maintaining in-house systems.

This whitepaper details the importance of parent involvement in a child's academic success and how the use of a parent portal empowers the parent. Included is the analysis of over 170 different school districts' parent portal solutions. The paper also presents K12Excellence's approach to designing K12Excellence ParentView™ and how K12Excellence ParentView™ is different from other parent portal solutions currently available. K12Excellence ParentView™ will help schools increase parent involvement and student performance.

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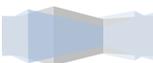
Parent Involvement Issues

Parental involvement is a combination of commitment and active participation of the parent to the student and the school. As the child progresses through school the parent involvement declines.

"Research shows that parent involvement begins to decline at the onset of the pre-teen and adolescent years. It is extremely important for parents to be engaged in their children's education and to support student learning throughout the grades. Increasing parent involvement in middle and high schools can lead to higher student achievement, higher graduation rates, and more students admitted to colleges. Collaboration between parents, educators, students, and the community is the best way to ensure students meet the demands for higher education and the 21st century workforce."
—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel
http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/kz_PB25keepingFSCcon.pdf

One of the most common reasons for lack of parent involvement is the lack of time. There just are not enough hours in the day for a parent to accomplish everything. For many families, there are additional stresses like the lack of resources or maybe they have experienced a divorce or death in the family. These families are in the state of change and this could be causing the lack of parental involvement. Most parents want their children to succeed in school and schools should understand that the lack of participation by parents does not mean that they are neglecting their responsibilities. The issue could be that the parent does not have the time, resources or the know-how to help their child.

Another reason for lack of involvement could be that the parents that are unable to speak English or they may be illiterate. Communication would be difficult, if not impossible.

More informal two-way communication is needed between the teacher and parents; this type of communication is much more effective than one way communication from the school to the parents.

Given the issues and benefits of parent involvement, providing a multi-lingual parent portal that is easy to use, providing insightful data and informal access to teachers would greatly enhance the parent's experience with the school, not to mention the child's experience.

Parent Information Best Practices

Prior to the development of K12Excellence ParentView™, we reviewed over 170 school district's parent portals. The analysis showed that approximately 60% of the sample school districts had a parent portal. We evaluated the parent portals for 35 key data elements or functionalities and found that no district had all the elements or functionality and there were only two districts with more than eight of the evaluated items, and two of these data elements were links to external websites i.e. school calendar. The parent portals provided some basic information to parents, however the portals lacked intuitive visual presentations and additional key indicators of academic performance.

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Data Elements/Functionality - % of Portals

| | 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Student Demographic Info
Transportation Data
Immunizations
Food Service Accounts
Text Book Issues
Library Books / Fees
Counselor Appointments
Parent / Teacher Conf Requests   *Via external link.
Campus Information
Hours / Bell Schedule
School Bulletin   *Via external lnk.
Calendar
Class Registration
Student Daily Class Schedule
Teacher Comments
Triggers (Alerts)
Discipline
Attendance
Transcript Request/Confirmation
On-Track / Graduation
TAKS / PSAT Deficiencies
Previous Years Test Results / Trending
ITBS / DIAL3 Test Results
Standardized Test Deficiencies
PSAT/SAT/ACT/AP Test Results
TAKS Test Results
Current Year Grades / Report Cards
Grades - Previous Years
Teacher Boards
Teacher Planning Time/Periods
email Teachers
Progress Reports
Assignment Grades
Assignment Resources
Course Syllabus
Assignments

 * Based on a sampling of over 170 school districts in Texas, including the top 18 school districts based on their student enrollment.

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In the areas where information was available i.e. assignments and attendance, the data was not presented in an intuitive manner.

- The ease of use and quality of data are important aspects when designing a parent portal
- The design needs to be simple yet informative so that parents will effectively use the portal on a regular basis
- Portals should be designed in a manner that welcomes parent participation and they should not be viewed as too complicated or complex for a given parent
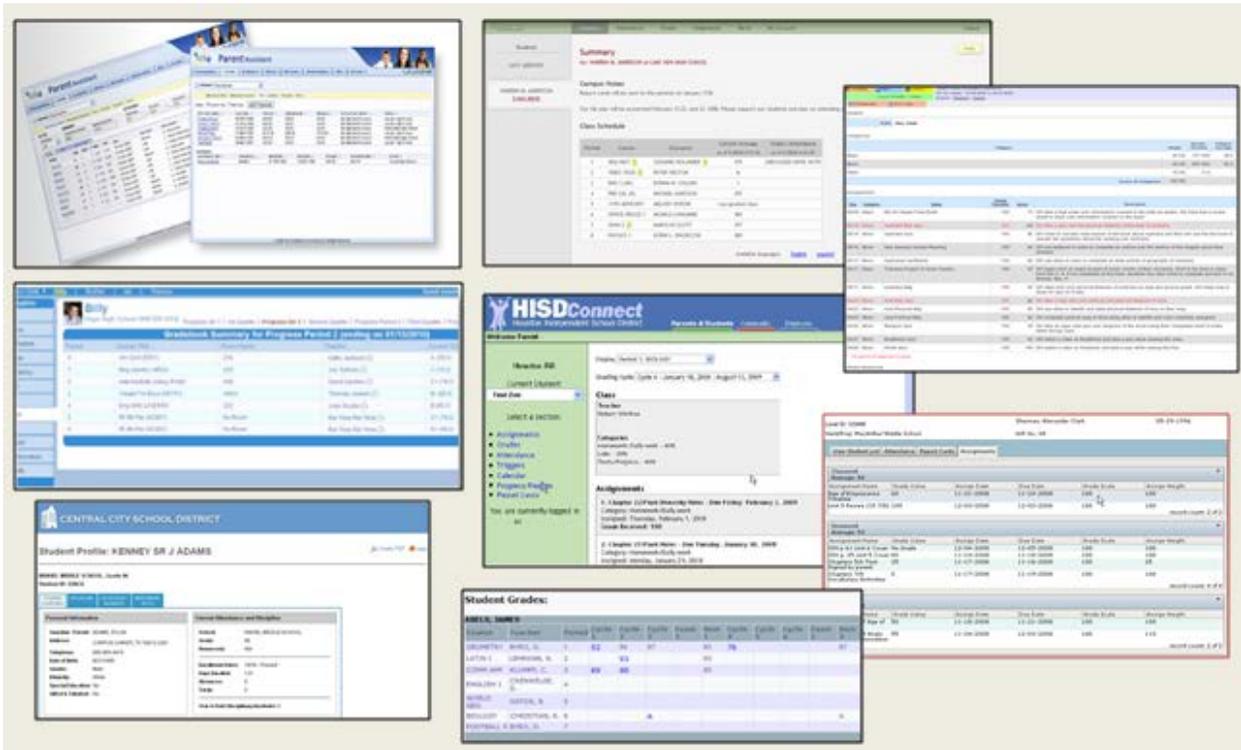
Examples of other parent portal screens

There is a need to provide parents with all historical standardized test results on record for their child in a manner that parents can easily evaluate how their child performed against the district or the state standard requirements.   We did not find any school district that provided the child's deficiencies, thus empowering the parent to help the child focus on those areas that required additional work.

Some of the portals included the teacher's email address but that was where collaboration with the teacher ended.   With today's technology teachers can create webpages containing assignment resources, newsletters and other documents and share with parents. This type of collaboration incorporated into the portal seemed absent.

In recent years corporations have found value in identifying processes and applying technology to automate workflows, thus reducing costs.   The following school functions could be included in the portal:

- scheduling of parent/teacher conferences
- student counselor appointments
- transcript requests to colleges

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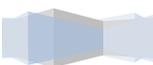
- notification of library fees
- other administrative tasks

These types of functions were not included in any of the parent portals we evaluated.

As a result of our analysis, it was apparent that most existing parent portals lacked the additional data elements, functionality and usability to empower parents to make a difference in their child's education. **It appears that most vendors providing parent portals also provide SIS (Student Information Systems), these companies have simply added a parent portal without fully understanding how to present the data in a manner that is most effective.** To design portals and dashboards effectively, you must understand something about visual perception - what works, what doesn't, and why. Portals and Dashboards equate to communication, NOT technology alone. It appears as if the portals are an afterthought, created by companies lacking the experience of delivering Business Intelligence applications.

By definition, Business Intelligence refers to computer-based techniques used in spotting, digging-out, and analyzing business data, such as test results by student groups, or by school campus and grade level. Business Intelligence technologies provide historical, current, and predictive views of data about people and processes. Business Intelligence has changed the way many corporations now perform day to day business and Business Intelligence best practices can now transform education.

Opportunities

K12Excellence's unique design brings together key software components to deliver a flexible powerful portal in a cost effective manner.
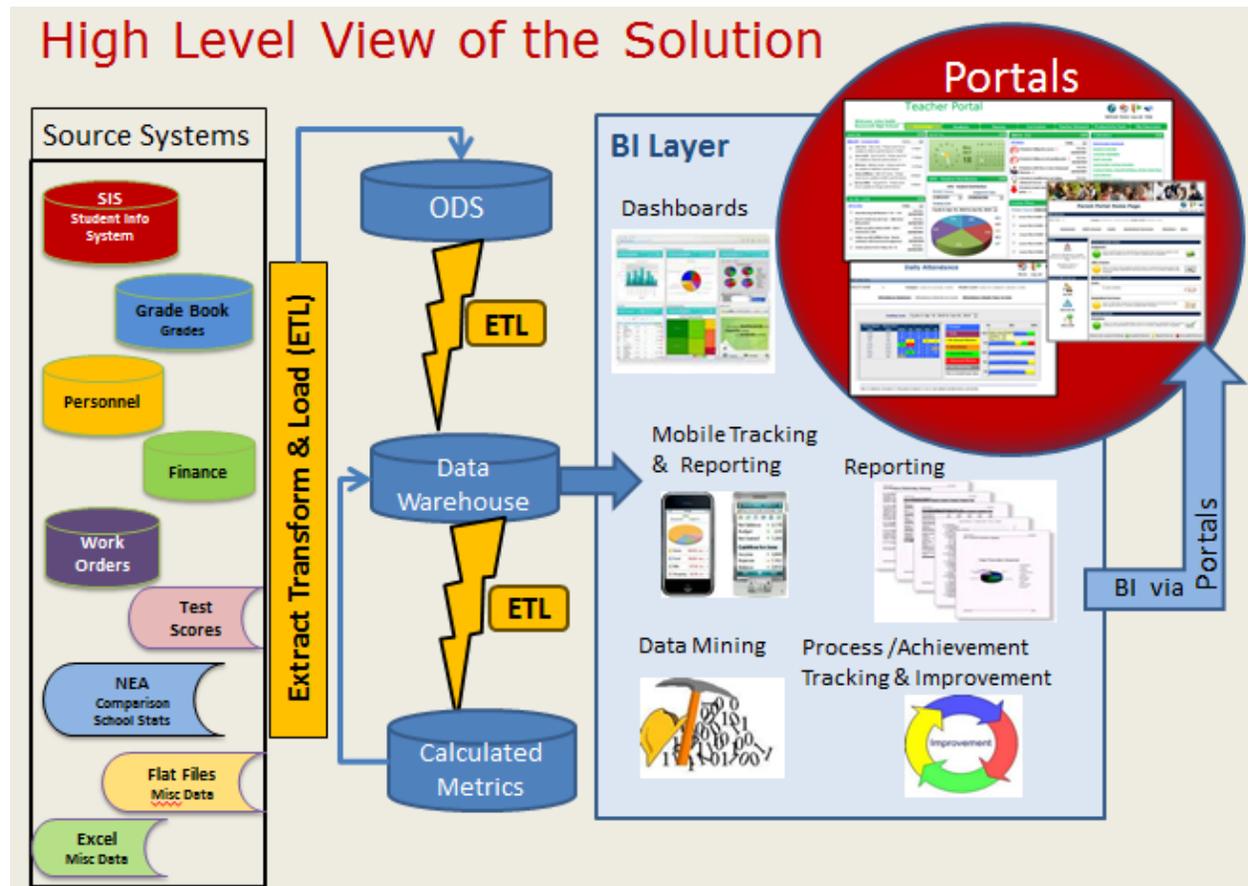
Our Approach

Using the Parent Portal research analysis and working with Dallas ISD, we designed a parent portal that would include all the data elements and functionality identified as essential to parent involvement for academic success.

Data Model

We designed K12Excellence Vanguard™, a data model that encompasses the best practices from multiple sources.   We combined the best from the National Education Data Model, lessons learned from actual school districts, Business Intelligence Best Practices and additional custom entries where we identified gaps.
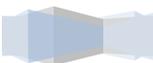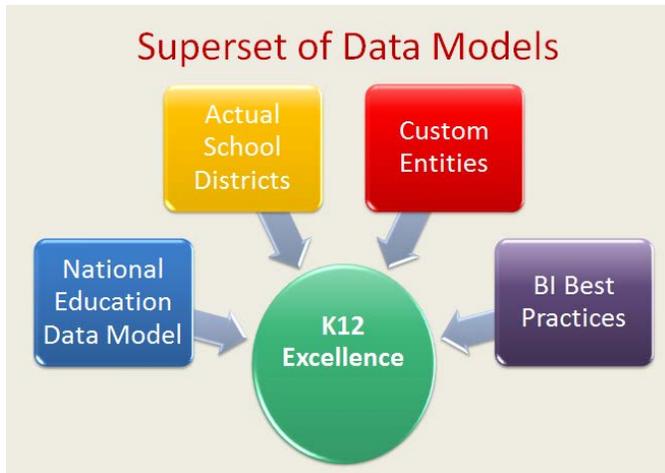
K12Excellence Vanguard™ Data Model is
- Built with the best practices in mind
- Designed to be highly adaptable
- Engineered to support Deep Education Analytics and predictive performance models
- Built investing thousands of hours of effort in the development process
- The only True Universal Data Model for Educational Business Intelligence

School Data Migration
We created data adapters that allow for rapid implementation by identifying existing data sources and applying adaptors to load the source data into the data warehouse.
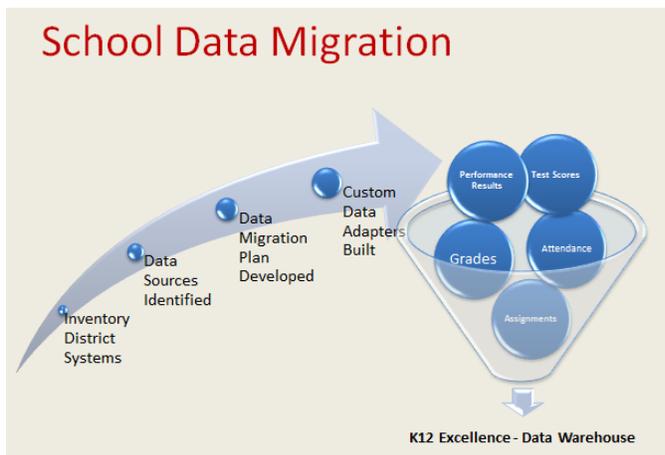
Portal Design
Presenting data in a manner that helped the parent intuitively understand the progress their child has made and how they can help their child obtain their academic goals was the key in our portal design.
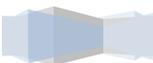
Examples of K12Excellence ParentView™

Cloud Service
For most school districts cost is a major factor. Using a Cloud Service costs are much lower than traditional implementations of systems. Due to the fact that the hardware, software and upgrades are maintained off site, costs are greatly reduced.

Security
Security is not an issue – all of K12Excellence products are Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (**FERPA**) and Child Online Privacy Protection Act (**COPPA**) compliant.

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Our Solution

K12Excellence's professional services team worked with the school district to assure successful implementation and on-going support of K12ParentView™. Our strong analytical leadership team worked with the district to carve out the business processes for implementing the technical solution. The Team supported the district at initial planning meetings, steering committee meetings, communication meetings to central office personnel, and parent focus group meetings.

Security - Patented security module guaranteeing compliance with FERPA and COPPA.

Registration - Automated processes to deploy schools and provide registration data to parents.

Security
Registration

Admin - K12Excellence team working side by side with the school district to assure a timely successful implementation and simple deployment to schools based on the school's requirements.

Admin

Parent Access to Information

Technology

Technology - A unique design of software working together to deliver flexible powerful portals.

Support – K12Excellence support team is cross trained in all areas of our products and provide registration and usage reports.

Support

K12Excellence provided professional services assistance to all the efforts required to implementing, deploying and supporting K12Excellence ParentView™.

K12Excellence ParentView™ Overview

Homepage
The homepage of K12Excellence ParentView™ can be customized by the parent to view information most important to them. Each child linked to the parent can have a separate customized homepage. The default homepage includes academic performance indicators and trending for each area, including views of assignments, grades, standardized testing, attendance and overall current performance.

Alerts

Alerts are a valuable tool in monitoring the child's day to day academic behaviors. Attendance and grade alerts can be customized for each child. Alerts can be sent via email, texted to a phone, or both. Alerts for grades can be based on individual class assignment grades or report card grades. Parents can create alerts for a lower threshold (e.g. grade <= 70) to monitor poor performance. Alerts can also be set for upper thresholds (e.g. grade >= 90) to reward excellence performance.

Assignments

Course assignment information provides a view into progress on daily assignments and classwork. The assignments are shown with the total possible points, points earned, and the due date for each assignment. Current and missing assignments are highlighted, and any assignment with a grade of zero is clearly displayed. In addition, you can view the assignment categories and weightings toward the grades, along with the class average for each category (e.g. classwork, homework, projects, tests, etc).

On-Track/Graduation

For High School students, the application displays the graduation plan selected by the student, the number of credits earned, the number of credits currently enrolled, and the number of credits remaining to be earned. The credit summary is also shown by course category (e.g. English, Math, Science, Foreign Language, etc). It includes standardized test scores required for graduation and all

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college readiness test scores. Additional information about transcript submissions, college applications, financial aid applications, and other post-secondary education planning information are included in this view.

Grades

This provides current grades as they are available and includes all historical grades based on the records within your school district.

Standardized Tests
This view easily identifies how the child performed on standardized tests. All standardized test results have the same look and feel using clearly defined academic thresholds (e.g. Exemplary, Met Standards, Below Standards, College Readiness, Above Grade Level, At Grade Level, Below Grade Level, etc). The standardized test reports includes trending where historical tests are available for the child. K12 Excellence ParentView™ identifies when a child has not taken a standardized test based on your standardized testing schedule and displays the percentage of their peers that have taken the test.

Attendance

K12Excellence ParentView™ includes an attendance summary for each grading cycle in the school year to clearly identify any attendance issues. Daily and period level attendance is color coded to quickly identify patterns in attendance habits.

Administrative

K12Excellence ParentView™ includes a number of administrative views and functions. You can view the child's school record profile, immunization records, transportation information, lunch program, library books and fees, and text book issues. You can also make appointments with counselors, schedule parent teacher conferences, and much more.

K12Excellence ParentView™ is also available as a mobile application.

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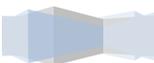
Implementation/Deployment

The K12Excellence Team helped the school district with the school registration events. We provided demos and step by step instructional guides to parents, although our finding was the system was intuitive and in many cases the guides were not used.

K12Excellence created a web-based PIN (Personal Identification Number) Registration System that provides school administrators a unique PIN for each parent registration. The school administrator validates the parent and then provides a screenshot to the parent that includes the PIN and instructions allowing them to register for the parent portal.

How is it helping?

Parents

Parents have found the program easy to use. Parents have stated that the data included is visually appealing, actionable and very informative. To further assist parents the portal includes detailed help documents and additional content that provides parents with questions to ask teachers and their child.

Multi-lingual parents are finding the parent portal easy to use as well. The language selection can be changed by selecting a different language at the time of registration or changing the preference on the parent profile after registration.

"It is because of the Parent Portal that I have been able to get closer to my children and most of all my son who now knows that I have access on the portal. He communicates with me more about his daily routine at school.   I thank you very much for giving us this tool."
http://static.coreapps.net/tasa2011/handouts/a8b3a8835f5f35f581729b9841505ce8_1.pdf

"Since DISD implemented the Parent Portal, I have been a regular user! I can now follow both of my children's progress and have more insight into their grades and test history. I really like the alerts and assignments feature. I can now tell if they are turning in assignments on time and how it affects their grades. Thank you DISD- for giving us this wonderful tool!"
http://educationfrontblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2010/11/disd-rolls-out-more-parent-por.html

Teachers

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There is no additional effort required from teachers to support K12ParentView™. The assignment and grade information included in the portal is based on the data entered in the school district's on-line gradebooks and grade systems. With the addition of the parent portal, parents are more informed and the teacher actually has less phone calls asking for updates on their child's progress.

"The 'parent portal' is a very positive step forward for DISD. The general data portal that has been available to the public for some months at https://portal.dallasisd.org/index.jsp already has priceless information for anyone researching any schools within DISD. It provides some taste of the data that parents will be able to see for their children."
http://educationfrontblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2010/06/disd-responds-how-it-will-get.html

Parent Services
K12Excellence provides the school district with registration reports and usage reports on a regular basis. These reports provide central office personnel insight about how parents are using the parent portal.
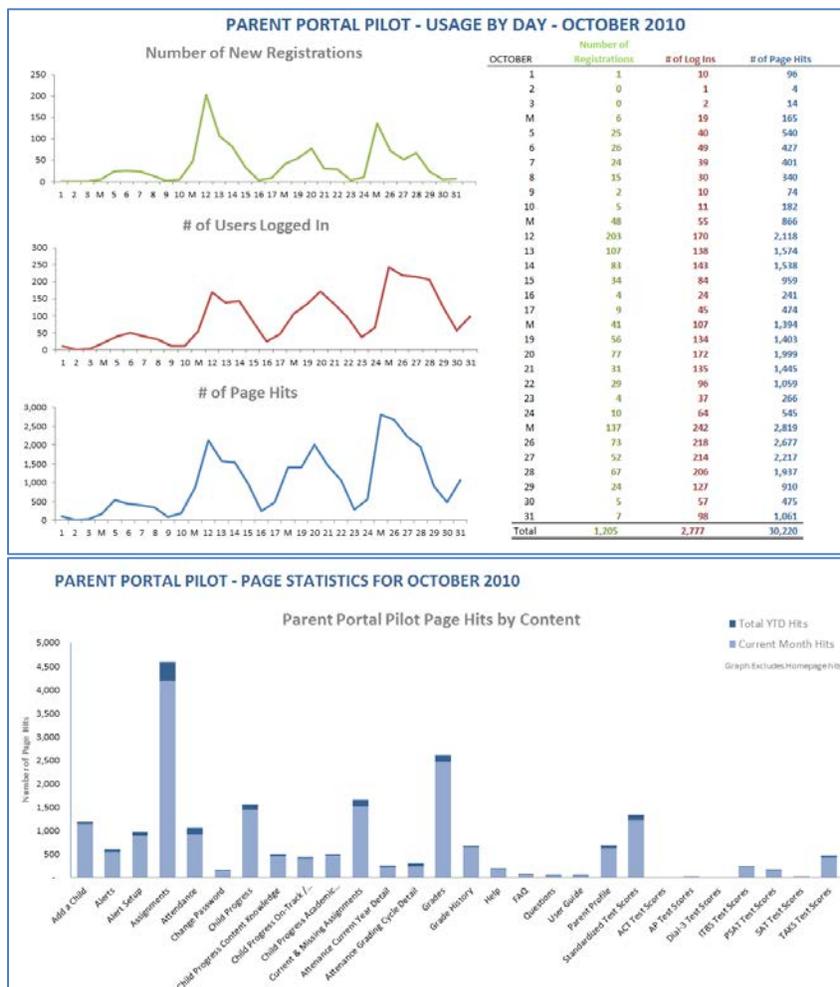
"... our parents have waited a long time for this type of information and it supports our students becoming college and workforce ready..."
Dallas ISD Parent Services

Directors
"We are excited about the development and rollout of the Parent Portal. It has the capacity to do three things: 1) to provide parents with current information about their child's academic performance, 2) to get parents more significantly involved in the education of their children, and 3) to direct parents to more online resources to benefit their child."
Dr. Leng Fritsche, Dallas ISD Executive Director of Performance Management and Analytics
http://educationfrontblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2010/06/disd-responds-how-it-will-get.html

Chief of Staffs
"I would hope that people think that I made a difference in the lives of students in Dallas," Viramontes said. "I sincerely enjoyed working with many dedicated professionals throughout the district. I am especially proud of putting in place the data warehouse and parent portal. These tools put timely information into the hands of people to help them make informed decisions."
Arnie Viramontes, Dallas ISD Chief of Staff
http://dallasisdblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2011/02/chief-of-staff-arnold-viramont.html

Superintendents
Dallas Superintendent of Schools, Michael Hinojosa, Ed.D., initiated the Dallas Achieves program. The parent portal is an important tool to encourage parent involvement.
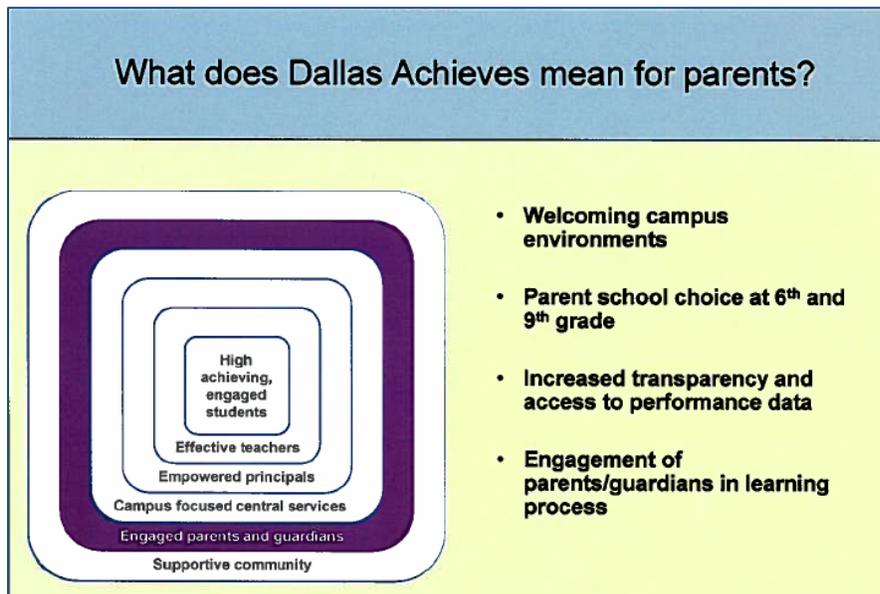
Increased parent portal participation is translating into increased parent involvement and Dallas ISD is experiencing a lift in graduation rates and standardized test scores while at the same time decreasing their drop-out rates.
http://schoolarchiveproject.blogspot.com/2011/01/four-measurements-of-graduation.html

Conclusion
A key factor to transforming education and student performance is empowering parents. There is probably no better tool to empower parents than providing a parent portal that includes impactful actionable data, processes and communication tools. In study after study results have proven that

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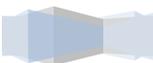
parent involvement makes a difference and all parents want to help their children succeed. For many parents they simply need guidance and tools from the school.

"Every study in this review that compared levels of parent involvement found that families of all backgrounds are equally involved at home, although the forms of involvement varied somewhat by culture and ethnicity. Every study that assessed programs to engage low-income families found that almost all were willing and able, with training, to implement practices linked to improved achievement. And every study that looked at high-performing schools in low-income areas found that parents were highly engaged. Furthermore, most studies showed that children's gains were directly related to how much their families were involved."
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Engaging%20Parents/ANewWaveofEvi.htm

Parent involvement reaps positive results in all ages of children. It is never too late for parent involvement, even high school students' experience an increase in performance when they receive the support of a parent or guardian.

"Researchers exploring the impact of ongoing parental involvement in high school on math achievement test scores found, for example, that school, family, and community factors independently and significantly affect students' math achievement. The analyses indicated that students in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty had lower math achievement test results, but scores improved with ongoing parent involvement. With such encouraging results, Epstien concludes that "it is never too late to initiate programs of family and community involvement, as benefits accrue through grade 12.""

Sheldon, S. and J.L. Epstein. 2006. Research-Based Programs of School, Family and Community Partnerships: Summary of Five years of NNPS Research, SAGE Handbook for Research in Education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry, Chapter 7, 117-138.

An effective parent portal provides parents timely actionable data that allows them to react immediately to positive or negative behaviors.   Reviewing their child's assignments and academic behaviors on a daily basis is as simple as a few clicks. Providing information for academic goal planning empowers parents and students to take responsibility and ownership for their post-secondary education goals.

Looking ahead

As technology changes there is ample opportunity for Parent portals to include more and more functionality.

- Data will have more impactful animated visualizations to show trending
- Include more customizations for school processes
- The use of social media to communicate with other parents, teachers, principals or other school administrators
- Parent forums that aid parents with solving issues or the sharing of ideas in a collaborative environment
- Near real time alerts and notifications to parents about academic behaviors or other items such as appointments or PTA meetings
- Parent surveys or polls enabling parents to decide on key decisions that impact their child's education
- Track parent portal use and student performance, using this information to raise registration rates

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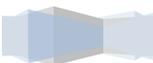
Empowered parents will drive changes at schools, thus transforming education performance results. Due to lower cost of technology and Cloud Services, providing a parent portal as a tool to parents will be the norm and not the exception. The difference will be the content, processes and collaboration tools the parent portal offers, the more robust the portal the more impactful parent involvement and increased student achievement.

Please contact me at Natalie_Wilson@k12excellence.com if you have any questions concerning the information presented in this white paper.

About Author

Natalie Wilson, Vice President Research & Development K12 Excellence
Natalie works with our clients and our development staff to ensure that our products are intuitive, informative and useful for their targeted audience. She researches current trends within the educational sector and determines how they can be applied to proven business intelligence methodologies. Natalie is passionate about making a difference in education. Natalie is committed to working with our clients to implement the best possible solutions to help them achieve their goals.

About K12Excellence

K12Excellence's development team is experienced with delivering cutting edge Business Intelligence and data warehouse solutions. K12Excellence provides easy to use, visually appealing products and services that meet or exceed the needs of our clients. We deliver a rapid deployment of solutions and services with the highest commitment to quality. Our cloud service model provides a lower total cost of ownership. We believe Business Intelligence solutions and portals for educators should not be as costly as commercial offerings.

K12Excellence was founded by RiTek Solutions, a company that has had many successes in the financial and retail sectors implementing business intelligence and data warehousing solutions using a SaaS model. For years we have successfully worked with numerous fortune 500 companies and we currently see a gap in the education sector of vital components coming together to help students achieve their educational goals and potential.

Working with the Dallas Independent School District, RiTek was successful at implementing solutions that were key to improving and monitoring student academic progress and internal processes. In addition to these internal solutions, RiTek successfully implemented a Parent Portal solution. The application was built, conception to pilot deployment within 6 months. The aim of this parent portal is to reach out to over 170,000 parents.   As a result of the successes with Dallas ISD, K12Excellence was formed.