



Communications Future Survey:

Educator Perspectives on What Works
to Reach Families and What Should Change

April 2022

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| About the Survey | 4 |
| Key Findings | 4 |
| Communication Challenges | 7 |
| Conclusion | 9 |
| About ParentSquare | 10 |

Introduction: Planning for the Future of School-Home Communications

What does the future of school-home communications look like? Today certainly doesn't look like the past. The "Friday flyer" used to be the primary form of communication between school and home. However, with the **increase of digital communications**, the weekly paper flyer is being retired in many districts for more efficient and effective methods.

One of the impacts of remote learning over the past two years is that **parents are now more involved** in the day-to-day life of their children's classrooms. Many schools and districts value this increased engagement and want to continue to deepen the relationships with their parent partners.

The research is clear about the benefits of parent involvement in students' education. The National PTA has **shared findings** that support the positives of parent involvement:

- Students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background or the parents' education level.
- Students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students from diverse backgrounds do better when parents and teachers collaborate to bridge the gap between school and the culture at home.
- Schools that work well with families have better teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents.

There is also no doubt that technology played a significant role in successful communication and remote instruction during the pandemic. Given that most schools now have some degree of digital capacity, they are evaluating the best ways to communicate with parents and families so as to **keep them engaged well into the future**.

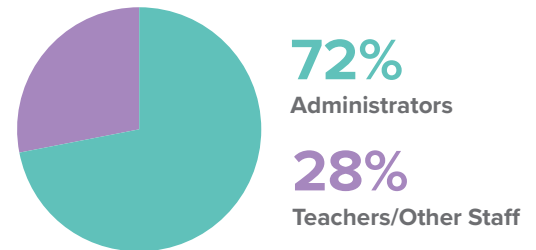
To learn more about the current practices in school-home communications — and schools' and districts' plans for future communications with parents and families — ParentSquare conducted a national survey in early 2022.



About the Survey: National, and Mostly Administrators

In January and February 2022, a survey was sent to school and district leaders across the country to learn about their **current channels of communication** with parents and families and **how they view the future** of school-home communication over the next two to three years. The survey was sent to both customers and non-customers of ParentSquare.

Seventy-two percent of respondents were administrators at the school or district level: 47 percent were school administrators, such as principals, assistant principals, and office staff, and 25 percent were district-level administrators, such as superintendents, communications officers, and technology directors. The majority of the remaining 28 percent were office and professional staff. There were 1,316 completed surveys.

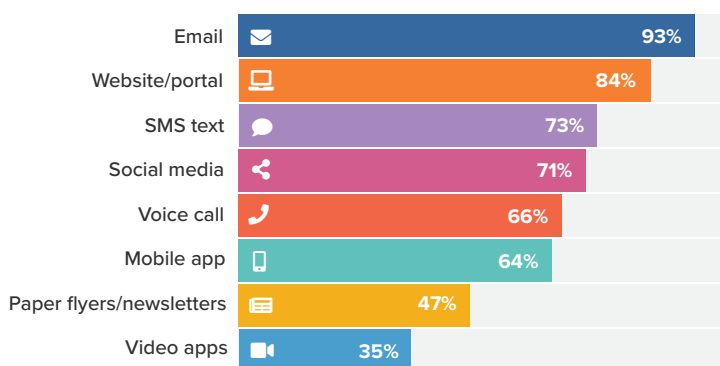


Respondents were asked about their **use of eight communication channels**: email, SMS text (texting), mobile app, website (school website or portal), social media (i.e., Twitter and Facebook), voice calls, video apps/messages (i.e., Zoom, YouTube), and paper flyers/newsletters. Their opinions are detailed throughout this report.

Six Key Findings: Multiple Channels, Frequency, Effectiveness and the Future

1. The majority of schools use multiple channels of communication.

Respondents were allowed to select up to eight modes for school-home communications. More than two-thirds of schools and districts **use five to six different channels** of communication.



In descending order, 93 percent use email as their number one channel; 84 percent use their school website or portal. In third place is SMS text at 73 percent, and 71 percent use social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Rounding out the top roughly two-thirds of channels are voice calls at 66 percent and mobile apps at 64 percent. It's interesting to note that nearly half, or **47 percent**, **still use paper** flyers and newsletters as part of their communication mix. Video apps/messages trail all other channels at 35 percent.

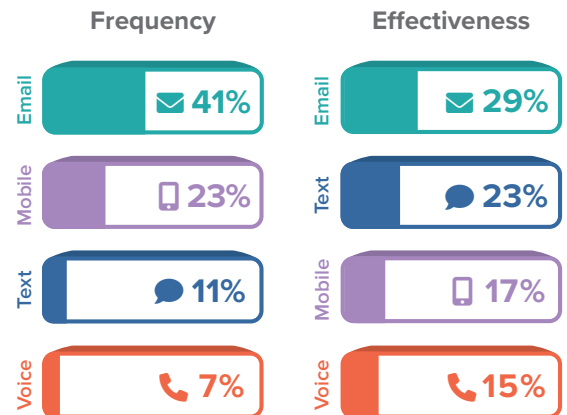
TAKEAWAY

While email is the most common choice, most schools use multiple channels to reach all families through each family's preferred channel of communication.

2. Although email is #1 in frequency and effectiveness, both text and voice are twice as effective as they are frequent.

Schools were asked to list the school-home communication channels they used **most frequently** and those they felt were **most effective**. The same communication channels are in the top four in both frequency and effectiveness rankings. Email was cited as both the most frequently used and the most effective channel of school-home communication. Mobile and text reversed their number two and number three positions between frequency of use and effectiveness, and voice was in the number four position in both categories.

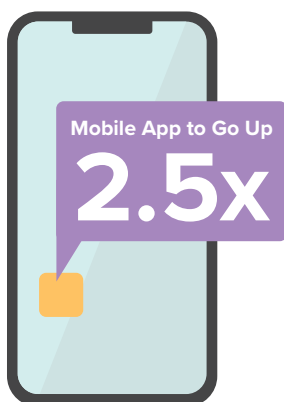
The top two channels for frequency, email and mobile apps, represent almost two-thirds of school-home communications. Email and text represent more than half of effective school-home communications. Interestingly, both **text and voice were ranked twice as effective** as their frequency. The differences in the remaining channels were not statistically significant.



TAKEAWAY

Email's frequency of use is greater than its effectiveness; it's the other way around for text messages.

3. Looking out two to three years, respondents project that the top three channels most likely to increase in their communications mix are the mobile app, SMS text, and social media.



Schools and districts project that they will **significantly increase their use of mobile apps** by almost a 3:1 margin over the next few years. Alongside mobile apps they plan increased use of texting and social media over the same period. At the other end of the spectrum, educators reported that the one channel they are most likely to use less is paper flyers/newsletters, followed by voice calls.

Throughout the survey, respondents expressed a **strong preference for more digital** communications. Schools and districts want to reach as many of their families as possible and feel confident this will require a mix of digital options. However, they want to post a message once and have it delivered in a variety of formats that families will respond to.

TAKEAWAY

Schools want to increase their digital communications in the future with a mix of options to reach as many families as possible.

4. By a huge margin, districts want to eliminate their use of paper flyers over the next two to three years.

There was a match between the channel that most schools expect they'll use less, and the one they'd **most like to no longer have to use** in the future: paper flyers and newsletters. A staggering 64 percent of respondents want to stop using paper flyers and newsletters—the number one response—while voice calls were a distant second at nine percent.

Although the vast majority of schools and districts would like to stop using paper, a number of respondents commented that **all modes of communication serve a purpose** and they plan to continue using all the channels they are currently using. In fact, several respondents noted that some families prefer paper instead of digital communications.



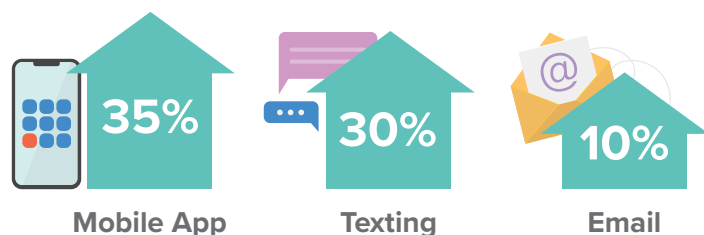
One respondent said, “All of these [channels] reach different demographics, so they should all remain available.” Another said, “So many parents have different preferences for communication, so there isn’t one that I’d no longer have to use — I just like to be able to send the same message in multiple formats at once.”

TAKEAWAY

Almost two-thirds of schools want to discontinue the use of paper flyers and newsletters in the future.

5. Over the next two to three years, schools want to significantly increase their use of mobile apps and texting.

There is strong alignment across findings when schools are asked whether each channel will increase, decrease, or stay the same in their communications mix, and which one single channel they'd significantly increase. In the case of one channel, approximately two-thirds of schools want more digital communications: **35 percent want to increase their use of a mobile app** for communication, and 30 percent want to increase texting. These top two channels are strongly preferred while the others fall to near-single digits. For example, email is in third position at just 10 percent.



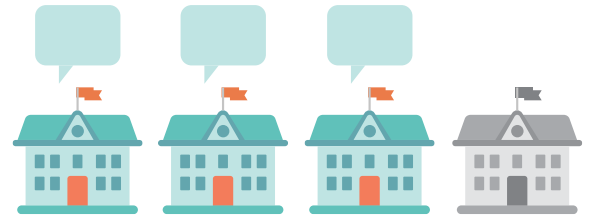
One respondent said, “I think these are all effective strategies to incorporate into a broad strategic plan. I don’t know that I would want to fully eliminate any of them.” Another said, “We’ll probably continue to use all above modes in one way or another, but perhaps in varying frequency.” There were also respondents who wanted **less frequent, but more strategic, communications**.

TAKEAWAY

Interest in increasing use of mobile apps and texting in the future far outpaces interest in significantly increasing any other channel of communication.

6. More than three-quarters of schools are currently using a communications application or platform, and more than half are using a student information system or email for school-home communications.

A significant majority of schools and districts — three out of four — are currently using a communications application or platform for school-home communications. Approximately half are using a student information system or email application or marketing system to reach families. Other, lower-ranked, methods include standalone social media applications, learning management systems, SMS texting applications, and standalone video applications, in that order.



TAKEAWAY

Dedicated communications applications/platforms are the predominant choice for reaching families versus other types of applications schools and districts may use.

Communication Challenges: Process, Priorities, Interaction

The final question asked respondents what they would like to see change in school-home communications over the next two to three years, **“if you could change anything.”** Survey responses strongly expressed schools’ desire for more interaction between schools and families. Comments from survey respondents included recommendations, such as:

“Making sure apps used for communication are easily usable for our families, and translations are there.”

“More integrated communication, so there is one primary source for parents/staff to look at and deal with.”

“More interactive tools to facilitate a conversation with families rather than just the more one-sided communication we currently have.”

“Parent language translation improved, and easier to keep student privacy and send messages to both parents without sharing personal contact information between separated families.”

“Something that has a more engaging platform for students and parents to be immersed in.”

“As two-way and interactive as possible.”

Streamlining the messaging process, **prioritizing** messages from school, and **verification** that the messages have been received are the three top priorities for improving the communication process over the next several years. Specifically, schools and districts want to have:

- Communication contained in a single mobile app or platform
- More two-way communication
- More engagement
- More texting
- More video
- Translation for multiple languages
- Read/receipt verification of messages

Schools have also heard that families are receiving too many messages from too many sources. The result is that **teacher messages are getting lost in the communication stream** because they have not been prioritized. A significant number of respondents also emphasized that parents should be able to **receive communications in their preferred channel** and in the way they'll be most responsive.

Preferences are for increased digital—specifically texting—communication. Several respondents noted that virtually every adult has a mobile phone equipped with texting capability. The need for **more technology training** was also cited by respondents. By a 2:1 margin, schools noted the need for training for parents and teachers. Quite a few respondents talked about the need for parents to have in-person training in communications technology for improved community engagement. One summed up these twin goals, “I would like more training for families to learn how to use these systems. Need to train staff and staff can inform or train parents.”

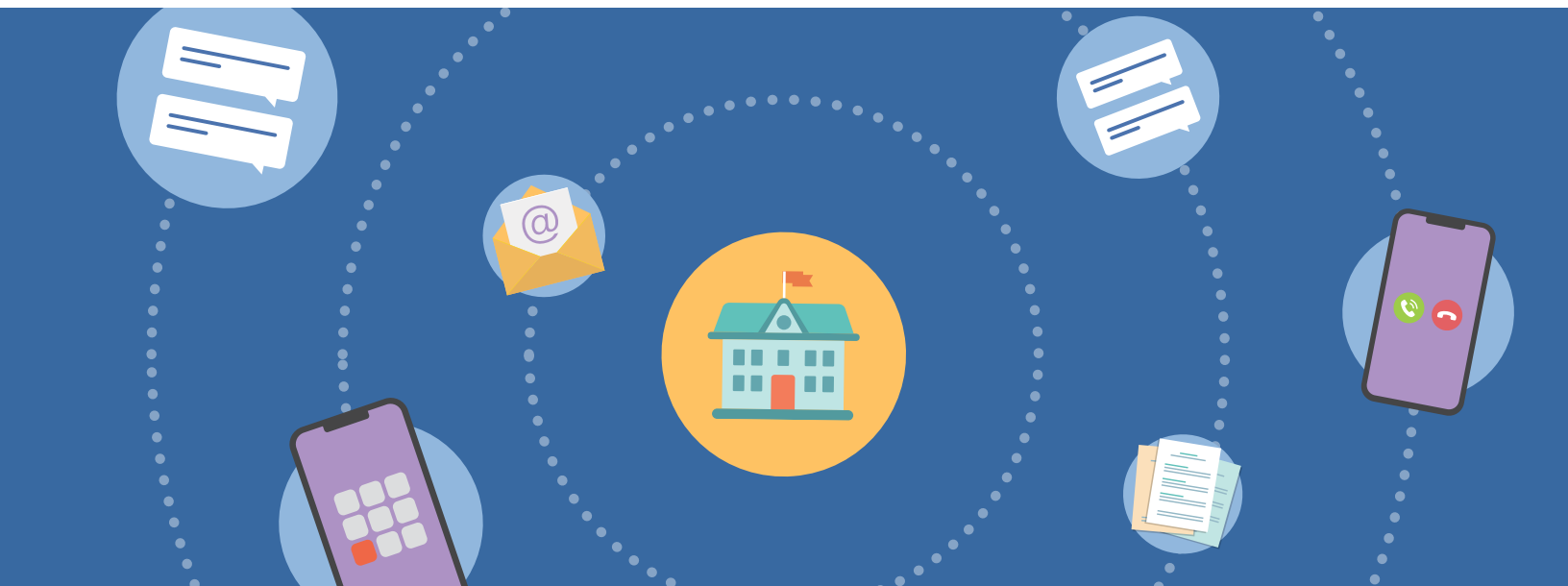


Conclusion: A Future of Shifting Channels & Two-Way Communication

Survey responses strongly indicate that the future of school-home communications will be **more digital** with mobile apps and texting as the primary channels. Educators want more two-way communication options and the ability to engage with all parents and families. They want to know that the messages and notifications are actually being read by families. They also want the volume of messages to be streamlined and prioritized so that it's easier for families to focus on the most important messages. Paper communications, voice calls, and website notifications top the list of channels schools want to stop using.

The importance of good school-family communication was put into sharp relief during the remote instruction phase of the pandemic. For many families, supervising their children's remote instruction has given them insight into their student's education that they never had before. Some parents will want to maintain that engagement moving forward. However, both schools and families want to increase the prioritization and transparency of communication using as many channels as necessary to **reach 100 percent of their families**.

Two-way communication is of particular interest as schools consider it the best way to increase engagement with their families. Schools with higher levels of parent participation have stronger academic outcomes, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher teacher morale and stronger school culture. Boosting parent and family engagement in the life of schools benefits all stakeholders—students, families, teachers, and administrators.



About ParentSquare™

This survey report was developed by ParentSquare (www.parentsquare.com), provider of the premier unified school-home engagement platform for K-12.

ParentSquare is the only fully unified product that engages every family with school communications and communications-based services — all the way from the district office to the classroom teacher, and all in one place. Schools know who's not being reached, and they have the reports and tools to improve contact and communications equity while maintaining privacy and security. ParentSquare is relied upon by millions of educators and families in 44 states for unified, effective school communications, and its technology platform features extensive integrations with student information and other critical administrative systems, translation to more than 100 languages, and app, email, text, voice, and web portal access.

If you're ready to discover more effective and equitable school-home communications for your district or school, visit links.psqr.io/Demo to schedule a ParentSquare demo or call **1 (888) 996-4156** to speak with our team.