

# 4

Steps for

## Mastering School-to-Home Communication

INFORM



EDUCATE



PARTNER



INSPIRE



## INTRODUCTION

School-to-home communication, a key driver of parent engagement, has dramatically changed over the years. In past decades, schools rarely reached out to families unless there was an emergency or problem with a student. In fact, it was widely accepted that “no news is good news,” which forced parents and schools to act independently to support the needs of the child.

But times have changed. Parent engagement is now widely recognized as a key contributor to student success, and with web-based tools and increased mobility, schools can easily reach and collaborate with parents like never-before.

Today, parent communication has reached an all-time-high, and schools are experiencing tangible benefits in the form of improved student performance, higher teacher morale and increased volunteer hours and donations. However, even though school administrators understand the importance of engaging parents, delivering great school communication is easier said than done.

In this book we have distilled the best practices used by leading school leaders into 4 practical communication strategies that you can implement today to be more effective in your communication with parents, to engage parents in their child’s education and build happy sharing school communities. We have included real examples from schools using ParentSquare that will inspire new ideas to apply to your own school environment.

Who is this eBook for:

- You would like quick examples to help you get started with parent communication
- You are communicating with parents but not seeing the engagement and parental support you had hoped for
- You are looking for creative ideas to brighten up your parent communication

Simply letting parents know is an important first step towards helping them become involved. Sometimes we take things for granted or we consider them self-evident when we should not. Be proactive, positive and consistent in your communication with parents. Fragmented or isolated efforts are not going to yield sustainable results, nor will they contribute to a system change. Proactive communication is the organic force that builds stronger relationships and school advocates, and nurturing it is not an objective but a daily practice.

### Move beyond logistics in school newsletters

Communication should be a mix of vision and conversation. Don't let your newsletters be the harbinger of bland, long logistical information. Shorten the newsletters and enrich the interaction by sharing news and moments as if sharing with family. Here's an example of how to break free of the monotony.



#### Aliso School Newsflash for 12.14.15 / Noticia de última hora Aliso School for 12/14/15

about 1 month ago • Mon, Dec 14 at 09:00 AM

##### **Gratitude Corner:**

Thank you to those families who donated food and their time to our Holiday Craft Night and snack sale in the cafeteria. Thank you to [redacted] for arranging and selling the food and beverages. We raised just over \$300. from the food/beverage sales. Thank you to all of the families who participated in this fun evening event at our school!

##### **Academic Vocabulary:**

We are continuing to focus on growing our students' vocabulary in many ways including school-wide academic vocabulary words. To this end, we will highlight the word of the week each week in our newsflash. Please discuss this word with your child in English and Spanish (or any other language in your repertoire) to support your child(ren) learning this word.

The word this week is: theme - a unified idea carried through the text; the unified idea that the author is trying to get across

Spanish equivalent - tema

Ex

*Send informative messages, showcase student achievements and offer learning strategies that can be applied at home.*

## Deliver clear advice about school policies and routines

In times of rough weather conditions or an untoward incident in news, re-share what you will do in emergencies, your preparedness and procedures to put parent minds at ease. Think about routines such as morning drop-offs and afternoon pick-ups where you often need to re-iterate school policies to ensure safety.



### What we do in an emergency...the Monica Ros Emergency Response System

[Stacy...](#) • 20 days ago • Wed, Jan 06 at 12:57 PM • [Monica Ros School MSB Staff](#)

Hello everyone! All is well, our little school has weathered this storm system quite nicely...students are cozy and dry.

But what if...? Monica Ros has a Safety Committee and Emergency Response System in place; rest assured that staff is prepared for any situation that may arise. Below are a few key tips that you can help with:

- In case of an emergency, all parents will receive a text message with details/instructions pertaining to the situation. **Have you updated your cell phone number in the ParentSquare system?** Please take a moment to login and do so.
- **Does your student have their Emergency Preparedness Bag at school?** Each year we ask you to supply a large Ziploc bag with extra clothes for your student (we keep these in storage, please drop off in the office.)



*This school uses ParentSquare to proactively communicate the school's emergency procedures and policies.*

## Share positives and showcase success

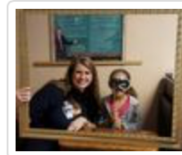
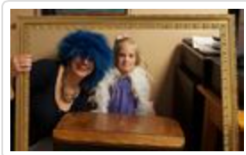
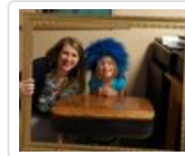
When exciting improvements are being made, everyone at your school feels the momentum. But do your parents feel the same way? They won't unless you invest in consistent communication. Reflect on successes at school to create a more positive, motivated school culture centered around higher student expectations. Parents who receive good news from school have more opportunities to discuss the successful experiences with their children and be actively involved with them in positive ways. One of our favorite ways to share success is via pictures. Pictures offer a fun and easy way to share school news and keep your school connected.



### August Students of the Month

4 months ago • Wed, Oct 07 at 02:26 PM •

Here are August's Students of the Month. These students demonstrated safe, respectful learning by consistently Giving 5 and lining up Short, Straight and Silently.



*This principal selects a student of the month and shares pictures with their parent and staff community using ParentSquare.*

In addition to informing parents and keeping them in the know, offering specific ways they can help at home provides parents with structured opportunities to participate in their child's education. Share information and suggestions that are aligned with the broader curriculum framework and expand learning from the classroom to home and beyond. Educate parents sharing your knowledge and expertise on how they can communicate with their children and continue to be involved as children grow from toddlers to teenagers.

### Provide parents with helpful learning strategies

Recommend practical and specific suggestions and strategies on how parents can further assist with their child's education, empowering them to become involved in the learning process. Provide parents with pointers on how to teach, resolve conflicts, how to guide children towards learning the importance of sharing, and to become good citizens.



#### Helping You Child Be Mathematically Powerful

[\[Redacted\]](#) • 7 days ago • Wed, Jan 20 at 09:00 AM • [\[Redacted\]](#)

##### Supporting Your Young Mathematician at Home

In order to encourage your children's success in mathematics, it is important that you demonstrate interest and patience when helping them at home. Keep the focus on problem solving, not on right or wrong answers. It is fine to point out mistakes but do so by asking your child questions, not by correcting his or her work. Keep in mind that there are many different ways to solve problems in mathematics. If we listen closely to our children, we may learn something we didn't know about math before! Praise their effort and encourage them to stick with problem even when it gets difficult.

Below is a list of helpful questions and phrases to use when working with children at home. There is also a list of phrases to avoid.

##### Helpful things to say:

- I'm interested in how you solved this problem. Can you explain it to me?
- Do you think there is another way to solve?
- How do you know?

**Ex**

*This is an example of a leader who provides information on supporting a student at math. This leader is partnering with parents to increase their confidence and understanding so that they can feel comfortable helping their learner at home.*

**Inspire leadership and build trust with families**

Good leadership builds trust with families and creates advocates at home and in the community. Use effective communication to build trust. Principals can do this by sending personalized communication out to parents, sharing ideas, accomplishments at school and success stories. Include clear and respectful messages, follow up on commitments and provide opportunities for feedback.

**Overpraising Children**

[Redacted] • 4 months ago • Thu, Sep 24 at 09:00 AM • [Redacted]

**Dear families**

Our superintendent, [Redacted], sent the video link below to every principal in the district this morning and I am forwarding it to you to view as a parent since I know I often fall into the trap of overpraising my own two children. The video reminded me how important the slightest difference in our words can be in producing desired results for our children. As I reflect upon my successes and what it took to get me there, I can honestly say that it wasn't because learning came easy for me or that I was born a natural athlete, but rather my parents instilling in me the value of hard work and determination. I want more than anything for my own children to have these characteristics instilled in them as well as the children I serve everyday at Adams.

Video link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWv1VdDeoRY>

**Ex**

*An educator shares an insightful link on the value of hard work and determination.*

## Build parents' capacity to communicate with their child about learning

Educators are experts who can provide guidelines on effective communication with children; the nuances of what to say and which phrases to avoid. This can be done by empowering parents with practical communication strategies, providing them with questions and conversation starters that can be used to discuss learning with children, and assigning homework tasks that allow parents to contribute and participate.



### Instead of, "how was your day?"

[JS](#) • 5 months ago • Wed, Sep 09 at 08:35 PM • [Conversation Starters](#)

When I talk to my son Everyday after school I have my usual (enthusiastically delivered) question of "how was your day?" With his usual (indifferently delivered) "fine."

Come on! You were in school all day long, for crying out loud! Give me something to work with, would you, kid?

I found this list of conversation starters to use that unintentionally go through the heart, mind, body, and soul of the day! I can't wait to try them out tomorrow!

#### Questions a kid will answer at the end of a long school day:

1. What did you eat for lunch?
2. Did you catch anyone picking their nose?
3. What games did you play at recess?
4. What was the funniest thing that happened today?
5. Did anyone do anything super nice for you?
6. What was the nicest thing you did for someone else?
7. Who made you smile today?
8. Which one of your teachers would survive a zombie apocalypse? Why?
9. What new fact did you learn today?
10. Who brought the best food in their lunch today? What was it?
11. What challenged you today?
12. If school were a ride at the fair, which ride would it be? Why?
13. What would you rate your day on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?

Ex

*This example shows school leaders offering 'conversation starters' for parents on how to elicit and facilitate dialogue.*



The goal with informing and educating parents is to build a productive partnership to further assist children to succeed in school and later in life. Partnership is a two-way street: Allow parents to provide positive feedback and give them opportunities to collaborate. It is important to take time to listen and gather information from your stakeholders to build true partnerships. Ongoing effective two-way communication will ensure the forging of long term relationships with families and build successful community.

### Gather together as a family

Plan and arrange simple school activities and events that the children, parents and educators can attend together in an informal setting. These gatherings also provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to learn about and appreciate each other's cultural differences.



#### Winter Night Celebration/Celebración de Noche de Invierno

School News • about 2 months ago • Wed, Dec 02 at 04:14 PM • [\[redacted\]](#)

DEC  
09

Wednesday  
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

The families of our Podemos committee invite you all to a free evening of fun:

Please save the date: On Wednesday, December 9th, Peabody Charter School will have our 2nd annual Winter Night Celebration, which we also call the "Chocolatada". This is a free family holiday event where we sing popular festive songs, dance, have yummy treats and enjoy each other's company.

So, please bundle up and come to school at 6 PM on Wednesday, December 9th. We ask you to bring a pre-cut, bite size dessert to share and we will provide hot chocolate and warm fruit punch "Ponche Mexicano".

The event will take place in the quad.

We are looking for inflatable Winter themed outdoor decorations to use just for this night. Please contact [\[redacted\]](#) if you can loan us your snowman, penguin or other winter inflatable. (we would need them by Tuesday afternoon)

Ex

*A school uses ParentSquare for its ease in sending the invitation to a winter night celebration.*

### Provide opportunities for positive feedback

Enable and encourage parents to respond to your notes by providing space for comments or by including quick questions as a guide. Opening up the lines of communication conveys to parents the important message that their perspective is valued and will be used by the school. Parents' positive perception highly influences their children's perception of school, which, in turn, positively contributes to students' academic, social, and emotional learning.

The screenshot shows a social media post from a user named 'BB'. The post title is 'Mr. B's Weekly Habit Message - Synergy'. It was posted 4 months ago on Monday, September 28 at 08:30 AM. The post content is titled 'Habit of the Week - Synergy' and discusses the concept of synergy using an analogy of a bicycle race or a flock of geese. Below the main text, there are options to 'Appreciate', 'Comment', 'Español', and 'Print'. A notification indicates that 53 people appreciate the post. Two comments are visible: one from 'Bob' saying 'After training and completing my century ride, I completely understand and relate with the analogy. Thanks Bob!' and another from 'Ms' saying 'Mr. B- Thank you for helping all of us to be better individuals or "the best version of ourselves". Simple yet powerful message. Thank YOU!'. At the bottom, there is a 'Comment...' input field.

**Ex**

*An example of an effective and simple way of providing an opportunity to give feedback.*

### Provide simple tools to gather input

Use a variety of approaches and follow-up communications to increase the number of parents reached. Gathering parent input on changes and new policies give parents a chance to express their goals for their child's education and clearly communicate your commitment to including parents as collaborators in the education of children.



How valuable was your scholar-led conference as the first conference of the year?

[Redacted] • 2 months ago • Tue, Nov 17 at 04:55 AM • [Redacted]

Note: You can select one option. Your vote is anonymous.

- Valuable. I prefer this format. 10 👍
- Valuable, but I prefer to have you lead the first conference and have a scholar led conference in subsequent quarters. 4 👍
- Not valuable. I prefer teacher led conferences. 3 👍

I thought it is good to have your scholar part of conference. That they really get to adsorb what they need to accomplish their goals.

It was valuable to have Hannah discuss her learning and growth, but I would prefer not to have to bring Hannah back to school for a conference. With three other kids to go to conferences for, it is a little much to have to drag along Hannah since I usually try to schedule back to back conferences. Anyhow, I didn't have to go to any of the conferences because

**Ex**

*This is an example of a teacher using ParentSquare's polling feature at a class level to get immediate feedback and take action.*

## Create visibility into participation to create new participants and build community

Volunteering and contributing supplies not only augments school's resources but builds supportive and informative relationships between educators and parents leading to higher overall satisfaction. Parents who participate send a strong message to their children that school is important. Provide opportunities to parents to get involved at school. Recognize and reward the positive school-family partnership by providing visibility into the participation.

We are short on volunteers this week. If you can come help out at recess and lunch this week, we would appreciate your participation. Lunch is the most needed area for volunteer help, but any time you can give is beneficial, Thank you!

### Volunteer List

Wednesday, Oct 14

drive thru traffic	07:40 AM to 08:00 AM	0 open 2 filled		Closed Add Someone
morning recess	09:30 AM to 10:30 AM	0 open 2 filled	er With 1st grade 	Closed Add Someone
lunch/recess	11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	1 open 3 filled	er  a 11am-12pm	Sign Up Add Someone

**Ex**

This example shows how schools can use ParentSquare to request volunteers online with an easy-to-use sign up tool, which helps streamline logistics.

Great leaders are passionate about what they do and inspire others through their unique ability to communicate and build relationships. As a leader of your school, share your wisdom, vision and strategy with your parents and teachers. Inspiring communication is undoubtedly a process but it is undeniably fruitful for the growth of the school culture and enriching to the families.

## Share your school's philosophy and experiences to build advocacy

How parents participate at your school and in their child's life is inextricably linked to how well you communicate. It is important to establish credibility as a competent professional and set the precedence for ongoing collaboration.

BB

### Mr. B's Weekly Habit Message - Gratitude / Mensaje Semanal Hábito Mr. B - Gritud

• 3 months ago • Mon, Nov 02 at 09:00 AM •

#### Habit of the Week - Gratitude

Being grateful is an easy way to remind ourselves that our lives are filled with wonderful people, opportunities, and a place to live. Gratitude physiologically and neurologically changes the state of our being by increasing healthy neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin. When we choose to be grateful we think more clearly, exercise more regularly, relate to others more sincerely, and reflect about our lives more deeply.

Habit Practice Tips:

- **Heart:** Have a family meal and share what you are grateful for in each other.
- **Mind:** Write a thank you note to someone.
- **Body:** Donate clothing items to Coats for Kids or food items to Loaves and Fishes.
- **Soul:** Think and discuss what gifts and talents you have to give away.

*Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings. - [William Arthur Ward](#)*

*As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. - John F. Kennedy*

#### Parenting Links

- [The Gratitude Experiment](#)
- [How to Raise Kids Who Aren't Spoiled](#)

Ex

The Principal uses ParentSquare to share his weekly "habits" with parents. This dialogue helps him establish a personal rapport and connection.

## Foster positive relationships between teachers and parents

Engagement is everyone's responsibility including teachers and also parents. Empower your teachers and parents to share inspirational thoughts. Nurture the relationship with positive communiques to build a trust and credibility to tide you through the times when negative information needs to be shared.



### Focus on Learning, January 13, 2016: Peter Glynn

[Peter Glynn](#) • 14 days ago • Wed, Jan 13 at 09:00 AM • [Focus on Learning](#)

"Are You Smart Enough to Work at Google?"

I read a really cool book over the holiday break written by William Poundstone entitled, "Are You Smart Enough to Work at Google?" What I enjoyed most about the book were the various thought provoking (and sometimes maddening) questions Google asks prospective employees in their effort to identify ideal candidates. Some of my favorites include: "Can you swim faster in water or syrup," "How would you weigh your head," and "Can a stack of pennies the height of the Empire State Building fit in a room?"

Google is not hiring employees for a specific job; jobs can and will change as technology and customer needs change. Google wants to hire people that have out-of-the-box thinking skills, are creative, and can collaborate well with their co-workers. Parents and teachers should strive to inspire children to practice these skills. Memorizing facts, true and false questions, and simple yes and no answers are not sufficient to build the workforce of the future. We strive to provide our students at Crane with opportunities to develop the skills that Google craves in their employees.

Ex

*This school leader invites teachers to write blog-style posts to share with families focused on a particular topic.*

## Create strategic and visionary communication with parents

Parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning. For parents to be full partners in their child's education, parent roles must be expanded in decision making at the school. Provide the opportunity, support, incentive and expectation to make wise decisions.



### Principal's Message: 9-17-15 - Strategic Plan

[\[Redacted\]](#) • 4 months ago • Wed, Sep 16 at 01:52 PM • [\[Redacted\]](#)

#### Strategic Planning Participants Invited

Peabody will be developing a strategic plan that will help our school move toward a preferred tomorrow. We will do this by first developing a "Learner Profile" which will be a community-wide understanding of what a Peabody graduate should know and be able to do when they matriculate.

From there, we will then discuss the conditions needed in several areas (teaching, leadership, parent support, etc.) to achieve this Learner Profile for each of our students.

The goal is to create a direction that is pointed as much as possible toward being a school that embraces the challenge of preparing students for the innovation age, rather than the industrial age. We want to make sure that we build on our considerable strengths, and continue to nurture students who are creative and innovative problem solvers.

There will be three facilitated input meetings between October and December. The first meeting will be October 7th from 4:00-6:00PM. If you are interested in being a part of this process, please email me: [\[Redacted\]](#) or call the office. We will have translation available.

Ex

*This message shows a school that created a town-hall style meeting, inviting parents to give feedback and take part in the development of a strategic plan.*

## **CONCLUSION**

It's an exciting time to be an education leader. The evolving educational landscape, with new tools and technology has changed the way schools communicate and partner with parents like never before. Schools can now easily reach and interact with parents in their preferred methods and languages. Two-way communication has given families the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback or simply say thank you for the information sent. Principals are building strong relationships with parents by extending their leadership home and inviting families to participate in strategic discussions. And teachers are providing windows into the classroom by sharing daily classroom activities and photos and equipping parents with conversation starters.

By investing in proactive and consistent communication, schools can build stronger school communities, encourage parents to become more engaged, and directly impact the success of each child. Everyone wins!

## **About ParentSquare**

ParentSquare is a simple, collaborative platform for school-to-home communication that facilitates parental engagement in children's education. Designed specifically to help preK-12 educators, ParentSquare reaches and engages every parent with automated email, phone calls, text and app alerts, language translation, and 24/7 access. Powerful metrics on parent engagement help school administrators take well-informed steps to improving parental involvement. Learn more at [www.parentsquare.com](http://www.parentsquare.com).