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Education Writing Assignment

October 3 2023

How to Turn Grading Portals into Portals to Success

Technology has been developing at such a rapid pace that people are not able to properly identify the constraints with which it should be used. Social media is an excellent example: from one perspective, the new improvements are allowing for stronger connections between communities across the world. However, it is almost impossible to escape from the constant interactions with people online, which leads to less genuine reactions overall. The increase in technological developments has been spiking in the education department as well, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic forced many teachers to digitize their classes. One product of this rapid advancement in school systems is grading portals. Grading portals (e.g. PowerSchool, Blackboard, Google Classroom, and Canvas) are online systems that students and parents can log on to in order to see every individual score they have received in each of their classes. Although opinions about these applications vary, an anonymous survey sent out to the Mass Academy class of 2025 revealed that 82.1% out of 28 respondents found it helpful to be able to see their grades at all times. On the other hand, when asked about how helpful it was that their parents were given the same ability to do so, 89.2% of students reported that it was either unhelpful, or neither helpful nor unhelpful (more information about this survey can be found in the Appendix). This poses the question of how access to these grading portals should be given to students and parents, particularly in high school. The best strategy is to allow students to regularly check their grades in order to keep themselves accountable for their academic goals in a less nerve-wracking

way, while withdrawing parental access to reduce the influence of academic stress on the parent-child relationship and encourage the student to make improvements on their own.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, students being aware of where they stand in a class actually decreases their personal anxiety regarding school as it guides them to manage their workload. Many students feel bombarded by the constant updating of scores that they see on the portal; however, these numbers are all quite minor when considering their impact on the final grade for that class. Therefore, even if there are some grades that are not satisfactory, the student is able to notice that and make changes to their performance before the collective grade is finalized. Students are bound to be upset when they see that one of their scores are not as high as they would've liked it to be, but "the stress that comes from seeing a bad grade in a grading portal early on is less than having that bad grade on your diploma" (Appendix). On the other hand, if a student notices that they have soaring marks in a particular class, this saves them a lot of unnecessary worrying about their performance in that subject and allows students to shift their attention to a different class that requires more effort. It may also be an indicator for the student to take some extra time to relax and recharge their minds. One very specific example of this was shared by a Mass Academy student through the anonymous survey. The student shared that their U.S. History teacher disregarded their lowest grade in their class every trimester; therefore, for the last major test of the trimester, the student "still studied..., but [they] didn't give it the same amount of stress that [they] would if [they] knew the grade would be counting toward [their] final grade, and [they were] able to focus [their] energy on other classes" (Appendix). Ideally, people should put as much effort as they would like into each of their commitments. However, many people tend to over-exert themselves through the excessive energy they put into their projects, which also increases the chances of burnout. Therefore, they need to find ways to

effectively divide and manage how much work they put into each of their obligations. For students, grading portals are proficient resources to gauge how they should divide their study time and focus among their numerous classes, as well as extracurricular activities.

Allowing students to check their grades as they find necessary also increases their preparation for the future by encouraging them to develop self-determination. In today's society, grades play a significant role in determining post-secondary education pathways. However, not all students feel the same motivation to achieve high marks. There are many cases where parental pressure becomes the sole encouragement to put ample effort in school. This may be helpful to temporarily improve the student's performance in class, but it is likely to set the student back in terms of their long-term productivity. In an anonymous survey about previous experience using a grade portal, one Mass Academy student mentioned how although their parent rarely checked their assignment scores, this played a positive role in "allow[ing] [them] to become the student [they are], as [they weren't] paranoid about achieving [their] parents' ambitions, but [their] own" (Appendix). There's no doubt that having someone to keep accountability is helpful to increase general accomplishment; however, it is not ideal to be constantly relying on someone else to stimulate your own work efforts. This is particularly applicable to students who move out after high school, as they would no longer have a parental figure to strongly encourage success. If a strong sense of intrinsic motivation is not established by the time a student transitions into independence, it can lead to significant difficulty — at least in the earlier stages — in getting yourself to complete tasks. There have even been various studies to prove that "extrinsic motivators such as...parental surveillance and control are detrimental to kids' long-term motivation to learn" (Lahey). In other words, by creating a safety net for students during their

high school career, parents make it harder for students to push themselves to spread their wings and fly after the net is taken away.

Furthermore, permitting only students to monitor their scores will teach them how to independently accept disappointment and utilize it in a beneficial way. This is crucial for students to develop long-lasting perseverance in their academic and extramural career. Everyone is bound to encounter set-backs in their life, but high school is the perfect time for students to experiment with different approaches and applications of feedback as the stakes are not as extreme. If they aren't given this opportunity to "deal with the consequences of their failures", ranging from "small mistakes to huge blunders and willful mismanagement of time and resources,...[they] not only don't learn how to do better next time, they simply don't learn as well" (Tate). Students need to be given the autonomy to analyze their own grades and independently make a plan to improve for next time, as they will have to do this for the rest of their lives. High school in particular is the best time to experiment with this independence because they have their parents to fall back on if truly necessary. One student shared their perspective that it is beneficial to be able to check your progress in your classes "so you can see whether your current work is satisfactory or if you need to improve and in what areas you are lacking the most in terms of work" (Appendix). All teachers have fluctuations in their expectations for work, so for students, it is helpful to view how each of their individual assignments ranked to see if they need to adjust their efforts next time. This is parallel to how different bosses and superiors in the future may also have different standards, so students being able to quickly adapt their practices is an important skill to develop.

Unfortunately, it is likely for parents to inadvertently interfere and interrupt this exploration process if they are constantly being updated with all of the minor fluctuations in their

student's performance. For example, a parent mentioned that the grade portal had "every grade laid out for my scrutiny, whether I want to see it or not," and although they knew that single C most likely won't play a huge impact on the overall grade, it made them "worry about [their] kid" and wonder how they should adjust their parenting based on this information (Miller). Even for this parent who knew that the single grade wouldn't be a huge issue, they were still questioning how they should change parts of their parenting style in response. It should also be noted that there is a large group of parents who would not take the C as lightly and hence would make their actions even bolder. Nonetheless, if parents try to push their child back on course whenever they make the slightest step off track, the child will never develop their own sense of direction. It can be argued that semester or trimester grades require a stronger reaction, as they are more solidified and reflect performance over a significant period of time. However, most, if not all, current grading portals provide information that is much more excessive than just these overall scores. Therefore, if it is not possible to just hide parts of the system like minor scores on assignments and quizzes, it is more effective to just remove it completely than to make no change at all for parents in order to grant children to make their own choices about how to adapt their habits to parallel their academic goals.

Removing parental access to grading portals will also encourage a healthier and stronger relationship for the student and parent by enforcing their dynamic as child and parent. When parents are given the ability to check their student's grades whenever they please, it is very likely for them to be constantly looking at them, even just out of pure curiosity. Therefore, these numbers can easily become one of the main aspects of their child that they focus on, especially if they don't have a strong connection through something else. As Jessica Lahey, mother of two sons and author of "The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children

Can Succeed” put it, “if I’m obsessing over the numbers and grades on my computer screen, I am likely to miss the most important indicators of his long-term success and happiness.” Many parents tend to forget that being a student in school is only a limited segment of their child’s life, and if they spend too much time stressing over their child’s performance in a class and not enough time building a bond through extracurricular interests, it is likely for the relationship to quickly crumble after the student finishes their academic career.

In addition, parents reacting to their kids’ grades in negative ways can push the child away and decrease their willingness to communicate. Parents want their children to be the best they can be, but sometimes their expectations are above what is actually reasonable or truly desirable for the student, and as a result, their well-intentioned feedback can come across harshly. In other words, a common occurrence for caretakers is that “wanting the best for [their children] can bring out the worst in us” (Whitler). Removing parental access in grading portals prevents guardians from constantly being bombarded about updates on how their student is doing in class, limiting fluctuations in how they view and treat their child. These subtle changes in parents’ attitude toward their child may even be unintentional, or stemming from disappointment in themselves. Whatever the case is, when parents respond harshly to a grade that falls short of their standards, students may begin to associate their parents and their school performance in an adverse way. A Mass Academy student said it this way: “[t]he fact that my parents had access to my grades at any time only made me reluctant to talk to them out of the fear of the topic coming up” (Appendix). Children should not be unwilling — let alone afraid — to talk to their parents for any reason, but the strong emphasis of high marks in today’s society makes it susceptible to becoming a sensitive topic between children and parents. Parents’ eagerness to know their child’s grade will not necessarily disappear with the removal of their online portal. However, without

the portal, they will most likely need to find out their children's scores through their child or teacher, both of whom can provide more context with the grade. This allows parents to analyze the child's perspective and not just a mere number ranking their efforts to determine their success in a class.

Grading portals have a great potential to encourage high achievement and success for students, but the current set-up that also allows parents to closely monitor their childrens' scores acts as a roadblock to students using it to their greatest advantage. Removing parental admittance to these systems whilst continuing student access will not only make significant improvements for the student during their academic career, but also create a lasting effect on the rest of their life past the boundaries of their home.

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Appendix

10/12/23, 12:45 AM

Grade portals survey

Grade portals survey

Hello! Yerin here :)

For my Hum Education Reflection essay, I am writing about the impact of grade portals that allow students to monitor their grades 24/7, and I would love to hear about your experience to strengthen my argument.

Thank you in advance!

(It says there are three pages, but you will only need to fill out two of them based on if you have or have not used a grade portal)

* Indicates required question

1. At your old school, was there a school-provided application that allowed you and/or your parents to regularly check your grades for tests and assignments? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 2
 No Skip to question 10

After using a grade portal

2. How frequently did you check your grades? *

- 1 = once every other week or less
2 = once a week
3 = 2-3 times a week
4 = once a day
5 = multiple times a day

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Onc Multiple times a day

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/17c9tD_#02L_F07Tt6B-QjRQcJL37TUyLhA4Aedit

1/8

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Grade portals survey

3. How helpful was it to be able to access your grades at all times? *

3 = neutral

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Unh Very helpful

4. How did this affect your anxiety about school? *

3 = no change

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Decr Increased my anxiety

5. How regularly did your parents check your grades? make your best guess; you can skip if you're really unsure!

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Onc Multiple times a day

6. How helpful did you find it (that your parents had access to your grades)? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Unh Helpful

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/17c9tD_#02L_F07Tt6B-QjRQcJL37TUyLhA4Aedit

2/8

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7. Overall, if you had the option to keep or get rid of this system in your school, what would you do? *

Mark only one oval.

Keep it for everyone

Keep it just for students (no parent access)

Get rid of it for everyone

8. Why did you choose the answer above?

9. Additional comments about your experience using the application?

No use of portal

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10. How often were you able to see your grades? *

1 = once a year
2 = twice a year
3 = thrice a year
etc.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One Every month

11. How helpful was it not being able to monitor your grades at all times (or just not having a system that allows your see your cumulative grade at any time)? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Unh Helpful

12. How did this affect your anxiety about school? *

3 = neutral

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Dec Increased my anxiety

13. Were your parents able to check your grades more frequently (compared to you)? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

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14. If so, how helpful did you find it that your parents had better access to your grades? skip if this doesn't apply to you

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Unh Helpful

15. If not, do you wish your parents would be given access to your grades more regularly? skip if this doesn't apply to you ;)

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

16. Overall, if you had the option to implement this system for your school, would you choose to do so? *

Mark only one oval.

Implement it

Keep original system

17. Why did you choose the answer above?
Or, can you describe the system you had at your old school about how grades were presented?

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18. Additional thoughts/comments about your assignment?

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