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The 2024 Back-to-School Checklist for School-Home Communications

Use this list of action items and resources to help you and your team set up your district communications this summer—so you can hit the ground running when school's in session. **Ready, set, go!**

(For the editable Google Sheet version click here.)

Assess: Review last year and take stock of where you are
What worked, what didn't, and what does your district need?

☐ **Collect metrics and data.** Gather available data to evaluate the current state of school-home communications and family engagement at your district. [**5 Parent Engagement Metrics You Should Track: links.psqr.io/5Metrics**]

☐ **Review the past year.** Using the data you've collected, complete a retrospective (group or solo) to explore what went well and where there's potential for improvement. [**ConceptBoard Article: 11 Retrospective Templates: links.psqr.io/RetroTemplates**]

☐ **Assess stakeholder needs.** What does effective communication look like for staff, teachers, families, students, and community members? Include requirements for any systems you use, including language and translation functionality.

☐ **Dream big.** What would make *your* life easier next year? In a perfect world, what would you like school communications to be? Take some time to imagine your ideal future and capture insights.

Benchmark: Pull out your playbooks and resources
Are there best practices for K-12 communications that can help support district needs?

☐ **Get an assessment report.** Benchmark your communications environment against K-12 best practices and generate a personalized report at **SchoolCommsCheck.com**.

☐ **Do a deep dive on district communications.** Strengthen your toolkit with the **Complete District Communications Playbook**. [**links.psqr.io/Playbook**]

☐ **Review content and cadence.** Review the best practices outlined in the **Effective Family Communications Guide** and incorporate them into your guidelines and standard practices. [**links.psqr.io/FamilyComms**]

☐ **Strengthen communications equity.** Learn about proven strategies for overcoming communication barriers and reaching all of your families with the **Reaching the Last 10% Best Practice Guide: links.psqr.io/Last10Percent**]

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Plan: Define your goals and lay out your strategy
What goals, priorities, and cadences make sense for your communications this year?

☐ **Set goals and metrics** Determine your communication goals for this year and decide how you'll track progress and measure success. [**5 Parent Engagement Metrics to Track: links.psqr.io/5Metrics**]

☐ **Update strategic plans.** Use your retrospective and your review of best practices to update your communications plans, including crisis communications and documents. [**The Complete District Communications Playbook Pt. 2: Forming a Communications Strategic Plan: links.psqr.io/PlaybookPt2**]

☐ **Update your calendar.** Make sure your public district calendar is complete, accurate, and up to date.

☐ **Set a schedule.** Pick dates for all your regular communications (like monthly newsletters, seasonal messages, weekly communications, social media posts) and get them into your communications calendar. [**The Complete District Communications Playbook Pt. 3: Utilizing Communication Channels: links.psqr.io/PlaybookPt3**]
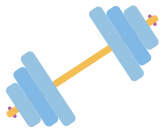
Set up: Make sure you're equipped for success
Are all of your core communication tools and channels in place?

☐ **Communication platform.** What platform or tools will you and your stakeholders use for communication? Account for all the different types of communication required in your community, including district communications, classroom communications, extracurricular communications, and more. [**Mass Notifications links.psqr.io/MassNotifications** and **Classroom Communications links.psqr.io/ClassroomComms**]

☐ **Emergency alerts.** What system will you use to communicate with your community in urgent situations? Consider events that require timely notification, such as closures or delays, as well as emergency situations like critical threats and natural disasters. [**Urgent and Smart Alerts: links.psqr.io/Alerts**]

☐ **Website.** What content management system will you use for your district and school websites? Determine who will be responsible for making changes and how, including maintaining calendars and posting updates. [**Smart Sites: links.psqr.io/Websites**]

☐ **Social media.** Which social media accounts will you be actively using this year? Make sure they're clearly identified for your community and integrated appropriately for cross-posting. [**Social Media Integration: links.psqr.io/SocialShare**]

☐ **Phone system.** How will your staff make phone calls home? Decide if they're able to use a digital alternative to classroom landlines and set out any specific requirements for logging and reporting. [**Virtual Phone: links.psqr.io/VirtualPhone**]

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Prepare: Put your your plan into action and make it happen

Are your templates, data, and content all updated and ready to go?

☐ **Update user access.** Review and update authorized administrators for messaging platforms, social media, alerts, newsletters, etc. Remove users who may have left or changed roles, including teachers, principals, PTA volunteers, and community partners.

☐ **Clean out last year's content.** Archive last year's communications and content from your school-home communications platform so you have a fresh start. Review links and resources for families on all of your public-facing platforms to make sure they're accurate and up to date.

☐ **Refresh visual assets.** Take new headshots of school leaders/board members and update your online properties with fresh photos. Replace any visual assets on your website and communication platform that are out of date.

☐ **Organize and share out templates.** Create or update message templates for **alerts** (snow days, lockdowns, outages, etc.) and **announcements** (staff training day reminders, etc.), as well as design templates for weekly or monthly **newsletters** [**links.psqr.io/Newsletters**]. Share these out to district and site staff for consistent branding.

☐ **Review data processes**. How can families correct or update their contact information? How will you maintain accurate contact data in your database of record? Make sure a solid process is in place so families know where to go and staff know how to get data corrected.

☐ **Test emergency alerts.** Test emergency broadcast systems before the year begins to confirm that your processes work, your contact data is valid, and your systems are operational.

Launch: It's finally here. Start your year off strong!

Are you proactively reaching out to stakeholders and getting them ready to engage?

☐ **Welcome Teachers & Staff:** Send a welcome back announcement to your teachers and staff, and share your communications guidelines, best practices and training schedule!

☐ **Train teachers and staff:** Make communications part of back-to-school professional development for all staff and teachers, so they understand policies, how to use available tools, and how to communicate effectively with families. [**District Example Training Deck: links.psqr.io/DistrictTraining**]

☐ **Send policy reminders to teachers and staff.** Send staff and teachers updates with key communications policies (how to protect student and staff PII, emergency protocols, who to contact for communications support, etc.)

☐ **Reach out to new families and students.** Send a welcome message to all of your new families and encourage them to download your communications app(s) and, if necessary, opt in to required communication groups.

☐ **Send an app download reminder to returning families.** Send a reminder message to returning families that haven't registered for your communications platform and encourage them to install the app(s) and confirm their contact details are correct.

☐ **Welcome everyone back to school!** Now that everyone's onboarded, send a welcome post to everyone. Include key dates such as packet pick-up, the first day of school, and back-to-school night. [**5 Tips (and Examples) for Back-to-School Welcomes: links.psqr.io/B2SPosts**]

☐ **Establish 100% Contactability for Families:** Review all failed text, email, phone, app notifications and *correct email/texts* that didn't work in your database of record. [**Contactability Tips: links.psqr.io/Reach100**]

✚ Anything else?

There's always something to add to the list. Include anything else you need to remember!

☐ **Pack a crisis comms emergency kit.** Store key items at work in case you need to act as spokesperson and manage a crisis—suit jacket, make-up, water, energy bars, phone charger, tissues, hand sanitizer, etc.

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☐ **Celebrate!!** You're all set up for a great school year with engaged families!

About ParentSquare

ParentSquare is the leading provider of modern family and community engagement solutions for K-12 schools. Millions of educators and 20 million student families in all 50 states rely on the unified platform that includes mass notifications, classroom communications, school websites, and other communication-based services—all expertly designed to better connect schools with families to improve student outcomes and school success. Learn more at **parentsquare.com**.