

Guide to PowerSchool for Parents of Middle and High School Students

Purpose of PowerSchool

PowerSchool is an advanced Student Information System used by schools across the country. Its functions include grading, attendance, and the scheduling of courses, teachers and students. PowerSchool is capable of allowing parents and students to access student grades and attendance in real time. The purpose of this feature is to increase communication and collaboration among parents, students, and teachers. While it gives parents and guardians more information about their child's education, at the same time it encourages students to take increased ownership of their learning.

Corresponding with Teachers

Part I - Grading Systems and Posting of Grades

Kinnelon Schools purchased the PowerSchool Software as a more advanced student information system for scheduling, grading and attendance and as a useful tool to increase communication among parents, students, and teachers. We are excited about the potential of this new technology, but realize that with this tool also comes a paradigm shift. The teachers and staff at Pearl R. Miller Middle School and Kinnelon High School have been trained on PowerSchool and continue to learn how to use the program and any new updates to its full potential.

We believe that, along with teachers, it is also important for parents to become educated in the process of grades and assessment. Before PowerSchool, parents received grade information only upon request or at scheduled times – progress reports, end of each quarter and end of each semester. With PowerSchool, it will now be possible for parents to check grade information more frequently and in more depth. With that in mind, it is important for parents to consider the following:

1. Each teacher has his or her own grading system. Some teachers work on a straight “total points” system while others weight the scores according to assignment categories (assessments, homework, projects, etc.). One teacher may give a grade for class participation; another teacher may not accept late work. Our teachers inform all of their students of their expectations and grading policies for the class at the beginning of the course. We recommend parents familiarize themselves with this information for clarification. Teachers will have listed their grading policy on the **Section Description** filed on the **Class Score Detail** screen.

2. Grades can change dramatically in the first few weeks of each marking period, or after a large test or assignment. In the beginning of each marking period, you may see dramatic shifts in the class average of your child. The reason is simply that when there are only one or two assignments in the grade book, a low or high score can have a dramatic effect on the overall grade.
3. Teachers need time to grade essays, projects, assignments and tests. Each day teachers are expected to have new material and lesson plans ready for class. Many teachers are also involved in co-curricular activities that take time to plan and attend. With that in mind, teachers need ample time to review assignments thoroughly. For example, a teacher will not be able to post grades for an essay assignment the next day when he or she has 25 students in each of his or her classes. Please be patient as grading does take time. **We have asked our core academic teachers to update their PowerSchool Gradebook at least every two weeks. Teachers who teach performance or project based courses may not be able to update within this time frame.**

Part II - Before you email or call a teacher

When Kinnelon decided to purchase PowerSchool as our new student information system, one of our goals was to enhance collaboration among parents, students, and teachers; however, we recognize the potential for numerous phone calls and emails from parents who have visited PowerSchool and are confused by grades or other information they see on their child's pages. If you are concerned by a grade you see on PowerSchool, we ask that you follow these steps:

1. **Talk with your child first.** Remember that our shared goal is to use PowerSchool to aid your child in taking greater responsibility for his/her progress, not to eliminate his/her accountability for work. Ask your child what the situation is with his/her grade(s). If s/he is not sure, please send him/her to talk with the teacher for clarification. A parent-teacher conversation should not take place before a parent-child conversation and a student-teacher conversation have first occurred.
2. **Read the grading philosophy and policies of the teacher.** This may explain how the assignments add up to the current average. Teachers will provide this to their students and should have distributed at Back to School Night. Often, you can find the policy by clicking on

any grade under *Class Score Detail*. This information will be listed in the **Section Description** field right under the **Course Name** and **Teacher Comments** fields.

3. Check to see if there is an **assignment description**. In the *Class Score Detail* page, if the assignment is listed in [blue](#), click on the assignment name and it will have more information about the assignment. Keep in mind that these are designed to help students understand what was involved in or expected for a particular assignment.
4. **Check the date of the assignment**. An assignment handed in late may receive deductions from its score. Also, early in the marking period grades can fluctuate dramatically because of the small number of assignments in the grade book.
5. In trying to clarify a **class average**, review the details to see if there are any missing or late assignments that could be affecting the overall grade average. PowerSchool lists the points a child has earned for each assignment as a fraction over the total available points for that assignment as well as a letter grade for each assignment. Please be aware that scores can be weighted in several different ways in a teacher's gradebook. Some assignments are 'weighted' simply by virtue of the number of points assigned – for example, a quiz might be worth 50 points while a homework assignment is worth 5. Some teachers can choose to weight categories differently making assessments worth 90% of the grade while homework may only be worth 10%.
6. **After following the steps above**, if you still have questions, click on the teacher's name to send an email to ask the teacher to help clarify the situation. When sending an email to a teacher, it is advisable to use an email address with a valid sounding name. Kinnelon has an aggressive spam blocker that blocks thousands of emails each day. **It is also important to include your child's name in the subject line of your emails.** Please remember that issues and/or questions that are personal in nature should be handled by placing a phone call or meeting with the teachers personally.
7. Please remember that **grades are fluid** and can change dramatically over time.
8. Assigning grades to student work and evaluations is only a small part of the learning process and often does not capture the big picture of what is happening with the student in the class. For this reason, we encourage parents to **work with their child** on what he is learning, not just on the grades he is earning.

Logging In To PowerSchool:

1. Make sure you are connected to the Internet. (For help with connecting to the Internet, contact your Internet Service Provider)
2. Open an Internet browser. (i.e. Microsoft Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator or FireFox, Safari, etc.)
3. Access Kinnelon's PowerSchool server in 2 different ways:

1. Go to Kinnelon's website <http://www.kinnelonpublicschools.org> and click on the Parent Access PowerSchool link.
2. Or type the following URL into the **address bar** of your browser:

<http://powerschool.kinnelon.org/public>

Note: **Regardless of how you connect to PowerSchool the first time, you should add this to your favorites menu for future use.

4. A login page will appear (very similar to the log-in screen to the right):
5. Type in the username and password that were provided in the introductory letter.
6. Click on the "Enter" button.



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Note: Please remember, when you are done in PowerSchool, log off from the site. Do this by clicking on the Log Out button, which is available on all pages. If you have questions or comments, please email: powerschoolhelp@kinnelon.org

Available Features of PowerSchool

Grades and Attendance

Provides access to a summary of your child's current grades and attendance at one glance

Attendance History

Provides access to the complete attendance record for your child for the current term

Grades History

Provides access to your child's current year report card with current term grades

Email Notification

Provides access to automatic email notification configuration - Use this tool to receive periodical emails with your child's grade and attendance information

IMPORTANT: If there is an assignment listed but there is no score – check the date. This may be an assignment that has been listed to make students aware of an upcoming due date, or it may not yet be graded. Teachers may also use codes such as collected, late, missing or exempt to convey information to parents. If a score appears in [blue](#), it means that the teacher has attached a comment to that score – click on it for more information.

Attendance History

The **Attendance History** page allows you to have a detailed view of your child’s attendance in school for the current semester. Clicking on attendance totals will allow you to see all dates of absences or tardies. At the bottom of the page, you’ll find the legend for Kinnelon’s attendance codes. Parents are encouraged to review the absence policy in the KHS/PRM Parent/Student handbook.

Grade History

The **Grade History** page allows you to view a list of all grades that your child has earned this school year. Essentially, this view acts as a report card screen. You are able to see the letter grade, percentage grade and the credits earned (after the semester is completed).

When accessing this page you will see the following tables:

Marking Period 1 (Q1)

Marking Period 3 (Q3)

Marking Period 2 (Q2)

Marking Period 4 (Q4)

Midterm Exams (E1)

Final Exams (E2)

Semester 1 (S1)

Semester 2 (S2)

Note: This page changes throughout the year as grades move from being “current” to “final.”

Grades will not appear until after a marking period or exam period has concluded.

The percentage grades are listed in [blue](#). Clicking one of these numbers will bring up the **Class Score Detail** showing the assignments and grades that made up that particular score.

Email Notification

The **Email Notification** page allows parents to set up an automatic email update to their personal email account. Parents will need to choose and submit their preferred settings. There are four areas that need to be defined for email notifications to begin.

The first item you need to configure is the type of information you want sent to you. You have five options to choose from. (**Note: The more you select the more emails you will receive**).

3. **Summary of current grades and attendance** - Sends out an email summary of current grade and attendance totals for each of your child’s classes. *This is the option we most recommend for parents.*
4. **Detailed reports showing all assignment scores for each class** - Sends out one email for each class with each assignment and scores. (Note: if your child has 7 classes you will receive 7 emails, one for each class. If you have multiple children at PRM or KHS you can be receiving over 14 emails with detailed information – for this reason, we are not recommending this option).
5. **Detailed report of attendance** - Sends out an email containing detailed attendance for each class your child is enrolled in for the current term. (Kinnelon High School only, PRM students attendance count refers to daily attendance)
6. **School announcements** –The school announcement link will take you directly to the weekly bulletin on the school’s website. Presently, this option is not recommended as an email reminder.
7. **Balance Alert** – Currently, Kinnelon’s food service is handled independently of the PowerSchool. As such, this function is not utilized at this time.

Once you have chosen the above options, you will need to configure the “How Often?” option of the notifications.

You have five options to choose from: Never, Once a Week, **Once Every Two Weeks, Once a Month (recommended options)**, or Daily. **Note: Because grades do not change dramatically over a short span, we recommend that parents select the “Once Every Two Weeks” option. Teachers at PRM and KHS will update grades every two weeks, depending on the assignment.**

What information would you like to receive?

- Summary of current grades and attendance
- Detailed reports showing all assignment scores for each class
- Detailed report of attendance
- School announcements
- Balance Alert (Note: Will only be sent when a student is low on funds.)

How often?

Send now?

Email Address(es)

(separate multiple email addresses with commas)

The next item, **Send Now**, allows you to have these emails sent to your email account now. At any time, you can return to this screen, check this box and click the submit button to have these emails sent. If **Send Now** is not checked, you will receive the next update according to the choices made above. The server sends out these updates automatically on Mondays.

Note: At any time you can return to this page and alter your choices. Changes will take effect upon clicking the Submit button.

Finally, you need to configure your email accounts. Type in the email address of the account to which you want emails sent. You can have these emails sent to multiple email accounts by simply separating the email accounts with commas (no spaces).

Teacher Comments

The *Teacher Comments* page allows you to view any comments that teachers may have submitted for your child. From here you are able to view your child's current schedule and teachers for each class. As with the *Grades and Attendance* screen, if a teacher has email available you can click the teacher's name and send an email to him or her.

Remember, questions can be directed to powerschoolhelp@kinnelon.org