



A Guide to Understanding Student E-Portfolios

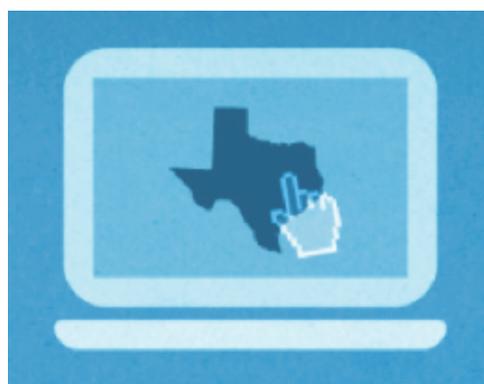
K-12 Digital Portfolio Programs for College and Career Readiness

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“For the students, it empowers their ownership in what they’re learning and how they’re learning. And it also empowers them to order the way they approach information.”

*—Janice McNeil
Librarian, Cypress Lakes High School*

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INTRODUCTION

Professionals and students around the world are using electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, to demonstrate their capabilities. In the Digital Age, the e-portfolio is the new tool in academic authorship; it is a robust collection of work in digital media for highlighting the unique skills and interests of the author. Some exciting work remains to be done to develop a familiar terminology and set of practices for e-portfolios in Texas K-12 education.

K-12 schools around the globe are piloting e-portfolio programs that allow students to showcase work, apply real-world skills, and track learning outcomes as they prepare for college and a career. This guide focuses on student-owned e-portfolios in the K-12 setting. Its purpose is to provide an introduction to e-portfolios and to explore how e-portfolios can be used throughout K-12 education. In this guide you will find the following:

- A **definition** of the e-portfolio
- An explanation of how e-portfolios serve to **increase student engagement**
- A discussion of the **two types of e-portfolios** and their respective uses
- An overview of the **considerations** for launching an e-portfolio program
- An **implementation checklist** for piloting an e-portfolio program in K-12 education

DEFINITION: WHAT IS AN E-PORTFOLIO?

An e-portfolio is a curated collection of digital artifacts representing hard work, creativity, and collaboration. Cooper and Love (2007) describe e-portfolios as organized compilations of artifacts that demonstrate knowledge, skills, values, or achievements that articulate the relevance, credibility, and meaning of the presented artifacts.

Two important considerations when beginning an e-portfolio program are an e-portfolio's *scalability* and *flexibility*. *Scalability* refers to how a large amount of multimedia content can demonstrate that a single e-portfolio is an extension of a grander, more comprehensive context. Scalability is reflected in the *types* of files uploaded into a digital portfolio (e.g., audio, text, video, or graphics files) and by the *number* and *size* of those files. With the advent of cloud storage, there is virtually no limit to the number or size of files that can be uploaded or linked to an e-portfolio. That e-portfolios are scalable also means they are dynamic and nonlinear. Content items can hyperlink to other items within the e-portfolio itself but also out to external Web pages. An e-portfolio's scalability also refers to its ability to grow and evolve with the author over time. E-portfolios support deep engagement with content in a variety of contexts. A scalable e-portfolio encourages lifelong learning.

The *flexibility* of digital portfolios allows for a single content asset to be used in multiple ways for different audiences and for different purposes. For instance, suppose Raul, a fifth-grade English language arts student, shares with his peers and teacher a narrative essay about his summer vacation to California. He could use the feedback and support that he receives from his peers and teacher to edit and revise multiple drafts of the essay. Raul could then share the very same essay with a group of peers in his social studies class, perhaps as part of a collaborative assignment to make a travel brochure. The essay and brochure assignments could continue to be available as starting points for future assignments and as a personal collection of Raul's favorite projects. Later in his education, Raul, inspired by an essay written so many years ago, might write about how the experience of traveling over the summer prompted him to become a travel writer. Raul's fifth grade essay is just one example of how the e-portfolio allows the same asset to be used in a number of ways over time. The assets themselves may or may not change as they meet new purposes, but they become a digital record of Raul's work as he makes his way through future classrooms and on to college and career.

E-Portfolios in K-12 Education: College and Career Readiness Across the Disciplines

It is a common misconception that e-portfolios can only be used in secondary and university educational settings. While goals of e-portfolio programs differ according to grade level, e-portfolios can be effective tools for both instruction and assessment of pre-K to postdoctoral educational achievement (Schallhart & Wieden-Bischof, 2010).

Many of our youngest students have yet to develop the literacy skills that allow them to publish their own e-portfolios. For students in the pre-K classroom, for example, most curating of student artifacts is done by the classroom teacher. The objectives for younger students' e-portfolios will differ from the objectives for older students. For one, pre-K and kindergarten e-portfolios can become a visual record of classroom growth. E-portfolios can also play a role in informing teachers and parents about the interests and skills of the developing child. E-portfolios can aid transitions, too. When a teacher digitally scans items and saves them to an e-portfolio, those items can stay with the student even after the student moves on to another school or is promoted to a new grade level. For example, Vanessa, a first grader,

“E-portfolios can be used to do more than just demonstrate student progress toward standards. They can also allow students to show who they are as individuals, while also providing a means for tracking a student's growth from kindergarten all the way through high school and beyond.”

—Sharleen Nelson (2011)

may have audio recordings of her reading aloud collected and posted by her teacher in Vanessa's e-portfolio at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. This audio record allows Vanessa's parents and teacher to have important conversations about her reading progress and provides artifacts to share with her second grade teacher the following year.

There are many ways in which a student-produced e-portfolio is especially suitable for use in a primary or secondary setting. An e-portfolio demonstrates the efforts toward college and career readiness that are so important in K-12 education. The electronic medium of the e-portfolio is an excellent way for students to show off their mastery of key foundational standards (See Table 1). E-portfolios are also ideal tools for cross-disciplinary education.

Higher-order thinking skills are essential for college and career readiness. Educators have redefined these skills for the twenty-first century, and they now include analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Figure 1). Digital tools are increasingly important in refining these skills. Rigorous education technology standards like the Technology Applications Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) support the use of digital tools as well as higher-order thinking skills.

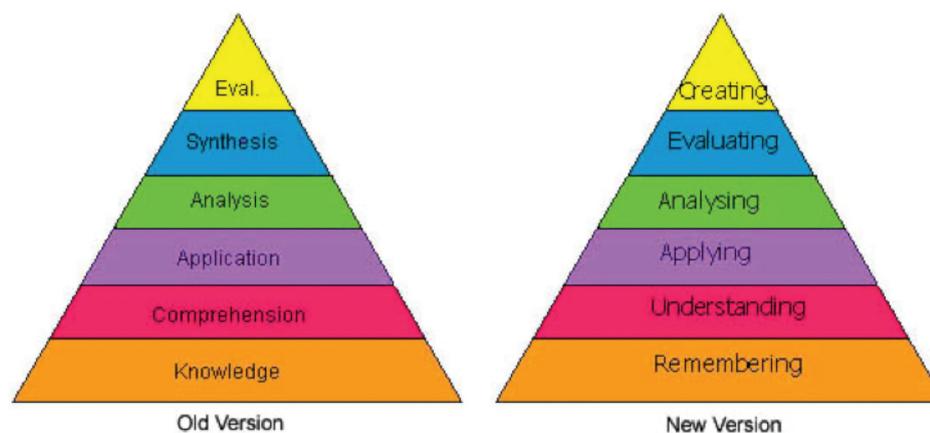


Figure 1. Revised Bloom's Taxonomy

Source: http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy

Students can exhibit mastery of content area and cross-disciplinary standards by making scalable, flexible e-portfolios. The Texas College and Career Readiness Standards recognize that twenty-first century work and learning span the four core areas of English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Academic and business leaders alike rely on knowledge and skills from all of these subject areas. As a medium that allows a single work to span these areas, the e-portfolio is an excellent tool for the contemporary K-12 student. The K-12 e-portfolio is well suited to demonstrate progress and mastery of important knowledge and skills (Paulson & Meyer, 1991).

Grade and Content Area TEKS	Technology Applications TEKS Student Expectations	CCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards	Revised Bloom's Higher-Order Thinking Skills	E-Portfolio Example
First Grade Science TEKS 1(10)(D)	1(2)(A) - Use communication tools that allow for anytime, anywhere access to interact, collaborate, or publish with peers locally and globally.	I. E. 2. - Work collaboratively.	Creating	Small collaborative group science project- Students use an e-portfolio blog to record their observations of animal life cycles.
Fifth Grade Social Studies TEKS 5(2)(B)	5(4)(C) - Evaluate student-created products through self and peer review for relevance to the assignment or task.	I. F. 2. - Evaluate sources for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance.	Evaluating	Individual writing assignment for social studies on Founding Fathers and Patriot heroes of the Revolutionary Period- Peer feedback is gathered through an e-portfolio and used for editing and revising drafts.
<p>Eighth Grade ELAR TEKS 8(18)(A) 8(18)(B) 8(18)(C)</p> <p>Math TEKS 8(1)(A) 8(1)(B) 8(1)(D) 8(1)(E) <i>Newly adopted Math TEKS to be implemented in 2014-15.</i></p> <p>Science TEKS 8(1)(B)</p> <p>Social Studies TEKS 8(31)(A)</p>	8(3)(D) - Process data and communicate results.	II. D. 3. - Present analyzed data and communicate findings in a variety of formats.	Analyzing	A multi-discipline project that involves surveying students on the use of the campus recycling bins and using the data to write informative or persuasive essays on effective recycling practices for (1) an audience of teachers and (2) an audience of community members- The essay has Web links to other articles researched by the student as well as links to tables and graphs within the e-portfolio. Community members may access the student essay and supporting materials via a secured URL.

Table 1. TEKS, CCRS, and Higher-Order Thinking Skills: The E-Portfolio Across Disciplines and Grade Levels

HOW E-PORTFOLIOS CAN INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

E-portfolios invite students to become more engaged by allowing them to adopt digital tools that cultivate communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students become authors and publishers of content and are likely to reflect on the content they create and share. In fact, research shows that an e-portfolio works best when a student uses it for reflection, collaboration, formative assessment, and planning (Black & William, 1998; See Figure 2).

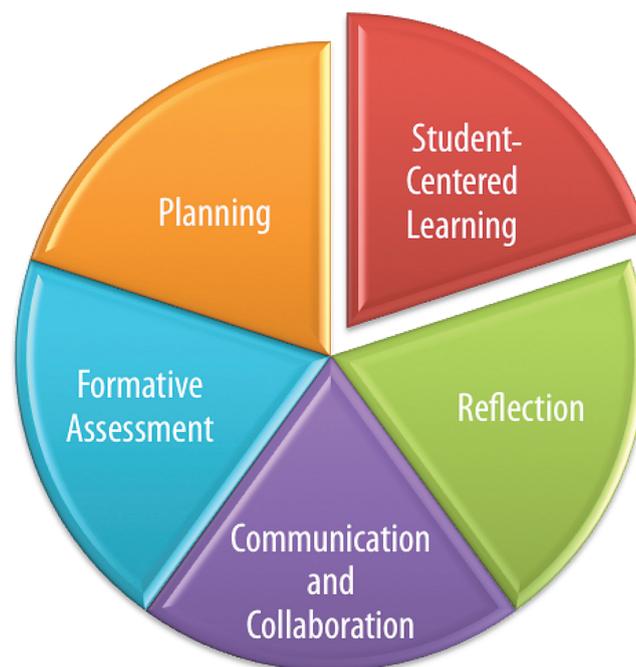


Figure 2. Student Engagement and E-Portfolios

To support student engagement in the twenty-first century, K-12 educators are shifting towards student-centered learning processes that account for how students reflect on their own learning. As with the summer vacation writing example, Raul used his e-portfolio to share a piece of writing, to improve upon his writing through collaboration with his peers and teacher, to revise his writing to meet a new purpose, and to reflect on a possible career path. For teachers who know the difficulties of trying to engage students in writing, the e-portfolio offers a new and engaging approach to a very important skill.

“Portfolios can become windows into the students’ heads, a means for both staff and students to understand the educational process at the level of the learner.”
 —Paulson & Meyer (2003)

Using the e-portfolio for formative assessment allows the student to show knowledge and skills achievement across a topic, semester, grade level, or even over the student’s entire academic career. Much like the first-grade reading example, the e-portfolio allows formative assessment to be real-time talking points between teachers, parents, and the students themselves. E-portfolios promote lifelong learning as the student continues to reflect on current learning and plan for future learning experiences.

Elementary E-Portfolios	Both	Secondary E-Portfolios
Development or Mastery of Knowledge and Skills	Showcase of Skills and Achievements	Value-Added Assessments
Introduction to eLearning and eLiteracy	Reflective Thinking	Introduction to College and Career Planning
Created with Instructor Support	Student-Centered and Self-Published	Created with Feedback from Peers and Instructor

Table 2. Secondary and Elementary E-Portfolios: Goals and Purposes
Adapted from: Schallhart & Wieden-Bischof (2010)

PRESENTATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL E-PORTFOLIOS

The flexible and multifaceted nature of the e-portfolio enables a K-12 organization and its students to work towards valuable education goals. One of two types of e-portfolio may be best suited for the goals of a particular K-12 organization—presentational or developmental. The type of e-portfolio that should be adopted by a K-12 organization depends on the organization’s short- and long-term goals. When determining which type, the organization should consider the audience. Who will see the students’ e-portfolio, and why? The organization should also consider its uses for e-portfolios. Possible uses include storing and sharing digital content, providing a platform for reflection and analysis, garnering feedback, and supporting academic and personal goals.

Presentational e-portfolios have a purpose much like the traditional paper portfolios in that they serve to showcase a student’s exemplary work. Presentational e-portfolios lend themselves to formative or summative assessment and often aid in the process of building a résumé or applying to colleges.

Developmental e-portfolios are better suited for the collaborative, creative, evaluative, and formative purposes mentioned above. They also serve a *transitional* purpose by enabling the portability of data when a student moves. An e-portfolio can follow the student whether the move is between courses, grade levels, campuses, districts, higher learning institutions, or careers. Developmental e-portfolios can concurrently serve a *learning* purpose that supports the student as he or she progresses through a set of knowledge and skills. For example, by saving writing samples across several years, a student can chart the development of writing skills while advancing through grades.

If an e-portfolio is scalable and flexible, a single student e-portfolio can serve multiple purposes and be presented to varied audiences as it is developed over time. A developmental e-portfolio engenders use as part of a student's lifelong learning.

E-Portfolios can follow students as they

- apply for admission to a college or university;
- transition to a career;
- relocate to a new classroom, campus, district, state, or country;
- request exemption from a foundational course (for example, placement in an advanced Web design course rather than a basic Web design course);
- enter local, state, national, and international competitions;
- compete for scholarships or awards;
- apply for certifications; or
- launch a business or service.

E-Portfolios can follow

- migrant students,
- students in foster care,
- students in military families,
- students recovering from extended illnesses or injuries, and
- students in alternative education programs.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONSIDERATIONS FOR LAUNCHING AN E-PORTFOLIO PROGRAM

An e-portfolio program can increase student engagement while offering a scalable, flexible learning tool. An e-portfolio program offers numerous benefits over traditional, print-based portfolios. The digital nature of e-portfolios also means there are some special considerations when launching an e-portfolio program.

Policies and People

For all the reasons you have read, e-portfolios can offer a positive expansion of your district's goals. As with any new educational technology, there are several considerations required for successfully integrating e-portfolios into an existing learning program (Madden, 2007). These considerations include the following:

- Legal, ethical, and technological issues associated with student accessibility, permissions, data protection, and security
- Resource and personnel issues associated with training staff to use, implement, and promote new e-portfolio platforms

Many districts and schools will already be familiar with these considerations. Legal and ethical considerations and resource allocation are part of any Web-oriented undertaking in education. For example, permission forms and technical personnel may already be in place in a district that has implemented online projects in the past. However, an e-portfolio program may mean taking a closer look at current policies and, if needed, revising a district's Acceptable/Responsible Use Policy.

Balancing Access and Security in E-Portfolios

The ability for students to freely access their school e-portfolios using digital tools is crucial if they are to engage in meaningful collaboration with peers and receive supportive feedback from instructors. A major concern for many educational stakeholders is ensuring that students have consistent access to their e-portfolios while protecting their privacy and ensuring safety.

Many e-portfolio platforms feature security tools called "access keys" that are used to secure information. Access keys act as passwords that allow students to control who can and cannot view particular artifacts and interactions in their e-portfolios. Access keys allow students to privately participate in collaborative, group,

or one-on-one interactions with teachers and students while also publicly showcasing their best work to potential employers or academic institutions. Access keys allow an e-portfolio owner to differentiate the security of artifacts according to various audiences and desired purposes (See Figure 3).

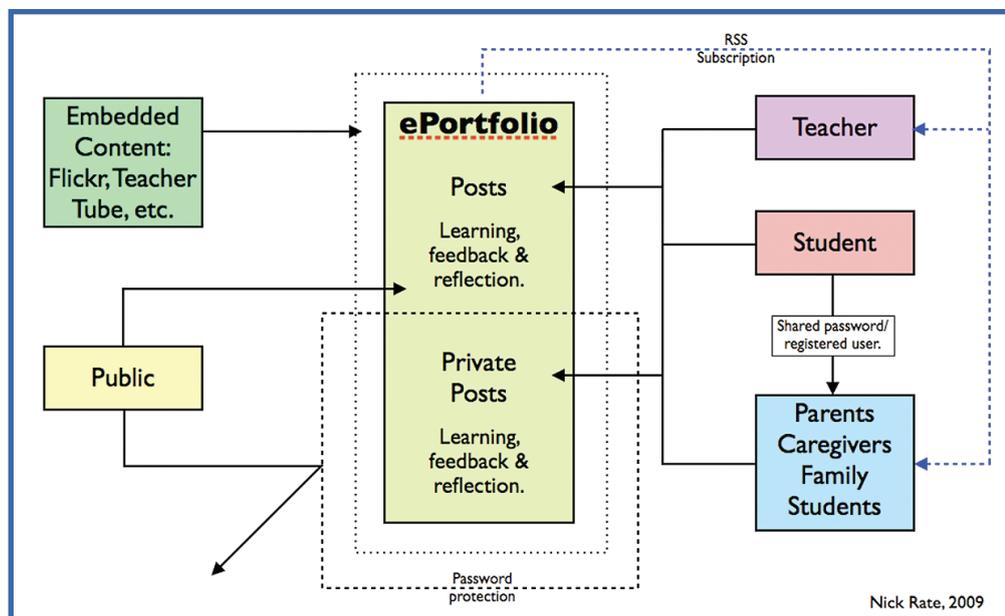


Figure 3. Controlling Access to E-Portfolios
Source: <http://nickrate.com/tag/eportfolios/page/3/>

Administrator, Teacher, and Student Responsibilities in Implementing E-Portfolios

To get off the ground, an e-portfolio program needs dedication from people in key roles. Diligence on the part of teachers and school administrators is crucial for the successful implementation of e-portfolio initiatives (Buzzetto-More, 2010). The guidance of the school administrator(s) is particularly important in the initial stages of integrating e-portfolios into the school curriculum.

As with much of education, students learn e-portfolios by example, so leadership is important. Teachers are central in guiding students through the e-portfolio process. By providing consistent feedback on student e-portfolios and modeling effective use by sharing their own e-portfolios, teachers play a crucial part in integrating e-portfolios into school curricula.

Students are most likely to benefit from e-portfolios if they learn to use them properly. For a district's e-portfolio goals to be met, students need both instructional and technical support throughout the e-portfolio process. Additionally, students should be aware of the importance of safeguarding personal data and understand how to use security tools like access keys to engage in secure and appropriate collaboration as they build their e-portfolios (See Figure 4).

“The real value of an e-portfolio is in the reflection and learning that is documented therein, not just the collection of work.”

—Helen Barrett (2011)

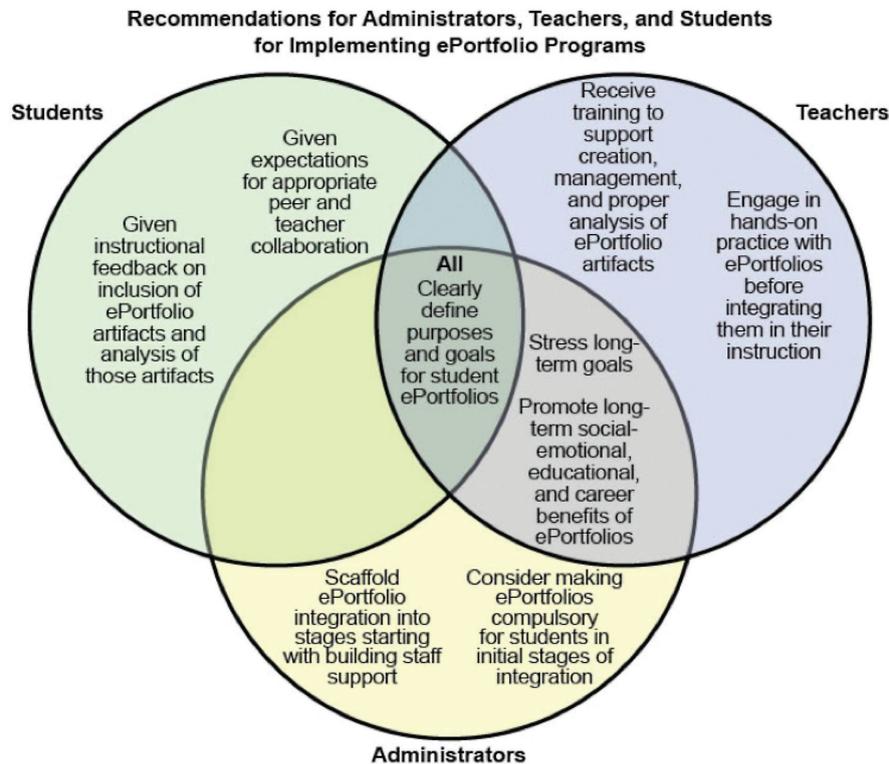


Figure 4. Responsibilities for Implementing E-Portfolios
Adapted from: Gathercoal et al. (2002)

PILOTING E-PORTFOLIO PROGRAMS: STEPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Develop an action plan for twenty-first century teaching and learning.

- a. Ask important questions before implementing an e-portfolio program. What is the vision behind using e-portfolios? What are the purpose and goals? How will the e-portfolio be used? Will it be used as a presentational e-portfolio? A developmental e-portfolio? Both?
- b. Identify the pilot group for implementation as well as the timeframe for subsequent adopting groups within the organization. Determine both short- and long-term schedules for building capacity and sustainability within the pilot group and the organization as a whole.
- c. Determine what knowledge and skills will be needed by the students and teachers. Plan to support all stakeholders throughout the implementation.
- d. Identify the training or professional development needs of the pilot group, campus, or district as a whole. Determine how to prioritize and deliver training for teachers and staff who will model and support e-portfolio use.
- e. Determine how teachers can use and support e-portfolios throughout instruction. Discuss how e-portfolios can have a significant impact in several areas, including new approaches to formative assessment, new avenues for reporting and communicating to parents, and new venues for highlighting student accomplishments.

2. Consider how e-portfolio technology will align with standards-based instruction and higher-order thinking skills.

- a. Align desired learning processes and outcomes with the content area and Technology Applications TEKS throughout the subject areas.
- b. Align desired learning processes and outcomes with the Texas College and Career Readiness Cross-Disciplinary Standards.

3. Answer the e-portfolio challenges of security, connectivity, and accessibility.

- a. Understand how user information should be secured according to district Internet protocols (Acceptable/Responsible Use Policies). The established purposes, uses, and audiences for e-portfolios should reflect the district policies for information security. Consider leveraging an e-portfolio platform that allows for multiple access codes or keys that customize levels of security for various audiences.
- b. Assess and address the availability of computing devices and broadband Internet access within the school building and across the community.
- c. Follow the district's accessibility guidelines for vision- and hearing-impaired students (e.g., closed-captioning or transcripts for video and audio content).

4. Align and allocate available resources to further support the use of e-portfolios by teachers and students.

- a. Consider an e-portfolio platform that can be adopted and sustained within budget. Consider the scalability of existing server space. Can the system accommodate files of the appropriate size? Is enough memory available for the e-portfolio program over time? Is cloud storage possible?
- b. Consider maintenance and sustainability. Identify what human and capital resources are available for rollout (who will set up accounts?), platform/server maintenance (who will keep it running?), and technical support (who will help users with issues?).
- c. Provide professional development in two areas: the e-portfolio platform and the practical application of e-portfolios in the curriculum.

5. Develop a digital culture.

- a. Provide digital citizenship training to members of the pilot group and to the organization as a whole.
- b. Evaluate the digital culture of the pilot group and, when appropriate, the organization as a whole. Analyze how the pilot group reacts to new technologies, classroom practices, and feedback from students and teachers. Schedule progress monitoring of the e-portfolio program and plan to make adjustments along the way.
- c. Include a feedback loop of self, peer, and/or teacher review of the e-portfolio processes and products. The feedback loop should foster professional, constructive commentary from the audience(s).
- d. Consider providing all stakeholders with examples of exemplar evaluation and feedback, and develop supporting policies and protocols to which they can refer.

6. Model instructional leadership for the use and support of e-portfolios.

- a. Articulate a clear purpose and goals for the use of the e-portfolio.
- b. Demonstrate support through the use of e-portfolios by administrators and other education leaders in the organization, specifically those leaders at the pilot group's campus. Experience the successes of authoring, publishing, evaluating, and managing your own digital portfolio as well as the trials and tribulations of the process.
- c. Ensure that pilot group teachers have adopted the e-portfolio and understand its classroom implications so that they can troubleshoot and mentor the student users.

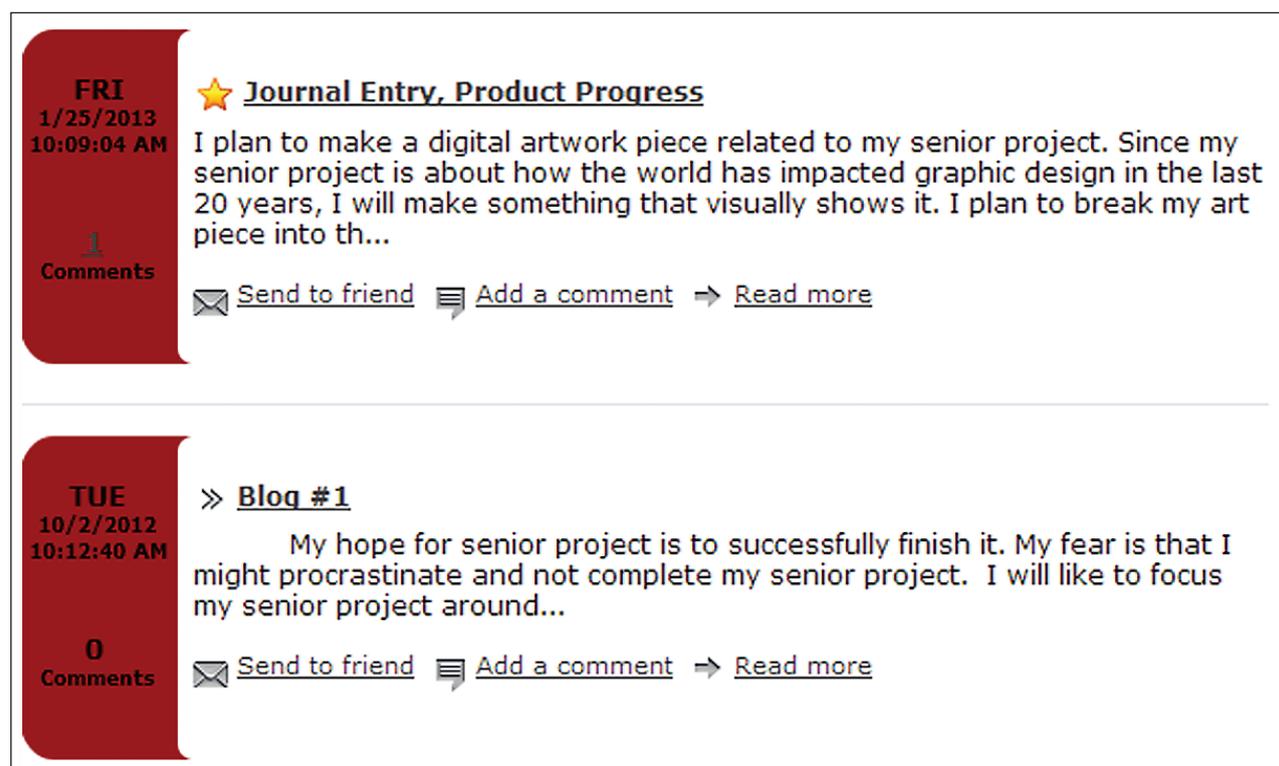
E-PORTFOLIO PLATFORMS

1. Learning management systems (LMSs) are used by many K-12 organizations around the world. Some LMS platforms, like **Epsilen** and **Moodle**, include e-portfolio options. Epsilen, the LMS offered through Project Share, is available at no cost to all Texas public school teachers and students. LMS-based e-portfolios integrate the e-portfolio features with the features of the online learning environment through courses and groups tools. For example, a student may contribute to Epsilen course blogs and have them also published in his own e-portfolio blog.
2. Organized cloud-based Web sites like **EverNote** and **LiveBinder** allow users to create free, basic accounts that access digital content storage software. These organized Web spaces offer many of the e-portfolio features like LMS-based platforms. However, sites such as EverNote and LiveBinder do not easily integrate with an LMS.
3. Showcase Web spaces like **Visualize.Me** and **PathBrite** allow a user to access his cloud-based account to publish professional résumés and artifacts. These showcase Web spaces offer more of the presentational type of e-portfolio.
4. Blogging sites such as **WordPress** also serve as e-portfolio platforms. Free cloud-based platforms allow users to have an organized digital presence for collaboration through feedback and review.

“Diligence on the part of teachers and school administrators is crucial for the successful implementation of e-portfolio initiatives.”
—*Buzzetto-More (2010)*

STUDENT E-PORTFOLIO EXAMPLES

Del Valle Independent School District developed a pilot e-portfolio program with seniors at Del Valle High School. As part of a cross-disciplinary problem-based learning project, students used their e-portfolios to collaborate, reflect, and showcase their work throughout the year. Del Valle seniors began blogging about their senior project ideas and received feedback from teachers and peers (See Figure 5).



The screenshot displays two blog entries from a student's e-portfolio. Each entry is contained within a white box with a dark red sidebar on the left. The sidebar for each entry shows the day of the week, the date, the time, and the number of comments. The first entry is dated Friday, 1/25/2013 at 10:09:04 AM and has 1 comment. The second entry is dated Tuesday, 10/2/2012 at 10:12:40 AM and has 0 comments. Both entries include a title, a star icon, a paragraph of text, and three interactive links: 'Send to friend', 'Add a comment', and 'Read more'.

FRI
1/25/2013
10:09:04 AM
1
Comments

★ **Journal Entry, Product Progress**

I plan to make a digital artwork piece related to my senior project. Since my senior project is about how the world has impacted graphic design in the last 20 years, I will make something that visually shows it. I plan to break my art piece into th...

✉ [Send to friend](#) 💬 [Add a comment](#) ➔ [Read more](#)

TUE
10/2/2012
10:12:40 AM
0
Comments

» **Blog #1**

My hope for senior project is to successfully finish it. My fear is that I might procrastinate and not complete my senior project. I will like to focus my senior project around...

✉ [Send to friend](#) 💬 [Add a comment](#) ➔ [Read more](#)

Figure 5. Del Valle High School Senior E-Portfolio: Blogs about Senior Projects

Dublin Independent School District's Information Systems Educator, Jennifer Miller, guides high school students in her class to develop their e-portfolios throughout the semester. Jennifer notes, "I feel it is essential for students to have the ability to publish content for larger audiences other than the institution. This is why kids love social media and enjoy learning in a more social or global environment." She also noted that "clear procedures or guidelines to instruct students, teachers, and administrators on how to set up their e-portfolios [make] the entire process easier." Her experience implementing e-portfolios with students shows as they reflect upon and showcase their learning (See Figure 6).

Showcase



Organizational Pattern/ Structure
Type: Picture

Description:
As a class we studied different pattern/structures that author's use to set up their literary works. We each read an essay and had to summarize by creating a graphic organizer.

Analytical Essay
Type: Document
File: [Analytical Essay austin delavergne.docx](#)

Description:
Our class had to complete an essay that would convince someone to choose our point without directly telling them "I like this product-" etc. My point of view was directed on the usefulness of PC's. Our essay was essentially based upon the article Mac or PC. After reading it we created our own opinions and made our essays which are presented to you today.



Persuasive Bumper Sticker
Type: Picture

Description:
In class I looked at different controversial topics that many people had different/conflicting views about. I created a bumper sticker for the support of the possibility of extraterrestrial life.

Figure 6. Dublin High School Junior E-Portfolio: Showcases classroom work for the semester

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NOTES





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“Schools that incorporate digital portfolios often discover that it becomes less about technology and more about students talking about and sharing their goals.”

—David Niguidula (2011)

“The e-portfolio feature is a really unique feature to learning management systems, so that’s one of the reasons why I like Project Share. It allows our kids to document the growth that they have accomplished as they progress through their school career, and it allows them to actually learn about digital citizenship in the process.”

*—Jill Galloway
Coordinator of Instructional Technology*



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