

Principal's Log 2.9

Dear TMS families,

The following log is redux of one I sent last year. I apologize for the repetition, but this is such an important message that I wanted to send it again and the timing is just right.

Electronic Progress Monitoring

Realizing that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift in student progress monitoring, as the first marking period comes to a close, I wanted to take a moment to discuss middle school electronic grade reporting. For a number of years now, student progress has been reported through the PowerSchool Portal. Of course, this will continue, but I want to offer some thinking on how this tool can be used to its fullest potential. My goal is to be helpful and offer a balanced perspective.

At its worst, the Portal offers real-time, constant progress monitoring for students. Taken moment to moment, this information can be incomplete and shocking. Like monitoring hour to hour market fluctuations, it intensifies the rating experience for students and causes anxiety. At its best, the Portal offers transparency, so that effective goal setting conversations can happen in the home supported with accurate information. When done thoughtfully, positive change and growth will occur.

In a Washington Post article from 2016, Sandra Miller discusses how this experience affects her as a parent. Her article titled, "*I Have Easy Access to my Teen's Grades, but Should I?*" is available [here](#). The premise of this essay is that the Portal is a tool that must be used thoughtfully. If not, a weighted impact on parents can be transferred to students in the form of frequent power struggles. It's important that checking the Portal not be seen as a daily obligation. Rather, it's an opportunity to create a knowing partnership of accountability among parents, students, and teachers. Together, we can be highly effective at holding students accountable without it becoming overwhelming.

Lastly, I wish to offer some tips that I wish I knew when I went through this with my first child.

1. Plan when you will check the Portal with your children. Knowing in advance will ease the specter of a hovering taskmaster.
2. Invite your children to share updates with you. Perhaps this is a Monday evening ritual? You choose when, but make it regular and predictable. Make it about success and progress at least half of the time.
3. Know that sometimes teachers make reporting errors. Most are tracking around 100 students. If your child insists that something is inaccurate, trust *and* verify with the teacher.
4. Celebrate hard work and progress.
5. Make sure you don't own the experience. Give the work back to your student. When adjustments need to occur. Ask, "What habits can you create that have the

power to change the outcome to one that is more desirable?" Remind them that there is a way out of every box. Encourage them to find it independently.

Ours is an information-soaked society and our middle school is not immune. I hope that this message helps you to have thoughtful conversations with your children about their academic progress in school.

Warmly,

Mr. Gregory Stiefel, TMS Principal

<https://twitter.com/GregStiefel>

Be sure to check out our website for PTA flyers, calendar snapshots, and other reminders.

http://tms.tuckahoeschools.org/201718_weekly_eneewsletter