

2025

Choosing a Communication  
Platform for School-Home Engagement:

# A Buyer's Guide

# In This Guide



Choosing the right communication platform for your school or district requires considering the needs of every stakeholder in your community, from everyone who needs to send home information to everyone who needs to engage with it.

In order to support family engagement—crucial to key outcomes like attendance, graduation rates, and academic progress—school-home communication has to be **effective, equitable, and engaging**.

Administrators, teachers, and staff members need a communication platform that's **simple to use, compatible with their specific uses and workflows**, and **successful at reaching students and families**. The superintendent writing a monthly newsletter, the attendance coordinator notifying families about absences, and the soccer coach rescheduling a rained-out practice all need a solution that lets them communicate their messages in a way that reaches their audiences where they are, whether that means posting announcements, sending alerts, or updating school websites.

Equally important are student families, who need communication that's **easy to access** and **easy to engage with**. When communication platforms are designed primarily with the sender's experience in mind, families are often required to download multiple apps, sign up and activate different accounts, and attempt to find and manage information from different sources. These challenges can lead to frustration and affect the trust between home and school.

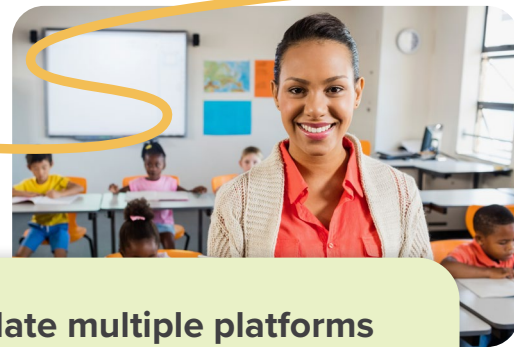
If you're choosing a communication platform for school-home engagement across your district's community, this guide includes questions and considerations to help you clarify your needs and evaluate prospective vendors.

# Questions to Consider

## 1 How many tools does your district use for communication?

Most districts use communication platforms acquired in the same way that most tech tools are acquired over the years: one program at a time. Districts using legacy systems often find that stakeholders have their own preferred methods of communicating with families, resulting in a confusing mishmash of **too many tools and messages** from different senders and platforms—as well as lower staff adoption for district tools and higher overheads for IT maintenance and support.

It's also easy to overlook the number of district programs and operations that require multi-channel communication. Strategic initiatives to address issues like chronic absenteeism often include multiple points of contact via phone, email, and text, and a district communication platform that includes all of these functions can help save time, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.



### To consolidate multiple platforms and increase adoption, consider asking:

- ★ What tools do teachers, principals, and administrators in your district currently use to communicate with students and families?
- ★ Are staff currently required to use any communication tools? If so, what does adoption look like?
- ★ Are teachers, coaches, and other staff able to create their own groups for activities outside of the classroom like sports and extracurriculars?
- ★ In the past, what challenges have you experienced in implementing new technology tools? Transitioning from one tool to another?
- ★ What district programs or initiatives require communication on multiple channels?



## 2

## What is the communication experience like for your families?

Families are often overwhelmed by the volume of inbound messages and variety of messaging channels, leaving them with questions like:

- Did I get a text about signing up for parent-teacher conferences, or was it an email that got sent to spam?
- Was there a practice schedule in the app the coaches use?
- Where did I see that reminder? Was it from a teacher app or the school one?

It isn't out of the ordinary for schools and districts to use at least half a dozen different channels to share information with families. But the more apps and channels that families need to check to get the information they need, the more challenging it is for them to stay informed and engaged—and the issue is compounded for families of English learners and families with students in multiple grades.

Any platform used for district communication should help improve message alignment and reduce confusion. In addition to providing multiple options to families for direct notifications, like email, app, and text, it's important to make sure the same messaging extends to public-facing channels like websites and social media accounts as well.



### To improve the communication experience for your families, consider:

- ★ Are messages consistent across different communication channels, or do updates and information vary depending on the touchpoint?
- ★ Can families receive text messages without having to download additional apps?
- ★ Do families know where to find trusted information from the district, school, or classroom?
- ★ Can families choose how frequently they want to be contacted or opt in or out of communication?
- ★ Can families respond directly to notifications from their teachers or their schools? Do they have access to a direct channel back to the school for any questions or concerns?

# 3

## How do you support equitable communication?

One of the most pressing challenges for districts is connecting with families that are harder to reach. Many factors can impact a family's ability to engage regularly with school communications, including cultural, socioeconomic, technological, institutional, and psychological barriers. At a minimum, the tools that districts use for communication should address the following situations.



### 1. Language and cultural barriers.

To support the families of English learners, platforms should allow two-way direct messaging in families' preferred languages—eliminating the need for manual translation tools or searching for translated messages.

### 2. Technology ability and preferences.

Despite higher technology use and ownership, the adoption of school and district tech tools isn't guaranteed. Communication platforms need to be user-friendly, versatile, and stand out from other tools and notifications.

### 3. Inaccurate contact information.

Platforms should include tools to track and ensure contactability even when parent and guardian information changes, as in the case of device replacements or shifts in primary caregivers.

### To promote equitable communication for families in your community, consider:

- ★ Can families receive district notifications on any device, including SMS-only cell phones?
- ★ Can families receive and send messages directly in their preferred languages?
- ★ Does your district have a way to see when contact information for parents and guardians is incorrect or outdated?

## 4 Can you protect and manage your district's data?

Whether student data is provided by families or collected in the process of using an app or program, any district communication platform should take a proactive and comprehensive approach to protecting data privacy and security.

Any notifications that include student-specific information should only reach authorized family and guardians, and the platforms that districts use should be COPPA compliant and support the district's FERPA compliance as well. Many states also have additional privacy regulations that affect or extend to student and teacher personally identifiable information (PII)—laws that put education companies, schools, and districts under scrutiny.



### To ensure the privacy and security of your district data, consider:

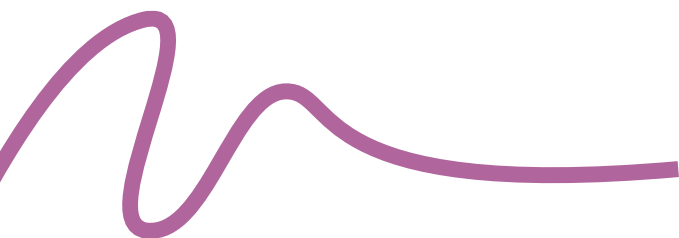
- ★ Does your communication platform comply (or support your district in complying) with relevant federal and state legislation about student data privacy?
- ★ Have your vendors sought privacy and security certifications from credible third-party organizations?

# Questions for Vendors

The following checklist can be used to evaluate a current or prospective communications platform to ensure it meets your community's needs.

For a detailed list of platform specs that can be used for creating an RFP, download the [Proposal Specifications and Scope of Services](#).

Core Communication	Yes	No	Comments
Can your district use a single platform for all school-home communication, including classroom communication?			
Does the platform enable communication for the following stakeholders?			
• <i>District administrators</i>			
• <i>School administrators</i>			
• <i>Teachers</i>			
• <i>Coaches and activity leaders</i>			
• <i>Support staff</i>			
• <i>Families</i>			
• <i>Students</i>			



Core Communication	Yes	No	Comments
Does the platform support notifications on the following channels?			
• <i>Text message</i>			
• <i>App and web</i>			
• <i>Email</i>			
• <i>Voice calls</i>			
• <i>Social Media</i>			
• <i>Website</i>			
Does the platform provide two-way communication via text, mobile/web app, and email?			
Does the platform support instant two-way translation into families' preferred languages?			
Does the platform provide manual/editable translation capabilities and translation via text-to-speech?			
Does the platform require families to download an app in order to receive messages?			
Does the platform allow families to select their preferred mode and frequency of communication?			



Enhanced Engagement	Yes	No	Comments
Does the platform integrate with or provide a content management system for school and district websites?			
Can the platform securely send documents with personal information, like report cards and progress reports?			
Does the platform support the collection of online forms, surveys, permission slips, and electronic signatures?			
Does the platform provide appointment scheduling for parent conferences and other events?			
Does the platform support online signups and event RSVPs?			
Can the platform import and sync with external calendars?			
Does the platform allow staff to call families and automatically log call details, including conversation transcripts?			
Can teachers and staff use the platform to create and send branded communications and newsletters?			
Can the platform be used to communicate with non-family members and the broader community?			

Data Security and Privacy	Yes	No	Comments
Does the platform allow stakeholders to communicate without exposing their personal contact information?			
Does the platform allow administrators to control access and restrict permissions as needed?			
Does the platform offer single sign-on (SSO) with the tools you already use?			
Does the company support districts in complying with FERPA?			
Does the company comply with COPPA?			
Does the company adhere to industry privacy and security standards?			
Does the company have SOC 2 compliance, ISO 27001 certification, or a similar third-party certification for information security?			

District Communication and Oversight	Yes	No	Comments
Can administrators send notices to families, staff, custom groups, and the entire school or district?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Can the platform import additional contacts not in the SIS?</i></li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Do family members have a way to verify contact details and update their information as needed?</i></li> </ul>			
Can administrators send notices to families, staff, custom groups, and the entire school or district?			
Can the platform simultaneously send messages to multiple channels, including websites, social media, SMS, email, app, and voice calls?			
Can administrators send urgent alerts to all contacts in time-sensitive situations?			
Can the platform deliver audio messages, including pre-recorded clips and text-to-speech?			
Can notifications be automated and customized with data from a SIS, such as for attendance, lunch balances, and bus routes?			
Can stakeholders create templates that can be shared and used across the organization, such as for messages, newsletters, and forms?			
Can administrators monitor and oversee communications from all stakeholders?			
Does the platform provide visibility into usage at the district and individual school levels?			
Does the platform provide metrics on stakeholder response and engagement?			

# ParentSquare Packages



		Smart Comms	Smart Comms Pro	Smart Comms 360
<b>Universal Reach</b> Mass notifications and alerts	One-way notifications and urgent alerts	✓	✓	✓
	Automated notices and attendance notifications	✓	✓	✓
	Social and website sharing	✓	✓	✓
	App and web portals, including StudentSquare	✓	✓	✓
<b>True Two-Way</b> Two-way communication on every device	Two-way SMS texting	✓	✓	✓
	Two-way app and web messaging	✓	✓	✓
	Two-way email replies	✓	✓	✓
	Automatic language translation	✓	✓	✓
<b>Active Community</b> Built-in features for enhanced engagement	Newsletter designer (Studio Editor)	✓	✓	✓
	Appointment invitations and RSVPs	✓	✓	✓
	Volunteering and signups	✓	✓	✓
	Public community groups	✓	✓	✓
<b>Admin Intelligence</b> Centralized tools, controls, and insights	Data analytics and reporting	✓	✓	✓
	100% contactability tools	✓	✓	✓
	Direct SIS integrations	✓	✓	✓
	Custom roles and permissions	✓	✓	✓
<b>Paperless Workflows</b> Streamlined tools for logistics and information	Online forms and surveys	✗	✓	✓
	Digital permission slips	✗	✓	✓
	Secure document delivery	✗	✓	✓
	Electronic signature collection	✗	✓	✓
<b>Smart Sites</b> - Customizable and compliant websites for schools and districts, seamlessly integrated with ParentSquare		\$	Available as Add-On	✓
<b>Virtual Phone</b> - Web and mobile voice calling to ParentSquare users and 10-digit US phone numbers		\$	Available as Add-On	✓



## About ParentSquare



ParentSquare is the leading provider of digital family and community engagement solutions for K-12 institutions, serving over 20 million students across all 50 states. Districts rely on ParentSquare's unified platform for mass notifications, classroom communications, school websites, translation in 190+ languages, and other everyday parent interactions. Seamless integrations with existing school information systems (SIS) easily connect schools with families to advance communication equity and impact student success.

Founded in 2011, ParentSquare has experienced over 500% growth in the last three years. Explore how it's shaping the future of school-home communications at [www.parentsquare.com](https://www.parentsquare.com).

Interested in learning more about ParentSquare?  
Schedule a demo at [www.parentsquare.com/demo-signup](https://www.parentsquare.com/demo-signup)  
or call **(888) 996-4156** to speak with the Sales team.

