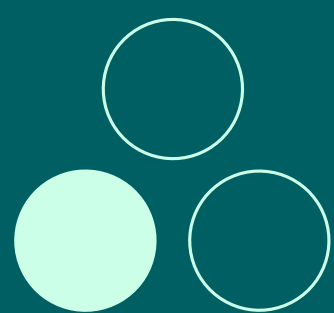


WHITEPAPER

# The State of Family-School Communication

A 2024 Survey of K-12 Families



1/3

of families do not feel well-informed about their child's progress

50%

of families use three or more platforms or tools to communicate with school

71%

of families desire updates celebrating good attendance





# Executive Summary

As school districts continue to reckon with the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system, the question of how best to communicate to families of students is increasingly relevant.

A 2024 survey of families with children enrolled in K-12 schools revealed critical insights into current school-family communication trends. This paper analyzes the results of this survey and provides recommendations for how to take action on these findings.

## Introduction

As school districts work to adapt to a digital-first era while dealing with unprecedented situations and challenges, the question of how best to communicate with families to drive engagement with their students' education is increasingly relevant.

Educators and schools across the US are adjusting to new normals following the COVID-19 pandemic. Resuming in-person classroom learning over the last few school years has been accompanied by one of the worst school absentee crises in decades. Considering these significant challenges, it's understandable that educators and district leaders want to know how they can connect with students' families, and engage them as partners in improving their students' attendance.

**Resuming in-person classroom learning over the last few school years has been accompanied by one of the worst school absentee crises in decades.**



To get insight into families' perceptions, concerns, and preferences around school-family communication, SchoolStatus conducted a survey of over 1000 respondents from families with school-age children. The survey revealed a wealth of information about current attitudes around school-home communication.

In this paper, we will analyze the results of this survey to see if they validate two simple hypotheses:

1. Families with school-age children want more effective ways to find, receive and share information pertaining to their students' education and experience at school
2. Effective communication between school and home is critical to successful student outcomes

# Proactive, Positive Communication Inspires Action

One of the areas of school-home communication that receives the greatest degree of scrutiny is the impact of intervention communications and outreach on overall student attendance rates.

It is common practice among school districts to actively send communications to families when their students are absent. Intervention methods like absence notices and phone calls are effective methods of combating absenteeism. However, an approach that is purely disciplinary risks families associating school updates with strictly bad news, and fails to inform and coach families about the importance of attendance on student success.



This practice is reflected in the family survey results. More than 45% of families only received updates about the importance of attendance after their student had been absent. 9% never received any communication about the importance of attendance. Most families actively want educational information about attendance —**53% of respondents want information on how missing school impacts their child's academic performance.**

Families also expressed a desire for positive reinforcement. **Over 70% of respondents reported that they want more updates from their school celebrating good attendance or attendance improvements.** The same percentage found these types of updates helpful to receive.

Communication between families and schools creates lasting relationships and family engagement that directly leads to better student outcomes.

Crucially, the survey results also revealed families' sentiments around the types of information they typically receive, and the types of information they would prefer to receive more often.

Many survey respondents expressed a desire for information about their students' experiences in school beyond academics, such as their behavioral or social development.

These families expressed a desire to see the impact of in-person education on their students' overall personal development. This is especially true of families with students who are facing behavioral challenges or have other areas of concern. These families require honest and comprehensive information about their students' experiences in the classroom, but often find that positive behavior and successes are not communicated to families as consistently as are incidents of negative behavior.

Celebrating successes and recognizing the hard work that goes on outside the classroom can help to motivate and empower families to continue behavior that supports their students' advancement.

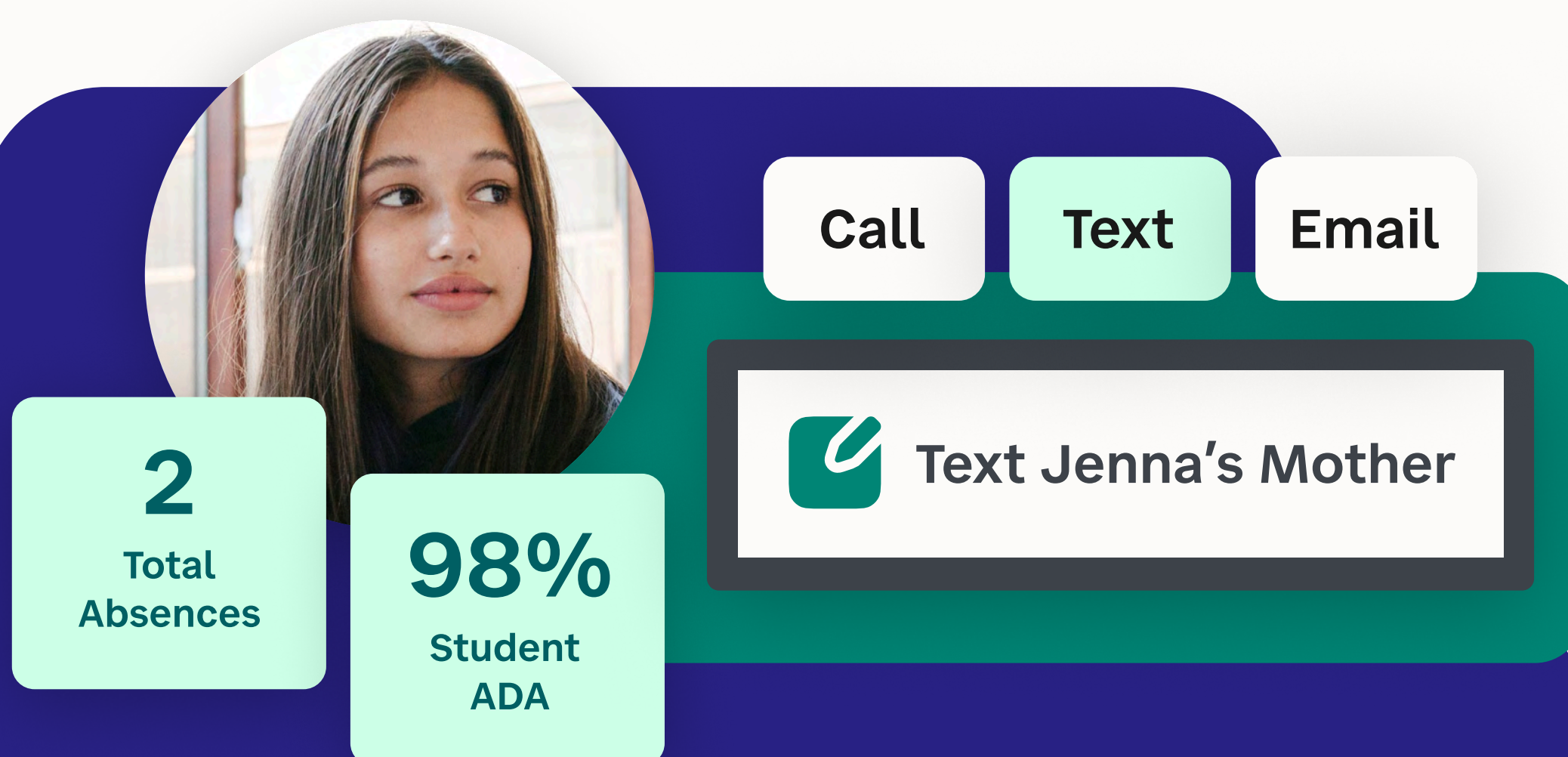
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# Nurturing Collaborative Partnership with Families

Families are the most important partners an educator has for advancing better student outcomes. But less than 40% of families report receiving regular communication on how they can support their child's academic success. This is especially true for students who require extra help or intervention for absenteeism or other challenges, who may want a more holistic view on their students' experience in school.

Families may not have the full picture on the impact of chronic absenteeism on their students' education—in fact, over half of families want information about how missing school impacts their child's academics. It is imperative that school leaders nurture these partnerships with families to create long-term engagement that students need to succeed.

The best way to nurture a collaborative relationship with families is with effective, consistent communication. A majority of families regard school-home communication as important to student success, and feel well-informed about their child's progress in school—unclear information and information overload are common barriers to feeling involved. In order to give families clear information about what matters most to them, we must consider their priorities and preferences when inspiring action.





## Understanding Family Priorities

As students progress through their education, the priorities of families shift and evolve. This can be seen in families' shifting views on attendance as their students age and advance in grade level. Surveyed families of high school students were more likely to place a high importance on attendance compared with lower grade levels.

Anticipating families' priority needs as their children age and develop as students can help to prepare those families for success. For example, providing early education around the importance of attendance before students reach high school would help to secure families' partnership in supporting positive long-term attendance patterns. Recent research by Learning Leaders and TNTP has shown that families who were highly engaged prior to pandemic-related school closures saw lower rates of absenteeism following school re-openings.

## Inspiring Families with Actionable Guidance

Families are on the lookout for information from schools about how to improve their students' school experience. 37% of families surveyed want information on the actionable steps they can take to improve their child's attendance. This reflects a desire among caretakers and parents to take part in their students' education at home. Educators can take advantage of this interest by guiding families to resources such as information sheets, suggested activities, or other ways to infuse learning into students' experiences at home.

By giving families next steps and takeaways that can help to guide their thinking around their students' education, educators can help shape students' experiences outside the classroom to give them the best possible experience in the classroom.



# Timely, Relevant Interactions Cut Through The Noise

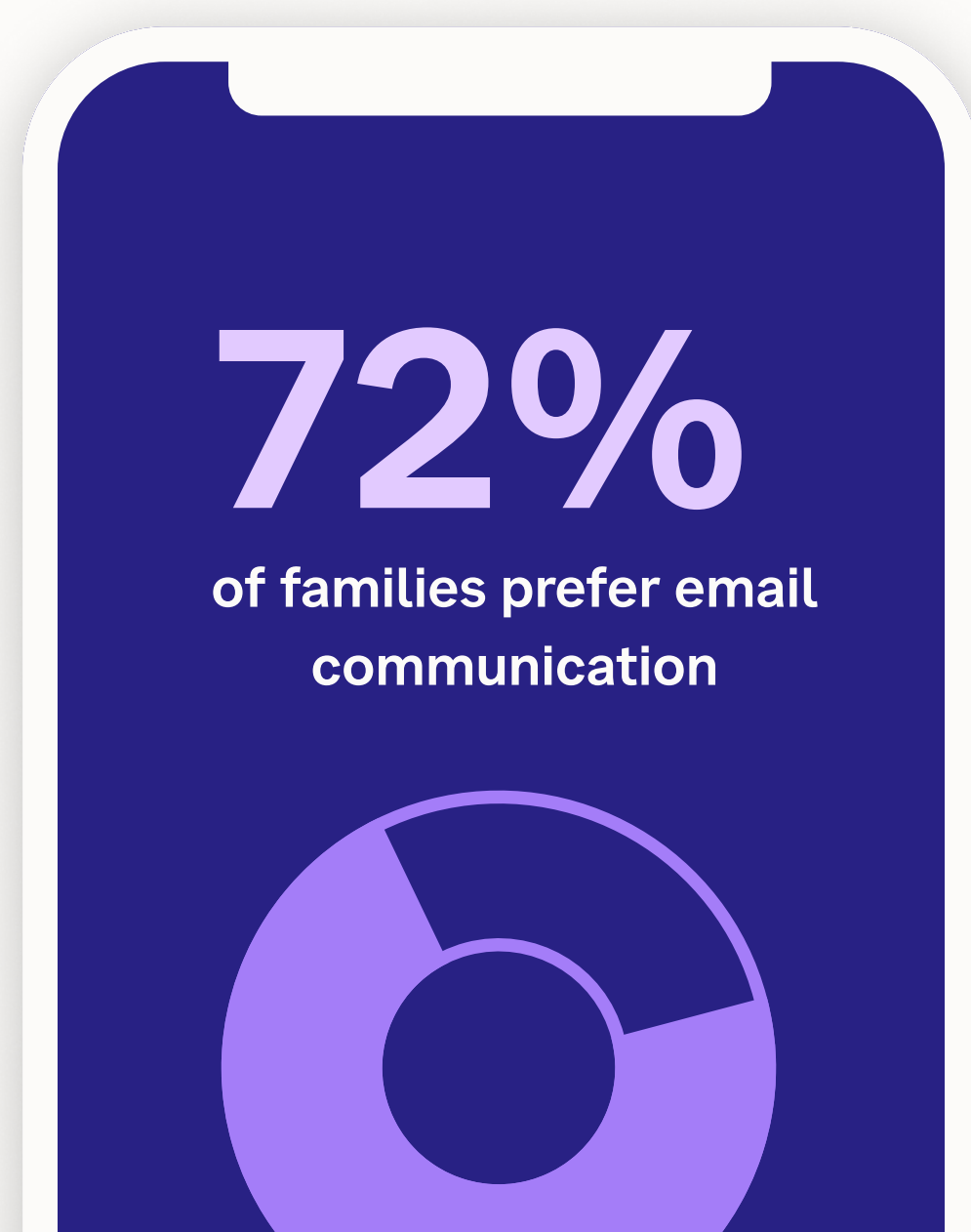
Thus far, we've examined what families have shared about the kind of communication they want to receive, and explored opportunities to foster long-term engagement with families. But the methods districts use to connect with families is just as important as what they say.

Educators are responsible for ensuring that their students' families are informed about educational progress and important information like school closures or other major events. There are currently more ways for schools to communicate with families (and families with schools) than ever before, from email and phone calls to digital portals, mobile apps, and SMS. With more communication options, schools can now reach families in effective and convenient ways—but can also risk submerging families in a flood of content where important information can be missed.

## In which ways do schools communicate with families?

For K-12 districts, school-home communication has moved to primarily digital channels. In many ways, educators are more immediately available to families than ever before—Only 8% of families said that they have a difficult or very difficult time connecting with teachers.

Overall, surveyed families prefer communication options that let them communicate directly with educators, primarily email (72%) and SMS (70%). However, while digital communications are convenient and powerful, the amount of information shared in different channels can lead to confusion.





One consistent challenge is a lack of a central source of information. Rather than a single point of contact like mail or phone, families tend to receive information from more than one source. For over half of families surveyed, their school uses messaging apps or communication platforms to message families, and **over 50% of respondents use three or more platforms or tools to communicate with their school.**



With so many channels sharing information, the strength of digital communication can become its own weakness—families cannot find the information they need buried in an avalanche of irrelevant messages. This challenge is even greater when you consider the additional notifications families receive from non-school sources, such as work, health, extracurricular activities, and more. With so much information flowing in, educators need to cut through the noise and give families the most important information about their child’s education.

Over

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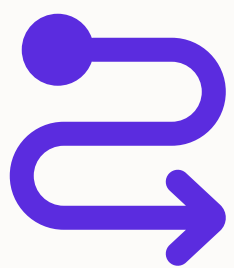
## **What are common barriers to engagement? How can they be addressed and overcome?**

**Lack of clarity and consistency in school-home communication can cause serious damage to family engagement.**

But families don’t want less outreach from schools—quite the contrary. When asked about what they wished their children’s school would add to their school-home communications, guardians typically responded with requests for more information. Their requests were revealing about the barriers that families face in getting clear and accessible information from districts and educators.



## How to overcome engagement barriers



### **Streamline communication between families and teachers**

Families can find it challenging to keep track of communications from schools across multiple channels. 25% say that lack of clarity in communications keeps them from feeling informed about their child's academic progress, and 24.5% say that the amount of information shared is overwhelming. A centralized platform can help to reduce the noise and provide clarity on all communication.



### **Keep families up-to-date with timely academic updates**

Cadence of communication is critical for keeping families informed. Yet less than 40% of families surveyed say that they receive regular communication on how to support their child's academic success. These kinds of outreach can be a catalyst for family engagement, as families are actively seeking opportunities to get involved. Not all families receive frequent updates—36% of families receive updates monthly or less often.



### **Create effective digital outreach for every family**

Don't clutter important channels with trivial information. Establish consistent communication plans across your channels so families know where to find critical information when necessary. A centralized platform can help to standardize communication so that nothing gets lost in the shuffle.

These responses indicate that there is opportunity for districts to improve the content and delivery of their school-home communications to be more relevant to the kinds of information families are looking for.

# Communications that Reach All Families

It's important to note that the respondents for this survey were overwhelmingly from homes where English is the primary spoken language. While only 5% of respondents are from families where English is not the primary spoken language, it is especially important to note their perspectives so schools and districts can craft more welcoming school-home communication strategies that engage the entire community.

## Making space for every member of the school community

### Overcoming language barriers

School districts are composed of families and students from different backgrounds. Often, families from minority communities are underserved, whether because school-home communications are not shared in their preferred language, or because they are unable to access school resources. It is the responsibility of school districts to ensure that all of the families in their school communities have access to the information they need to support their student's success.

The survey found that there is an opportunity to inform K-12 families whose primary language is not English with better school-home communication, particularly regarding the importance of attendance. Only 52% of these families view school-home communication as very important or critical to student success. What's more, 56% of these families do not feel well-informed about their student's progress in school, and **37% feel that messaging is not tailored to them or their students' needs**. These responses highlight the importance of reaching every member of the school community and planning communications that keep the entire audience in mind.



# 5 Ways to Build Better Communications

Although educators face significant barriers in communicating effectively with families, there are still opportunities to make marked improvements. Consider these best practices as you evaluate your district's school-home communication strategies.

## 1. Centralize and streamline communications

Consolidate the number of communications channels you use to communicate with families. A few consistent channels with easily accessible information makes it easier for families to stay engaged with your outreach.

## 2. Be consistent in what channels you use and how you use them

Consider how families will access and absorb the information you present. Making your communications more accessible could unlock better engagement.

## 3. Be timely and thorough in follow ups with families

There are many resources available to help speed up responses and follow-ups. Leverage auto-response and scheduled outreach tools to give families a clear acknowledgement and next steps.

## 4. Go beyond the report card and attendance sheet

Find opportunities to recognize student growth in other areas, like positive attendance reporting or behavioral updates.

## 5. Look at your data to find opportunities to improve

Examine data reporting and identify district-wide trends to see where your communications need work.

It is possible to make significant improvements to student attendance, performance, happiness, and well-being by examining and adjusting the ways in which districts connect and engage with families. By applying the insights gleaned from this survey data, district leaders can continue to serve their school communities and make an impact in the battle against chronic absenteeism and other persistent challenges.

# Summary of Our Findings

The 2024 Family Survey on School-Home Communication identified several themes that reveal families' sentiments around how they receive notices, updates, and information from their child's schools.

- Proactive, positive communication inspires engagement with families that can improve attendance rates
- Engaging families in partnership leads to better student outcomes over the course of their academic career
- Timely, relevant interactions are more effective at reaching families than unpredictable or mass outreach
- To reach families of all backgrounds, school-home communications must bring everyone into the conversation

## About SchoolStatus

SchoolStatus is a unified K-12 platform for centralized school-home communication, data-driven attendance management, and streamlined educator professional development. We enable an integrated and impactful educational experience, from district leadership to families at home. With more than 200 million successful school-home interactions, and millions of users, SchoolStatus drives meaningful results for districts and schools across the US.

**Meet with us to learn how we can support your district's communication and attendance goals.**

[Book a Meeting](#)

