

Comparing and Contrasting Two Parent Portals

Compare and Contrast

I evaluated two different schools'/districts' parent portals. These are websites which parents can go to to see how their child is doing at the school. It usually includes a calendar of events, the student's grades for each class, assignments for each class, lunch account balances, and general school information. Both websites were easily accessible and navigable. They were both done in shades of gray with dark lettering, making it very easy to read the information presented. All menus were clearly labeled and each option had further drop-down options. Website A's navigation menu was on the left side of the screen, and presented a rather dark and cluttered feel. Website B's navigation menu was at the top of the screen, and so left the rest of the screen relatively clean and uncluttered. Both portals opened up in new browser windows, but did not link back to the school's original homepage. Website A had a picture of the student; Website B did not. Both websites were up to date with information about student scores and account balances (as recently as 30 minutes ago!).

Strengths and Weaknesses

The greatest strengths of Website A was that it had the picture of the student and the most recent grades on the page you first come to after logging in. The design of the page is bold, with a dark navigation menu and bold lettering. Its weakness is also that it has such a dark navigation menu and that it is to the left of the screen. It takes up a chunk of screen space, and makes the page feel more cluttered than needed.

The greatest strength of Website B was that it is extremely clean and uncluttered. The navigation menu being at the top of the screen helped keep the page organized. However, it was also unusual, and so it took a moment to realize that it was at the top and not just entirely absent. It also did not have any graphics to speak of, including a picture of the student. After logging in, the website opened with very little information about the student - only grade level, name, and building, and a short calendar of events that included the recent Labor Day holiday.

Scenarios of Usefulness

Both websites would, of course, be used by parents of students. They have most information parents would want to know about their student on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

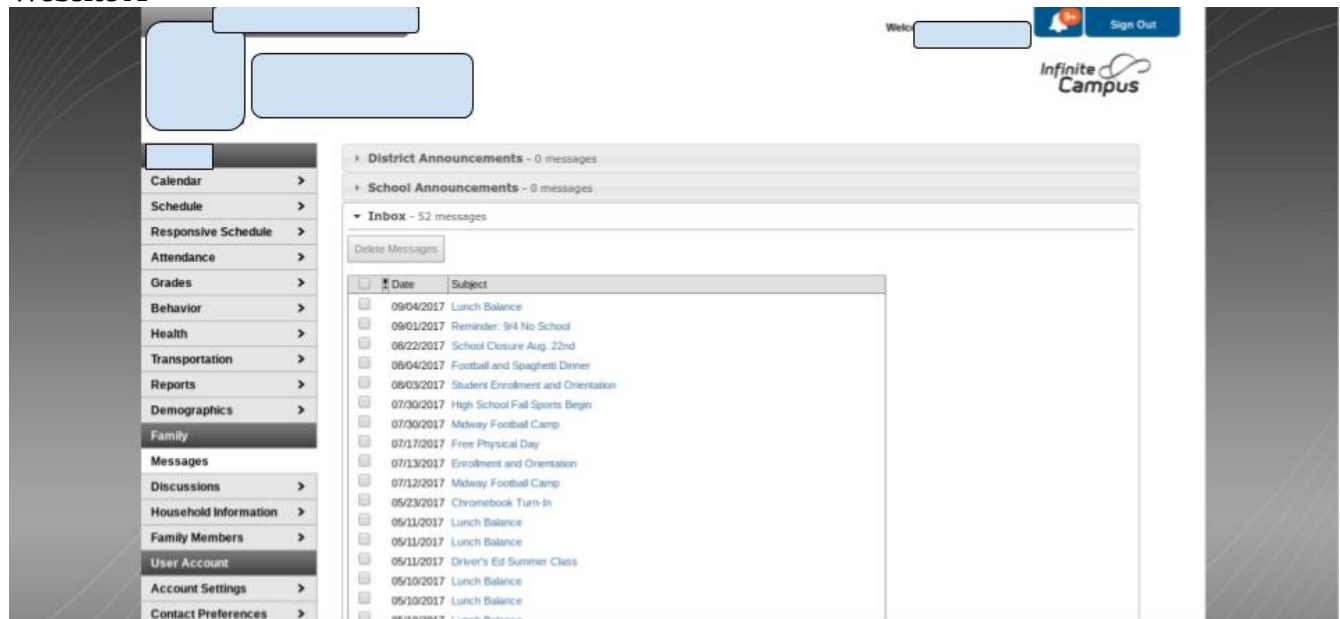
Another scenario in which these websites would be useful would be for the students themselves. They can check up on their own tasks and grades on their own, whereas they might be too busy during class time to randomly discuss this with a teacher.

Although I evaluated only the parent portal portions of the school websites, the school websites themselves would also be used by numerous people. School websites can be used by prospective parents, students, and even teachers or other staff members, before deciding on that school being the

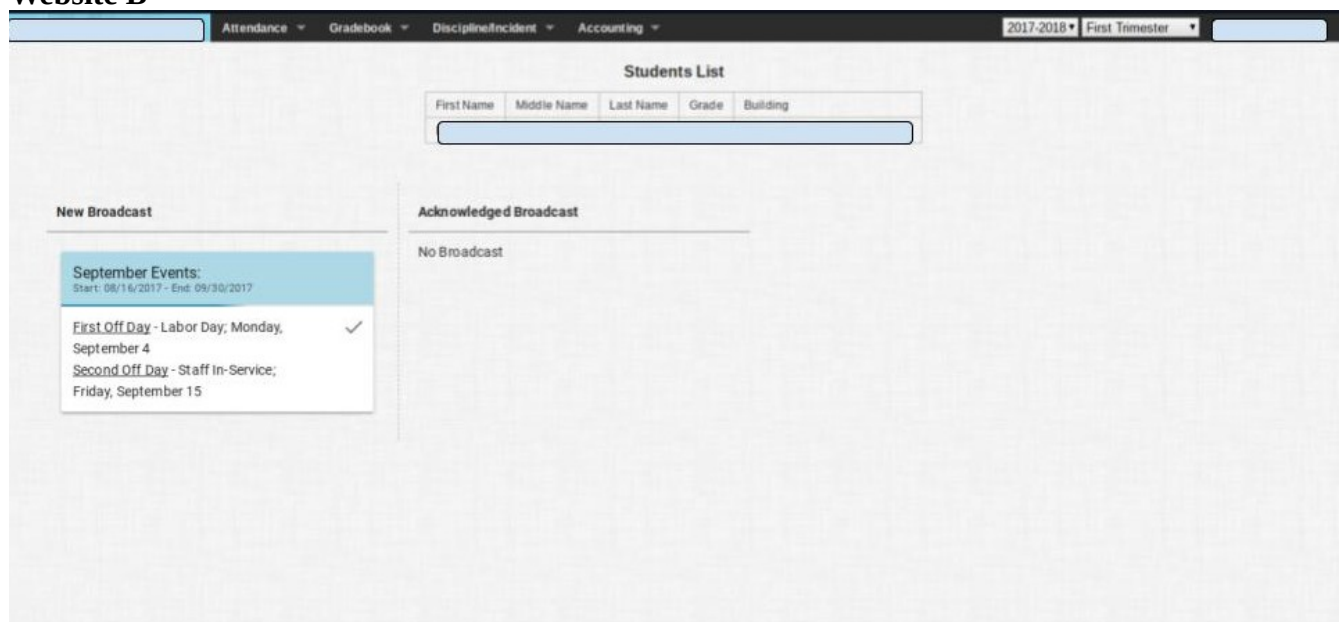
one for them. School websites in general provide a lot of information about schools, including staff/teacher lists, calendars of events, and other district links.

Since these are personal parent portals, others would not be able to login to navigate these pages. I have taken a screenshot of each of the pages you see after you log in. The light blue boxes are placed so no personal information of the families is revealed.

Website A



Website B



Classmate Responses and Critiques



Lauren Grandestaff

Thursday



Well done, Sarah. I agree that Website A has a cluttered feel. I wonder if the people who built both websites had universal design in mind? It seems like Website A may have thought about that a little bit with including the student's photo. Heading for both sites could be more clear though. Website A has too many while Website B's headings aren't predominate enough for a user to intuitively go to them.

I would assume that with many public schools, parent portal websites are fairly low on what to spend money on. I'm curious, have you seen a parent portal site that is both user-friendly and designed well?

Also, I'm guessing since these are sites that users have to log into, credibility isn't an issue? I wonder if any schools have had issues with hacking or other malicious attacks on sites like these?

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