

EBOOK

Connected Classrooms,
Engaged Communities:

Your Guide to Strategic Communication in K-12 Education



Why Strategic Communications in K-12 Education Matter

A healthy school lunch program. Committed, experienced, and supported teachers. Appropriate funding. All are key factors that lead to a successful K-12 education. But there's one other component that's highly impactful: the quality of your district's communication.

When members of an educational community are kept informed and feel included, districts build meaningful relationships with stakeholders and are able to meet critical, student-focused milestones, such as:

- Improved student performance
- Reduced absenteeism
- Better behavioral outcomes
- Lower drop-out rates
- Higher college attendance rates

Improving communication in a school district is about building trust — externally and internally. The more families learn about their children's progress and important issues, the more they're likely to be engaged, get involved with school activities, and support their children's learning.

In the same way, teachers who feel their principals and administrators take time to inform them of vital decisions and acknowledge their efforts feel more trusting in their institutions.

Which brings us to the most foundational building block of communication: your district's communications strategy for the school year. It's essentially your roadmap to optimizing communication so that you meet key goals and don't waste resources on efforts that don't pay off.

This eBook provides a step-by-step plan for developing a communications strategy for three critical types of outreach:

- ◆ Educator to Family
- ◆ School to Family
- ◆ Principal to Team

When districts develop an effective communications strategy, they're starting out on the right foot toward improving interactions throughout a community and building valuable relationships.

So how to get started? Let's take a look at the Four Pillars of Developing an Effective K-12 Communications Strategy.

Pillar #1:

Know Your Audience

Principals and educators usually have a clear view of what they'd like to see change in their schools and classrooms—improve absenteeism, boost family engagement, reduce behavioral issues, the list goes on—but they don't often know how to modify their communications systems to achieve those metrics.

That's why the first step in developing a communications strategy is to get familiar with the needs of your target audiences. To do that, superintendents, administrators, principals, and educators must know their communities well, especially as it relates to how community members want to receive and respond to information.

This leaves districts with a host of important questions: What's the best way to reach members of our community? How do we ensure that emails will be opened and read? Are printed announcements put in student backpacks being ignored? Are we sending too many messages, or too few?

The best way to find those answers is to send out community-wide surveys.

The surveys should ask recipients for their name, email address, phone number, and preferred language(s).

To ensure that surveys are completed by the maximum number of people, follow these guidelines:

- Create one survey for each group of recipients, for example, one for families, and one for staff.
- Distribute them in multiple channels (such as email, text, and hard copy) and in their home language.
- Keep surveys short—they should take only one or two minutes to fill out—and include only a few, simple, pertinent questions.



Surveys can help you understand your district better

Here are some sample survey questions for external and internal outreach:

Survey Questions Sent to Families

1. How often would you like to receive a newsletter about what's happening in the classroom, school, or district: Once a week, or once a month?
2. How would you prefer to receive most communication about your child: Email, text, or phone calls?
3. What information would you like to receive that you're currently not getting: Your child's academic progress, days absent, grades, or behavioral issues?

Survey Questions Sent From Principals to Faculty:

1. How often are you comfortable attending team meetings: Once a week, or every other week?
2. How would you like to receive summaries of district and school decisions: Weekly, monthly, or as they happen?
3. How would you prefer to receive most communication: Over email, text, or hard copy?

Survey Questions From District Superintendents to Principals:

1. What district processes or requirements are unclear to faculty and staff at your school?
2. How does your school inform and engage the broader community around your school?
3. What tasks or processes are taking up too much time or manual effort?
4. How can the district support educators at your school to improve staff retention?

Survey data can give districts, schools, and educators a much clearer idea of how to reach different groups within the school community. Understanding your audience will help you craft more thoughtful and engaging messages to bring the community together.

Pillar #2:

Follow Communications Best Practices

Whether your communications goals are aimed at ultimately strengthening family engagement, reducing absenteeism, or building a more cohesive team, your communications strategy should include five best practices to be followed in all communications sent throughout the district.

1

Be consistent.

Keep information consistent across all your communication channels, such as newsletters, classroom notifications, website updates, and agendas for team meetings, and stick to it. Only urgent notifications should fall outside of scheduled communications.

2

Write content that resonates.

Before writing an email or text to families or staff, craft messaging you think your audience will find useful. Keep it brief. People tend not to read information they think will take a long time to get through.

3

Make It visually appealing.

School communications don't have to be boring! Jazz them up with fun colors, photos, and attractive fonts. Work with great-looking templates and modify your emails, messages, and website to reflect your district's brand.

4

Be welcoming to everyone.

Offer all communication in recipients' home language and through multiple channels. For example, families that don't have a computer at home would probably prefer texts or phone calls over emails.

5

Leverage data-driven insights.

Use data to make communications effective and efficient. For instance, you can send out certain information to segmented audiences, such as families in a particular grade or educators whose students are showing high rates of absenteeism.

Pillar #3: Be Mindful of Every Student

To effectively reach families and other community members, it's important to consider their needs and the difficulties they may be struggling with. Issues such as food insecurity, immigrant status, stress, a disability, or unemployment can make it hard to stay connected and engaged.

A recent study shows that chronic absenteeism rates across the US dramatically increased following the COVID-19 pandemic and have continued to be especially high among economically disadvantaged students and those of color.

Some families in your district who are new to the community or the country might not speak English as their primary language. A family member's disability may prevent them from filling out a school form. A caregiver who works multiple work shifts might not have time to attend a conference.

It's critical that districts overcome these barriers and build equitable safeguards into their communication strategies so that families of at-risk students have the best chance to stay engaged.

Tips for Success

- ◆ **Be respectful of families' time.** Be judicious with the number of communications that go out, being careful not to burden family members with too many or very long messages.
- ◆ **Choose channels and devices that work best for families.** Your surveys should reveal how each family prefers to receive information; some families without internet access may only be able to interact with their phones.
- ◆ **Translate information into each family's primary language.** Based on your survey data, deliver messages in the language or languages that a family has specified.
- ◆ **Keep your community informed with up-to-date information.** Ensure that critical details like contact info, school schedules, and other commonly searched information is available on a public place like your school website.

SchoolStatus: Your District's Data-Driven Solution

SchoolStatus is a K-12 success platform that drives meaningful results for districts and schools, meeting the communication and data-management needs of the school community including superintendents, administrators, educators, and families.

With SchoolStatus, districts can:

Reduce chronic absenteeism

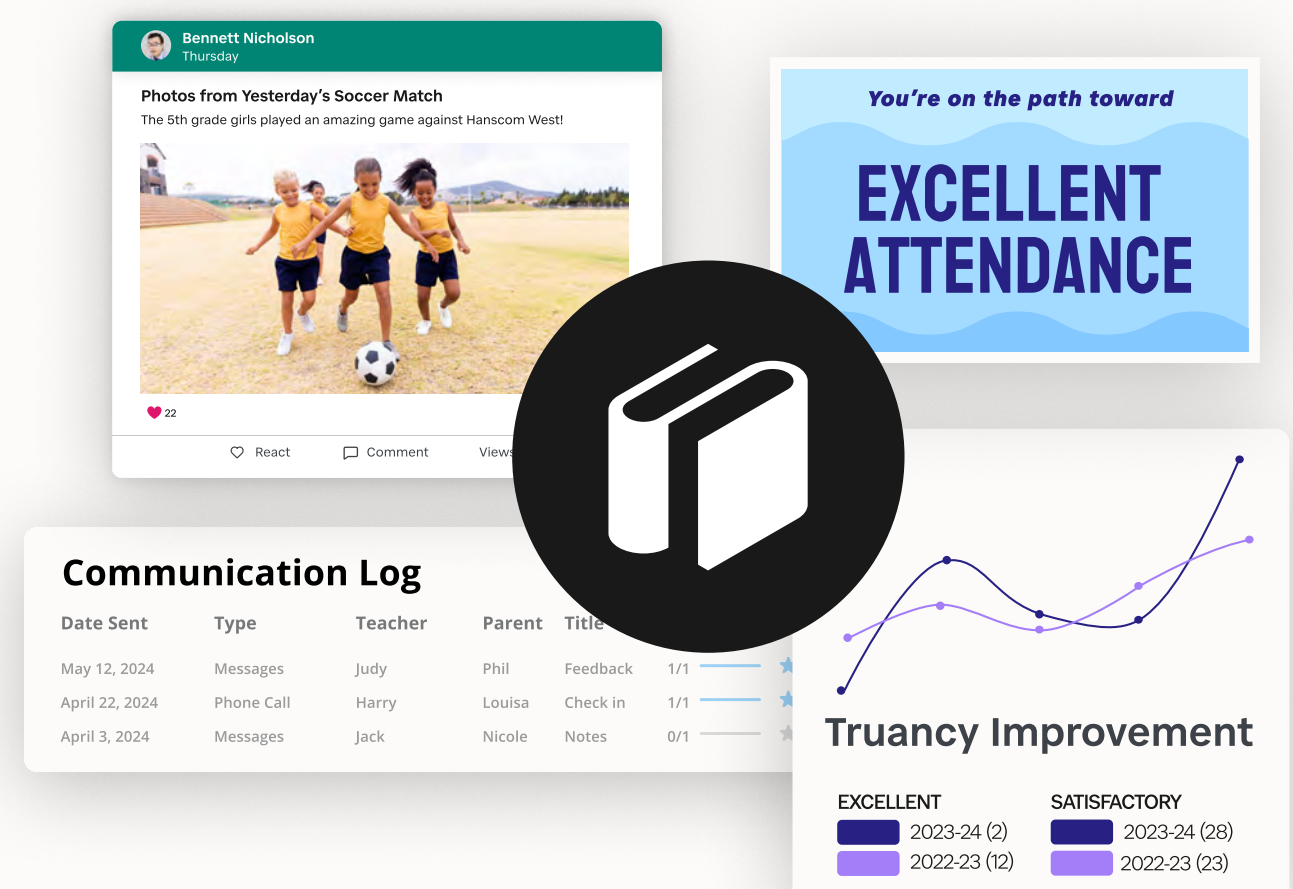
Engage and educate families about the importance of regular attendance, whether it's via mass notifications, 1:1 digital communications, resources on school websites or positive reinforcement mailings sent to students' homes.

Gain operational efficiency

Create processes that scale across your district and reduce staff time spent on attendance letters, digital forms, website management, and home communication, while increasing attendance rates and engagement with students and families.

Engage more families

Everything schools and districts need for school-home communication, all in one place. Two-way messaging, auto-translation into 100+ languages, mass notifications, and mailed attendance letters and school updates help engage families in their students' success. Communication logging and tracking make oversight and reporting easy.



"Our families now feel that they're not alone. They know we want to talk with them. That's why we're using SchoolStatus."

—Marueen Brown, Director of Outreach, Dove Schools of OKC

Pillar #4:

Adopt a Data-Driven Communications Solution

The last component in your strategy relates to technology. Even when a district follows best practices, it can be hamstrung trying to implement them without a top-tier solution that's designed for district and school communications

SchoolStatus stands above other school-communications solutions because it leverages data-driven tools to enable school districts to create meaningful connections with all community members, including superintendents, administrators, educators, and families.

"At first, everybody was really reluctant. 'We're not doing anything new,'...But as the year progressed, we would let them know you can do that through SchoolStatus. You can track your messages. You can have all of the documentation that you need right there. So it kind of built throughout the year, and now I have a lot of teachers who use it very often."

—Wendy Michael, Principal,
Hernando Hills Elementary

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Pages 8-10 outline best practices that educators and principals can follow to make the most of SchoolStatus and improve their engagement with families and team members.

Strengthen Educator-Family Relationships

Teachers play a huge role in strengthening engagement with family members and can use SchoolStatus to make those processes efficient and meaningful.

Here are ways they can put SchoolStatus to work to stay more connected to families.

- ◆ **Send a quick, positive message.** With SchoolStatus, teachers can communicate with families in ways that work best for them, including 1:1 via text messaging auto-translated in more than 100 languages. These messages could be anything from “Maya aced that math quiz. Great work!” to “Sorry to hear Akeno’s under the weather. We look forward to seeing him when he’s well!”
- ◆ **Include photos.** SchoolStatus makes it easy for teachers to share photos and organize them by student, by grade, by event, or any way that helps them stay organized. Including school photos in a newsletter encourages families to engage with the content. Just be sure that any photos of people, especially students, have received family approval and consent before publication.
- ◆ **Maintain an online presence.** Your community needs a way to get essential information about your school online—and despite the look of many school websites, it’s no longer 2004. A consistent, up-to-date digital landscape (including your website, digital communications, and apps) gives families a reliable place to find information and get involved.
- ◆ **Create an exciting weekly update.** Teachers can put together a short, weekly update via SchoolStatus Connect, using templates from Smore, to keep families updated on what’s going on in the classroom. These updates can be used to explain a new procedure, offer a valuable resource, alert them to a medical concern, or give tips to improve performance and attendance.
- ◆ **Access the Student Card.** The Student Card houses all of a student’s data in one place, giving teachers immediate access to attendance data, grades, and past communication with families. Educators can use the Student Card to guide their communication strategies and understand the context for each student.

Improve Communication Between Principals and Families

Principals who want to stay engaged with families can use many of those same SchoolStatus tools. That includes sending families an attractive, colorful newsletter every month, every quarter, and at the start and end of the school year.

Here are tips for creating a newsletter and broadcast communication that families will enjoy receiving:

- ◆ **Access data-driven segmentation insights.** SchoolStatus makes it easy to set up communication that's targeted to whatever group works best so you're assured that the right people get the right message. For example, you can send a newsletter only to families whose students' attendance have dropped in the last 30 days. You can also segment based on students who are in a particular grade or class, or who are new to the school.
- ◆ **Keep the message positive.** While newsletters can be used to communicate serious content, they're more likely to be opened and read by family members when the subject line indicates that the information has a positive tone. Be sure to acknowledge students who have made good progress. Call out student birthdays for the month, or announce a donation or a parent's act of kindness.
- ◆ **Set up templates to share important news.** SchoolStatus' Smore integration comes chock-full of attractive, easy-to-customize newsletter templates so your newsletters look sharp. Use templates to quickly and clearly communicate critical information, such as school closures due to holidays or bad weather.

"The single biggest benefit of using SchoolStatus has been the consistency and ease of all our classes and families knowing where communication is coming from. It's a quick and friendly way for them to know what's happening during the school day."

—Rory Crouch, Principal, Ventana Ranch School

Achieve Better Team Collaboration and Cohesiveness

The teachers in your school work hard, so you want to be sure to communicate with them in a way that makes their jobs easier and more enjoyable. Some parts of the US are experiencing a labor shortage crisis in which districts are struggling to find enough educators to teach all subjects, so improving job satisfaction and morale have become imperative.

An effective way to reach faculty and make them feel informed and included is to send them a regular newsletter that's created with Smore in SchoolStatus Connect. It goes a long way to make staff feel appreciated and supported and that they're receiving information they need to be productive and successful.

Here are several scenarios where a principal can win points with their staff thanks to SchoolStatus:

- ◆ **Recognizing a teacher's stellar job.** Give outstanding educators a shout out on your school website or newsletter to recognize when they go above and beyond for their students.
- ◆ **Include a monthly teacher profile.** Write up a special edition newsletter that shines the spotlight on one or two teachers and their accomplishments. This is especially helpful to introduce faculty to a new team member.
- ◆ **Make teachers' lives easier.** Look for opportunities to streamline or automate time-consuming tasks that create busywork for teachers. Understanding teachers' frustrations can help earn their trust.
- ◆ **Announce a reward.** Most employees feel it's important that employers reward them for their work. So use your newsletter to announce that a teacher's excellent performance has earned them a gift card at their favorite coffee shop or school supply store.

SchoolStatus also contains data-driven analysis capabilities that allow you to utilize metrics to evaluate engagement among your team members. For example, if you notice that someone is missing an inordinate number of days you can reach out and see if they need additional support.

Key Takeaways

- ◆ In this eBook, we covered the importance of developing an effective communications strategy to enable school districts to meet key objectives, such as improving student performance and attendance rates, enhancing family engagement, and boosting morale among staff.
- ◆ We shared the Four Pillars of Developing a K-12 Communications Strategy, which includes sending surveys sent to families and staff to define goals, following communications best practices, being mindful of all students, and adopting a data-driven communication solution.
- ◆ SchoolStatus delivers that solution by empowering districts to improve communication and strengthen relationships in three key areas: between teacher and families, between principal and families, and between principal and faculty.
- ◆ Finally, we looked at how districts can use SchoolStatus to enhance communication in those three scenarios.

With more than 200 million successful school-home interactions, and millions of users across all product lines, SchoolStatus drives meaningful results for districts and schools across the US.

[Book a personalized demo](#)

