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FBISD trustees approve consulting contract for online parent portal

By **DIANE TEZENO**

Updated: 01.29.09

Parents will soon have a high-tech way to keep tabs on their child's academic status with Fort Bend Independent School District board's recent approval of a consulting contract for an online parent portal system.

At the Jan. 26 regular school board meeting, trustees voted unanimously to approve a \$100,000 consulting assistance contract to Extreme Technologies, Inc. for the design, development and implementation of the first phase of the system.

With implementation of the online portal, parents will be able to log into the system and view their child's major and daily grades, as well as absences, conduct, discipline issues and lunch account balances.

The district's goal is to have a working system in place in time for the 2009-2010 school year, according to Robert Calvert, FBISD executive director of technology.

"The plan is to do development and testing before spring break, and come back and start releasing a pilot to a limited number of parents," Calvert told trustees during the meeting.

During the testing phase, a selected test group that includes students and parents from the elementary and secondary levels will use the portal and provide input about its functionality, as well as provide practical information about the feel and touch of actually working with the system. Teachers also will be a part of the testing phase to get their input and suggestions to make the parent portal an effective communication tool for them.

Through the online portal parents also will be able to communicate directly with teachers, enhancing the opportunity for greater parent-teacher interaction.

Response to the proposed system among board trustees was positive, including FBISD board president president Sonal Bhuchar.

"We've heard a lot of interest expressed, so it will be exciting when it comes together," Bhuchar said.

Calvert called the desire for such a system a hot topic among parents who cited use of similar systems in a number of other school districts.

One board member suggested the system provide a way to ease the amount of paperwork parents are required to sign at the beginning of each school year.

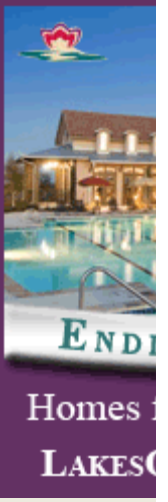
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The board member also asked the technology director if parents would be able to use their credit cards to pay their child's lunch account balance online.

"I think that there are a number of things that we can do that will provide an easier experience for parents, but this is the first step," Calvert said.

The overall cost of the program will depend on its complexity and the number of components included in the system, said Calvert, who hopes to see a paperless grading system in the future.

According to the district, more detailed information about the parent portal project will be released after the testing phase is completed.

The second phase of system development, not included in the current contract, will include web page and data clean up, if needed.

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