

On Feb. 23, staff of the Hillsboro Independent School District's (HISD) technology department kicked off a six-week pilot program to test the new Skyward Family Access parental portal.

Parents participating in the pilot program have been given access to an online portal system where they can retrieve attendance records, student grades, student schedules and general student information for their children in HISD schools. The portal also has an e-mail notification system. For example, a parent could set the Skyward system to send them an e-mail if their child receives a grade below 80 percent.

Participants are being asked to evaluate functionality and usefulness of the new portal system, and recommend training and user procedures for parents and teachers. Parents of Franklin Elementary students are not participating, as the only information available at that grade level is attendance.

The Skyward program will undoubtedly increase communication between parents and teachers, but HISD Instructional Technologist Marci Hanner believes students have the most to gain.

"I think it's going to increase the parent awareness of their students' academic scores, and it will also allow [parents] to see what work is being done," says Hanner, so that children can get the help at home that they need to succeed in the classroom.

Though this pilot will end on Apr. 17, a second beta test period will be offered from Apr. 20 – June 5. That evaluation period will be open to any HISD parents who wish to participate but, while comments and suggestions will be welcomed, survey completion won't be required.

Hanner expects the pilot programs to run smoothly, and anticipates that the Skyward Family Access will open to all parents Sept. 7, 2009. More information can be found on the HISD Web site (www.hillsboroisd.org). Under the Parent Resources tab, choose Skyward Family Access link.