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Area schools moving to paperless report cards

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Nervous students waiting for the mail to hide their report card for a few more days soon won't be able to do so. Most schools are updating to online grade books, which allow parents to view progress reports before they hit the mailbox.

"There shouldn't be any surprises," said Riverside Schools Director of Guidance Beverly Lee. Parents can view what teachers are putting in the grade book or homework assignments through the web-based system. Students also can use the systems to track their individual progress.

The software programs such as TeacherEase, Parent Assist Module, and Infinite are being used by the schools to provide online access to provide information.

Mentor School District no longer sends paper report cards to students' parents because of this system. However, parents can receive a hard copy report card if they are unable to log in to the Infinite Campus portal.

The software system is used in different ways by districts. Some allow parents to view health and discipline concerns through the system tabs.

Most districts have an attendance tab, which parents can view to see if their child has been in class. "Parents can look and see period by period if students are in class," said Mentor High School Principal Joseph Spiccia. "The system is real time and teachers take attendance through the online system." He said the system, which is in the fourth year at the school, works well.

"Parents know where their child stands at any time," Spiccia said. "Parents can track everything."

"It's just more efficient," he said. "(It) works great at recordkeeping as well as a communication tool with parents."

Perry Schools has used the software program for several years to communicate with parents about students' daily progress. Parents can view homework assignments that are due, as well as test grades.

"There is a regular ongoing dialogue between the schools and parents," Perry Assistant Superintendent Rosemary Gornik said. "The system has made a positive effect on student achievement."

Gornik said the system's quick reports help teachers and coaches to find out more information about students in a group. "If a coach wanted to find out about a student's eligibility, they can do a report and see who is at risk," she said.

Perry Schools recently announced that its elementary and middle schools won't be sending paper report cards home to parents.

The high school will go paperless in the next quarter. All parents will receive a hard copy of the final report card at the end of the year.

"We are always trying to be green and we thought it was unnecessary to kill so many trees by sending out the report cards," Gornik said.

However, she said the district will look at consequences of not sending out report cards and see how it works or if there is a need to reconsider the plan.

Parents aren't the only ones benefiting from the portals. Students can benefit from accessing the online system as well. "By having access to the information, students are taking responsibility of their own learning," Gornik said.

Chardon Schools has spent several years providing up-to-date grades electronically. Using TeacherEase, teachers can upload a student's grades to an online application, accessible to parents and students, district spokeswoman Ellen Ondrey said.

Online grades also are available in the fourth and fifth grades, she said. Aside from saving money on printing grades on paper, Ondrey said it saves time and allows instant access. That instant communication can sometimes be vital to a student's progress.

"This really takes the guesswork out of a student's performance," Ondrey said. Before, parents had to contact the teacher directly, stop by the school or ask their child. "We want to be able to keep those failing students from failing. If we're able to catch them with the parents looking at the grade book, that's a good thing."

West Geauga Schools also provides grades online for students in third grade and up, district spokeswoman Bonnie Gruttaduria said.

But the Chardon and West Geauga districts also still offer report cards on paper.

"There are still families that don't have computers and don't go online," Ondrey said. "We're still in that transition period. You still have to provide for those families that don't use a computer."

Riverside uses the Parent Assist Module, which allows parents and students with a user ID and password to log in to view a child's homework records and grades.

"The parents can see what the teachers are recording within the electronic grade book," she said.

The district still intends to send paper grade reports, although parents have this online portal. "We have to be sensitive to some parents that don't have access to the Internet," Lee said.

School districts such as Willoughby-Eastlake and Wickliffe have plans to roll out their own software systems for providing online grades.

North High School Principal Jennifer Chauby said high school students and parents will most likely have access to the portal in January. The schools won't go paperless, but are moving in that direction. "It's such a valuable tool for the parents," she said. "Having that interaction with parents in real time, it's something the schools needed to do."

Jim Turk, executive director of Lake Geauga Computer Association, manages West Geauga's Parent Assist Module, an online student management system.

"I think it's helped communication with both teachers, students and parents," Turk said. He added that the company covers school districts in Geauga and Lake counties, eastern Cuyahoga County and Medina Schools. "You're seeing real-time information on the grades as the teachers enter the

information."

Before the appearance of online grades, Turk said he had to wait more than four weeks in a nine-week grading period to get his daughter's progress report.

Despite that inaccessibility for some, Turk said information is moving online. "All the data is instant," said Turk, adding that parents also can view their child's daily attendance record, student fees and/or disciplinary actions.

"This explosion — you're in the information age. You need to be in the know."

"I believe (instant) communication is vital to these students learning."