



# K-12 Parent Portal: An Implementation Guide

Available Online at: <http://portalguide.tech4learning.ca>

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Note: Links embedded in the text may not be functional in this pdf version. Please use the links at the bottom of each page.

## Welcome to the Implementation Guide <sup>[1]</sup>

Is your school or district planning a Parent Portal? This Guide can help you in your journey to success. Filled with background information and “how-to’s”, it is designed to spur your thinking and give you step-by-step instructions when you encounter challenges.

You can access the full Guide through the Table of Contents at the left of the screen. You may print individual pages. Watch for a full pdf version available for download in the future.

Not sure what a Parent Portal is? Check out this video, and share it with others who are asking “What is a Parent Portal anyway?”.

This Guide is produced under a Creative Commons license that allows you to use the content freely to help you in implementing a Parent Portal at your school or district. Please attribute the content to this site, and don't use it to generate income. If you wish to use the Guide in a different manner, please contact me by clicking on the link under Feedback <sup>[2]</sup> on the left.

This site was built in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Educational Communications and Technology. I have learned a lot about parent engagement on the journey to produce this Guide, and I am happy to share this learning with you. I have learned from the many scholars who have written and researched this topic, and from the many parents and teachers who have so willingly shared their ideas

and challenges. They have helped to build this Guide.

It is my hope to continue to update the Guide as it is trialed in different districts. So please use the [contact form](#) [2] to send your suggestions for changes, and your stories to share. There are also discussion forums set up on [Parent 2.0 Interactive](#) [2] so please check out the discussion there.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this Implementation Guide a reality.

*Cindy Seibel*



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# Introduction

School districts are implementing technology solutions to support and improve relationships with parents. But will these technologies make a difference? Does it matter how these solutions are implemented? What are parents expecting from the technology?

A parent responding to a blog posting about parent engagement described the problem well:

We have great teacher's (*sic*) that want to involve parent's (*sic*) but are not sure how to go beyond the photo-copying, cutting out, washing desks kind of tasks. They would be willing to try but administration seems to throw roadblocks at every attempt. Offer to help with the website — no I'm sorry that's a security risk. Help a teacher start a Blog — sorry blog's (*sic*) are scary and blocked. Start a community parent's [ning](#) <sup>[1]</sup> (*link added*) — no school events, no pictures that may have been taken at the school, no teacher's allowed to participate, no discussions regarding school (even though it was an initiative that was community based they are still trying to control it).

My personal frustration level is at an all-time high. I want so desperately to be involved at my child's school in a meaningful way, a way that I can share my interests and aptitudes but there is no place for me beyond the traditional parent roles (secretary, fund-raiser, parent council). How do I carve out my place — how do I quell the fears and work with administration in a productive way? I'm at a loss.

As observed through this parent's eyes, technology presents the possibilities for parents to engage with schools in new ways, to change the story of parent engaging with school. The problem described is not about using technology to support and enable parent engagement, but rather to create a different culture of parent engagement that is aided and enabled by technology.

**What is parent engagement?** The term parent engagement is used to describe participation in both the planning and execution of broadly defined learning activities at home and at school.

**What is a Parent Portal?** A portal is defined in the Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2008) as "a site serving as a guide or point of entry to the World Wide Web and usually including a search engine or a collection links to other sites arranged especially by topic." Web portals <sup>[a [2]]</sup> provide a personalized gateway that aggregates information and allows access to a variety of relevant resources and services. Personalization is key here – portals allow the end user to be in control of the content rather than the person or organization delivering the content. For parents this would include the ability to connect with information and services relevant to their child's learning and activity at school, through any computer connected to the World Wide Web. With the explosion of communication technologies, there is an opportunity to construct a model of engagement that honours parent voice, that leverages technology in the learning environment and the home, and that builds a positive connection between home and school.

This Introduction includes sections on the Purpose of and Audience for this Guide, as well as an overview of relevant research in parent engagement.



Look for this symbol to find Sally's Good Ideas throughout the Implementation Guide.

[a <sup>[3]</sup>] See the [Resources Section](#) <sup>[4]</sup> for more information about portals.

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# Purpose of the Guide

## Why have an Implementation Guide?

First you must believe that a Parent Portal is a good investment of your time and resources. I have spoken with many parents who believe it is a great way to help parents engage with their children's learning. And anything worth doing is worth doing well.

This Guide provides background information and instructions to help you implement your Parent Portal in your school or district.

A Parent Portal supports the community you nurture at your school with communication and collaboration tools. The Guide helps you understand how communities come to be, and what you need to consider to make your Portal a success. Choosing the right technology for you, creating a plan, and keeping the Portal working for you are all addressed in this Guide.

***How To Use This Guide*** is described at the bottom of each page.

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# Audience

This Guide is written specifically for the Project Team that is responsible for the implementation of the Parent Portal. But the information included here is also useful for the decision-makers and anyone using the Parent Portal. The Guide is intended to be accessible to many readers. Everyone brings some expertise to the implementation of your Portal.

The Portal Team should include representative district staff and parents, and other as necessary to provide the expertise needed to implement your Portal. For more information about the needed skills and expertise on your Portal Team, see the [Introduction](#) [1] section of the Guide.

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# Research Says

This section presents a summary of the research and the literature about parent engagement. Building a Parent Portal without understanding parent engagement – its purpose and successes – is the same as using technology to automate a bad business process in the corporate world. You can also look at the [Resources page](#) <sup>[1]</sup> for additional information about parent engagement and portals.

A significant body of research demonstrates the contribution of parent engagement to student learning. Henderson and Mapp (2002) reviewed 51 studies conducted between 1993 and 2002 and provided a synthesis of the research findings. The report pointed to the strong impact of parent involvement on student achievement, attendance and behaviour. Research also indicates that parent participation declines with grade level, that socioeconomic status and family situation are factors in determining parent engagement and that students want their families to be involved in their learning (Boethel, 2004; Epstein et al., 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

*Importance of parent involvement to student achievement.* Numerous studies point to the correlation between parent engagement and student achievement. Henderson & Mapp (2002) identified several studies in their review of 51 studies on parent involvement that demonstrated such a correlation. Henderson and Mapp (2002) summarized the relationship:

Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for student, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and education backgrounds and for students at all ages. (p. 24).

The authors reminded us that a positive correlation does not mean that parent engagement is the sole determinant of student achievement.

*Models of parent involvement/engagement.* Perhaps the most widely quoted work in the field of parent engagement is by Epstein et al. (2002). In their model of parent involvement they described six different categories: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The framework, shown in Table 1, aids in understanding the development of activities (an action can include more than one type of involvement), the measurement of results, and plans for improvement. Each type of involvement generates different results for students, parents and teachers.

Table 1.  
*Six Types of Parent Engagement*

Type	Description
Parenting	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
Communicating	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress.

Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support.
Learning at Home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
Decision Making	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
Collaborating with the Community	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development

*Note.* From "School/family/community Partnerships" by J. L. Epstein, 1995, Phi Delta Kappan, 76(9), p. 704. Copyright 1995 by Phi Delta Kappan. Pending permission of the author.

Pushor (2007) extended the definition beyond involvement to engagement and argued that engagement is the hallmark of parent connections that truly make a difference for students. Pushor contended that we need to change the story of school from a place that is institutional and fortress-like to one that truly welcomes parents as partners in their children's learning. Involvement as a defined term marginalizes the role of parent to interview-attendee and fund-raiser, while engagement reflects shared consequences that can only come from participation in both the planning and execution of learning activities at home and at school. Engagement is thus the chosen terminology for this paper.

Context is important in understanding parent engagement models and strategies. Context in the literature is variously described for the parent and child's home, school and community, and each context interacts one with the other (Epstein et al., 2002). For example, each child arrives at school carrying the aspirations of the parent (Marjoribanks, 2002) which may or may not match the expectations of the teacher. Similarly, Beothel (2004) noted that young children's home environment (family background and family interaction) is related to skills and abilities at kindergarten entry. Holmes (1998) studied the views of educators compared to a sample of non-educators and concluded that while we live in a pluralistic democracy there is a consistent view among the education establishment that is not shared with the public at large. These differing contexts are a source of conflict between home and school.

Lewis and Forman (2002) conducted an ethnographic study of two schools in different socioeconomic communities. The schools considered parent role differently. A consumer role was characterized by ambivalent and competitive interactions at one school, while a participant role was characterized by interactions reflected as accommodation and community at the other school. The authors inferred that schools leaders have the ability to enable a culture of empowerment for teachers who will in turn engage with parents in productive and meaningful ways. The authors concluded that social class and school culture combine and interact in the formation of parent-teacher relationships. The role of social class is often discounted as not important in the research. In school practice, however, it may sit as a delicate subject to be avoided. Consideration of social class and concomitant power issues helps build understanding of dealing with the phenomenon known as helicopter parents, the power struggles between parent and teacher, and the role of teacher professionalism as a defence mechanism that negatively impacts parent-teacher relationships. Each of these is a real manifestation in the everyday life of a school.

*Parent engagement at different grade levels.* Beothel (2004) noted that family involvement generally declines from preschool/child care situations to kindergarten. This is the beginning of a trend that continues through the grade levels to high school completion. Not only are parents engaged less in the more senior years, but the type of engagement changes. Primary grades are characterized by parents participating directly in the classroom and communicating with the teacher through regular parent-teacher

interviews and at school functions. At the senior high school level each teacher works with many classes of students making communication with parents more complex and difficult. Schools struggle to schedule parent-teacher interviews when each teacher may work with more than 100 students. The logistics alone are insurmountable for teachers and schools. Instead, parent engagement is more likely relegated to fund-raising and signing acknowledgements (Pushor, 2007).

Students themselves change their views about parent engagement as their grade level changes. While they are still wanting their parents to be engaged, the nature of that engagement changes as they seek to gain more autonomy in their lives (Versteeg, 2006).

Deslandes and Bertand's (2005) research with Quebec Grade 7, 8 and 9 parents examined the factors that cause parents to become more involved in their children's schooling. Four psychological constructs – parent role construction, parent self-efficacy, teacher invitation and student invitation – were assessed. The authors found that teacher invitation was a predictor of parent involvement at school and student invitation was a predictor of parent involvement at home across all three grades. However, parent role construction, that is how parents perceive their responsibility as parents, was a more significant predictor of involvement at home in Grade 7 than the other constructs. At the same time, parent role construction was a more significant predictor of involvement at school in Grade 9 than in Grade 7. Parent efficacy was only a predictor of involvement at home for Grade 7 parents.

The question remains as to whether parent engagement practices should change as grade level changes. Versteeg (2006) argued that just as the parent-child relationship changes as the child matures, so should the parent-teacher relationship change. However, the core values associated with that relationship should not change. Rather the activities that support the relationship will reflect the child's life at the time.

*The difference between parents and teachers.* If the research demonstrates the benefits of parent engagement with school staff and at schools, then why are there not successful parent engagement strategies at every school? One could say that it is all about relationships. Pushor (2007) suggested that the personal relationship between the parent and the teacher is at the core of parent engagement. Deslandes and Bertand's (2005) suggested that parent involvement is more likely when the parent is invited to be involved by the teacher.

Power plays a role in the development and sustainment (or lack thereof) in relationships. Different real or perceived power plays into the complexity of the relationships. According to French and Raven (2001) there are five different kinds of power that may influence how people relate to each other. These are reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power. While each type of power is likely at play in a parent-teacher relationship, the latter expert power is a key component to the relationship. When the parent perceives that the teacher is an expert and the parent can neither contribute to nor challenge the expertise of the teacher an imbalance in the relationship occurs.

Other factors have been identified as determinants in the formation of parent-teacher relationships, such as social class (Lewis & Forman, 2002) and perceptions of what is important in school readiness (Boethel, 2004). The climate within which public education functions can also determine different perspectives between teachers and parents. Engvall (2002) suggested that accountability measures are demanded when parents and the community do not trust what teachers are doing. The rise in standardized testing is suggested to be a reflection of the need for the public (especially parents and government) to have a measure of learning, of what teachers are delivering to students. This climate of distrust by parents causes teachers to in turn distrust parents.

*Preparing teachers and administrators for parent engagement.* Educators are less likely to come to their work knowing how to appropriately work with and engage parents without some prior knowledge and skill-building. Holmes (1998) contended that we are recently emerging from a belief that educators owned the

schooling franchise to one in which we acknowledge that the public owns the public education franchise. McEwan (2005) captured some of this skill-building in her book *How to Deal with Parents*. While the types of engagement can be described, schools will be successful in working with parents and communities if the staff take time to listen, to understand, and to relate to the families with whom they work (Pushor, 2007). The school, and more specifically the principal, establishes the culture in the school that expects and supports meaningful engagement with parents (Lewis & Forman, 2002).

While there is some evidence in the literature that pre-service education for teachers would be a benefit (Epstein et al., 2002; Stelmack, 2005), there is paucity of pre-service training for teachers in working with parents. An examination of undergraduate university calendars in Alberta and Saskatchewan yielded no evidence of coursework targeted to parent engagement, involvement, or partnership. Pre-service training appears limited to internship opportunities to work with parents and course work embedded at the preference of the teaching professor.

*Preparing parents for parent engagement.* Just as teachers and administrators can prepare for parent engagement strategies, so too can parents themselves. Books by Epstein et al (2002) and Henderson et al (2007) have detailed workshop and planning materials for both parents and schools. Governments often place parent information and materials on their websites (Alberta Education, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) to assist parents in understanding what their children are learning at school and in engaging with their school.

Kerr (2005), Director of the Parent Involvement Centre, concluded that a deliberate focus and activity related to the Epstein (1995) framework did produce a higher level of parental engagement as compared to schools without such a focus. Recommendations for organizing programs to stimulate parental involvement are published on the Parent Involvement Centre website at <http://www.parentinvolvement.ca> [2]. The Centre was established in 2005 to research and disseminate best practice in parent engagement strategies to schools, families and communities.

Engvall (2002) examined parent report cards as a way to assess how parents are performing in supporting their child's education. While a formal report card has not yet appeared, he indicates that symbolic report cards are an opportunity for parents to self-assess and critique their own contributions.

### Summary

That parent engagement can have a positive impact on student learning among other benefits is more than a gut feeling, more than motherhood and apple pie. The research demonstrates<sup>[\* [3]]</sup> that parent engagement has a positive impact on student learning. Culture, socioeconomic background and family characteristics influence parental engagement, and the nature of relationships that are formed between parents and teachers. Schools set the parameters and culture for parent engagement, but teachers and administrators are often ill-prepared to take on this responsibility. Principles of trust and mutual respect are important in this as in any relationship.

[\* [4]] For an annotated bibliography, see the Literature page at the Parent 2.0 wiki (<http://parent20.wikispaces.com/literature> [5])

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## ◀ Audience

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[5] <http://parent20.wikispaces.com/literature>

[6] <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/role.aspx>

[7] <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/readiness-synthesis.pdf>

[8] <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>

[9] <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/>

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# PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

## ***Start here!***

Start by identifying a Project Team. You need a group of people who will lead this initiative and represent the different needs of those who will use the Portal. Part of the Project Team needs to be someone who can make decisions, find and allocate resources, and help to make things happen. You need to determine for your school and district how this will best work. The membership of the Project Team will vary over the course of the whole initiative for lots of reasons. People will move in and out of roles as they naturally do outside of this initiative. Find a champion or core of champions that will keep the initiative alive.

These are some key skills and expertise to look for as you enlist folk for your Project Team:

- project management skills
- community dynamics
- change management
- communications
- training
- technical skills

You will see there are some inherent principles evident in this Guide. You will find the advice offered is premised on these principles, so best you know before you begin. These principles derive from the research, documented in the [Research Says](#) <sup>[1]</sup> section of the Guide.

## Principles Evident in this Guide

- Parent engagement benefits learners.
- When parents and teachers believe they are members of the same school community, the work together for the benefit of students.
- The principal is key in establishing the culture of school that welcomes parents and supports positive teacher-parent relationships.

PART ONE: GETTING STARTED will provide you with some background ([Introduction](#) [2]) and then guide you through the information collection you need to do in your district as you prepare for your Parent Portal.

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### Sally's Good Ideas

*Throughout the Guide you will see references to “school” and “district”. The terms are used to differentiate between the place called school and the governance of a district. If however you are in an independent school, then your perspective will be that of school and district.*



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# Understanding School Community

It takes a village to raise a child. Perhaps an over-used cliché, but the research demonstrates the power of community in supporting our children in their learning. Parents and teachers are both important, and more powerful when they work together.

Communities don't just happen. They require purposeful attention from all community members.

This section describes actions in building community, and considers the role of technology in community.



## Sally's Good Ideas

Listen to *one school's story* <sup>[1]</sup> of parents and teachers working together in a culture of engagement for the benefit of students, from *IRDA* <sup>[1]</sup> the Intercultural Development Research Organization. Click *here* <sup>[1]</sup> to listen to the podcast.

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- [Building Community](#) <sup>[2]</sup>
  - [How Technology can Help Build Community](#) <sup>[3]</sup>
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# Building Community

As you read in the section [Research Says](#) <sup>[1]</sup> the principal is a key enabler of community that includes parents, teachers and administrators. Communities are complex and no two communities are exactly the same. The participants, the environment, and the times all converge to create a unique experience. In our schools this changes as families come and go with their children on entering and exiting the offered grade levels in each school.

So how can community be built and sustained, particularly where technology will be part of the community fabric? A corollary may be found in *Virtual Learning Communities*. The following table provides some suggestions based on the elements that define a community separate and apart from just a group of people.

Suggested Activities to Build Online Community <sup>[a [2]]</sup>		
Historicity	<i>Communities are stronger when they share history and culture.</i>	Incorporate what members have done in the past, and make their stories part of the community culture. Explicitly mention the culture, value and context of the virtual community. Make public the history of the community.
Identity	<i>Communities foster a sense of shared identity.</i>	Use team-building exercises, develop community logos, and publicly acknowledge accomplishments by the group and individual members within the community. Articulate the focus or purpose of the community (e.g. parent council) and outline the requirements and rituals accompanying membership in the community. This might include visiting the Portal once a week, acknowledging a message, or volunteering for an activity.
Mutuality	<i>Communities spring from and are maintained by interdependence and reciprocity.</i>	Include group activities that solicit the input of all community members, and preferably <i>need</i> the input of all community members. Pose leading questions that encourage members of the community to invest in concerns held by other members, and to share ideas and possible solutions.
Plurality	<i>Communities draw from vitality from "intermediate" associations.</i>	Encourage connection to other groups related to the work of the community. These might include businesses, associations or groups in other locales exploring similar issues or ideas.
	<i>Communities</i>	Foster individual expression and comment explicitly on its

Autonomy	<i>respect and protect individual identity.</i>	value. Set up protocol for respectful communication and reach consensus in the group. Create strategies for settling disputes or inappropriate behaviour.
Participation	<i>Social participation supports autonomy and sustains the community.</i>	Allow members of the community to shape agendas. Give guidance to new community members, and promote opportunities for established members to reach out and connect beyond the community.
Trajectory	<i>Communities are not static.</i>	Identify the direction of the community and its purpose. Ask members to describe what they have learned in the community. Conduct “visioning” exercises to determine new initiatives to be undertaken by the community.
Technology	<i>Technology facilitates development of community but may also inhibit its growth.</i>	Employ technology that allows meaningful communication, and which is easy for members to use. Promote communication approaches that are compatible with older, less costly equipment where communities intend to be inclusive.

These actions do not belong only to the school principal, but rather can be shared among various members of the community. As the community evolves, members will move from being new entrants to insiders who can take on additional responsibility and welcome others.

[a [3]] Adapted from Schwier, R. A. (2007). A typology of catalysts, emphases and elements of virtual learning communities. In R. Luppincini (Ed.), Trends in distance education: A focus on communities of learning. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing. Used with permission of the author.

◀ Understanding School Community

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How Technology can Help Build Community ▶



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# How Technology can Help Build Community

Technology has already proven useful in connecting parents with parents, and parents with schools. Email alone has made possible direct communication with parents that failed when phone calls and notes home did not reach the parent.

A Portal is a technology that adds much more functionality than simple email.

Think of a Portal as a place to meet online with the principals, teachers and parents at your school. Think of a Portal as a place to post and view homework, and children's learning. Think of a Portal as a place to buy lunch or bus passes. Think of a Portal as a place to get information about children's learning or ask questions. Think of a Portal as a place to work together online in support of schools and learning.

If the Portal is just another way to push information to parents, it will only be as current as those who are posting. But if a Portal supports the parent-school community, that is a different story. We need to change the landscape of school to engage parents differently. When parents are engaged, the portal extends that engagement beyond the physical walls of school.

Technologies on the Internet today provide tools designed to support community. You may find that not all of these tools provide the security that you want in a Parent Portal. You may want to consider using some of these to supplement what you are able to provide in the Parent Portal provided by the District.

Tool	Description
Ning	<a href="http://ning.com">http://ning.com</a> [1] Software platform that lets you create, join and browse social networks online.
Facebook	<a href="http://www.facebook.com">http://www.facebook.com</a> [1] Software platform that supports information sharing and community building – <a href="#">read more</a> [1].
MySpace	<a href="http://www.myspace.com">http://www.myspace.com</a> [1] Software platform that supports information sharing and community building – <a href="#">read more</a> [1].
LinkedIn	<a href="http://www.linkedin.com">http://www.linkedin.com</a> [1] An interconnected network of experienced professionals from around the world, representing 170 industries and 200 countries. You can find, be introduced to, and collaborate with qualified professionals that you need to work with to accomplish your goals. (from the website)



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# Current Situation

With an understanding of parent engagement and your reasons for implementing a Parent Portal, you are ready to begin. The first thing you need to do is take stock of where you are today. Some of the information will help you in making decisions about which technology to use (are you large or small?). Some of the information will help you chart a path of other work that needs to be done (do you know the legislation that may come into play?).

What do you know about your district? What do you know about your school community? These sections guide you through the background you will need to collect as you get ready to deploy your Portal.

When you complete collecting information about your current situation, you will be ready to look at the technology in your schools and district in the [Technology Today](#) <sup>[1]</sup> section where you will also examine your district's approach to technology.

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- ▶ [About Your District](#) <sup>[2]</sup>
  - ▶ [About Your School](#) <sup>[3]</sup>
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# About Your District

What do you know about your district and how parent engagement is addressed in your district? In this section, you will collect information about different aspects of your district that will be critical in planning your Portal.



## Sally's Good Ideas

*You might wonder how this information will help you build a Parent Portal. Well, it won't contribute directly to building it, but you may uncover some issues that need to be addressed before you start building!*

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- [District Parent Groups](#) [1]
  - [Role of Parent in Your District](#) [2]
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# District Parent Groups

Each district and jurisdiction (province, state, country) may have legislation that governs what parent groups may and/or must be formed. Some are posted on the [Parent 2.0 wiki](#) [1]. You will need to discover what parent groups function at your school or district.

Here's why you need to know.

- The parent groups may have rights and responsibilities embodied in the legislation that will impact how the Portal is developed and/or deployed.
- There may be school or district policies that describe how parent groups are supported.
- There may be different kinds of parent groups functioning at school and district levels and you will need to know how they need to be involved in developing and supporting the Portal.

This information will be helpful when you deal with issues such as [ownership](#) [2] and [governance](#) [3].

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# Role of Parent in Your District

Implementing a Parent Portal is putting tools in everyone's hands to support connections between school and parent. The Portal only reflects the values that already exist in the school or district. So if your district is already investing with parents to create a school community that includes everyone, then a Portal can help strengthen those connections. If there is little parent engagement, a Portal is not likely to make it better. The work is a human endeavour that is helped by technology – technology cannot create community by itself.

Engaging parents begins at each school, because that is where their children are. What does parent engagement look like at your school? Are parents welcome? Anytime, any day? Are parents viewed as partners in their children's learning? Or do parents feel they are just fund-raisers for school activities?

Here are comments from some parents about how they are connected with their child's school. Which of these are happening in your school or district?

[Being on parent council, volunteering in class, chatting with teachers, school activities \(concerts, pot lucks\), parent teacher interviews](#)

[Speaking to teachers and principal, report cards, member of the parent council, talking with other parents](#)

[Changing the home reading books weekly, volunteering twice weekly with local reading program, reading student agendas and helping with homework](#)

[Online learning, especially in junior/senior high and now in grade 5/6, school-distributed newsletter/notices/etc, parent council program to email council notices/information to parents](#)



Sally's Good Ideas

*Be sure you have a good understanding of the role of parent in your school or district.*

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# District Innovation Index

Your innovation index considers how much your district like to try new things and whether you are risk-averse. Some districts prefer a conservative approach, making plans that take into account not only what needs to be done but also what might go wrong and preparing for alternative paths. This is the system life-cycle approach. Other districts prefer an action research orientation. In this orientation failure is not to be avoided but to be embraced and used a learning experience. This is the adaptive cycle approach.

As will be noted in the discussion on [district size](#) [1], there is often a correlation between size and approach. Larger districts, often due to the complexity of the technical environment, will choose a system life-cycle approach to deploying any technologies on a district-wide scale. Smaller districts or single campuses find it possible to be more nimble, and an adaptive cycle approach can work.

This is not to say that large districts cannot be innovative. It may be more difficult to do so in the whole district at once. Selecting a few schools or a smaller area of the district to evolve the Portal can help. Then the Portal can be deployed throughout the whole district.

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[District Size ▶](#)

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# District Size

How is district size related to a Parent Portal? There are several ways:

- Technology
- Parent groups
- Complexity

Technology choices will look different if you are working with a single school or a large, multi-school district. You may see technologies in a large district that are similar to those selected by large corporations. In a single school campus, technology

Parent groups take on different forms and functions depending on both the size and the nature of the school or district. A single school campus may have a parent group as its governing board. A large district may have parent groups legislated at both the school and district level.

Complexity increases with the size of the school and district. More schools means there are more parent groups to work with, more communities to bring diverse context and opinion to the work of developing the Portal.

Take stock of your situation. When you create your plan, you may need to spend more time at each step to consider the impact of each of these areas will make.

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# About Your School

Every school community is unique, even if it is part of a district of schools. School is not about the building but the people who spend their time there together. Some schools do not exist in a building at all, but are connected through online learning technologies. Yet each has a culture all its own.

In this section, you will collect information about your school that will help you in planning your Portal.



## Sally's Good Ideas

*Remember that the administrator (principal or head teacher) plays a critical role in defining the culture of the school. This person is a key player in understanding how school and parent work together at your school.*

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  - [School Parent Groups](#) [2]
- 

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