

Challenge & Solution

Allen County Schools was using a mix of applications for school-home communications, with individual teachers resorting to social media to reach families and none of the platforms connected to one another. After learning about ParentSquare, the superintendent implemented the platform for the 2021-22 school year, consolidating disparate tools into one unified, district-supported system.

Results

- Substantial time savings for office staff by eliminating paper distribution of report cards and progress reports
- Consolidated multiple platforms into one unified system, freeing IT staff to focus on higher-priority tasks
- Secure Document Delivery gives the district confidence that communications reach families and are acknowledged

Stronger partnerships through unified communication

It took one well-placed email for Superintendent Travis Hamby to realize that his school district needed a new approach to district communications. With five schools and 3,000 students on one campus, Allen County Schools had been using a mix of different applications for school-home communications.

Each of the schools used a different solution. Individual teachers—who didn't have access to these platforms—were using social media programs to communicate with families.

None of these platforms “talked” to one another, and finding coherence in this disjointed technology was basically impossible. “And you couldn't cue up multiple messages,” said Hamby. “Our system also wasn't very user-friendly.”

Cohesion and standardization wanted

Lacking a cohesive, standardized form of communication across the district, Hamby began

looking for a better solution. He learned about the ParentSquare feature-rich, safe and secure platform for school-home communication from an email, visited the company's website and initiated a conversation with a ParentSquare representative.

"I just wanted to see what they had to offer in terms of consolidating a lot of different tools that we were using down to one platform for a more consistent approach to communication across the district," Hamby said. "That's really what we were trying to accomplish."

The rest, as they say, is history. The district implemented ParentSquare for the 2021-22 school year and began using it for direct communications back and forth with parents. It also uses the platform's Secure Document Delivery to send report cards and progress reports to parents—an approach that Hamby said has been well received by the families.

Embracing change

Teachers and administrators are embracing the new platform and giving up their existing, disparate communication approaches, but Hamby knows that the culture shift may take time.

"It's kind of like having a Tesla versus a Toyota Corolla. You get in the vehicle and if you never use the self-driving feature, it's just your loss," he explained. "Ultimately, we all know that we need tools like ParentSquare that have a host of important features, which improves transparency for our families and gives them access to information that they didn't previously have."

Hamby said some teachers are exploring ParentSquare's functionalities on their own while others are learning about the school-home communications platform professional development meetings.

He's also looking at ways to incentivize families to download the ParentSquare app, which would enable the use of digital permission forms and other documents that have to be signed. "We're encouraging people to use the app so that we can increase the engagement," said Hamby. "The more features we use within ParentSquare, the more we will increase the engagement. That's really been our approach."

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Superintendent

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Key benefits

Hamby expects ParentSquare to save Allen County Public Schools' office staff a considerable amount of time. Schools that issued progress reports and report cards during the fall of 2021 used both electronic Secure Document Delivery and paper copies. Moving forward, he said there will be no need to distribute those out by sending them to homeroom, sending them home and risk them getting lost or not being returned.

"I think that will ultimately save us a lot of time," said Hamby, who sees potential for more time savings as the district continues to figure out and utilize all the features that are available to it in ParentSquare. Perhaps even more importantly, everyone across the district now has a unified, safe and secure platform to use for two-way, school-home communications.

This also allows the district to provide better IT support—since it's only using one tool—and ensures that teachers no longer use unsecure options like social media to communicate with parents. This also frees the district's IT staff to focus on more important tasks than continually troubleshooting issues across multiple communication platforms.

"We have a small tech staff that's available to help everyone, and it's important that we implement tools that can be supported by the staff that we have," said Hamby, who sees his district's unified school-home communication platform as a tool for solidifying partnerships between the district, its parents, and the surrounding community.

"If we're going to have those strong partnerships, we need really strong lines of open, transparent, respectful, two-way communication so that we can optimally engage with one another," said Hamby. "I believe ParentSquare is one of the best tools for doing exactly that."

Set up a help desk

To other schools that want to get the biggest value from their school-home communication

platforms, Hamby suggests mapping out all the features on the front end and then creating a timeline for rolling out each of those functionalities. For example, before school starts, you could train teachers how to create a post and have everyone actually create a post by a given date; approximately four weeks later, as you near the time of progress reports, train personnel in how to use Secure Document delivery; a few weeks later, as you approach the time for parent-teacher conferences, show everyone how to do proper sign-ups.

Hamby also tells districts to set up “help desk” tables at open houses and other events that parents attend, knowing that they might need some help and encouragement downloading and using the app. “It’s not hard to do, but parents have busy lives,” says Hamby. “It’s always more effective when you have a captive audience.”

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