

## Challenge & Solution

Pearl River County School District relied on manually-managed email groups and paper correspondence, with contact updates entered by hand and no way to confirm families were receiving messages. The district piloted ParentSquare in January 2022 and rolled it out districtwide for 2022-23, consolidating all staff, coach, and student communications onto one platform.

## Results

- 100% contactability by midway through the first full year, confirming every student had a verified contact on file
- Eliminated time-intensive manual registration code emails and paper correspondence, saving staff hours and mailing costs
- StudentSquare adopted by middle and high school students for sports, extracurriculars, and instant event notifications

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## From manual email groups to 100% Contactability

Situated about an hour north of New Orleans, Pearl River County School District serves about 3,300 students across four schools. Up until last year, the district relied on a system of parent “email groups” for school-to-home communications. Each grade level and school used a separate group, with all email address updates inputted manually into the district’s Central Access student information system (SIS).

Because teachers and administrators ran their own email groups, the manual changes weren’t always obvious to everyone in the district. A principal would get notified of a parent or guardian who wasn’t receiving the emails, for example, and then someone would go in and manually update the system. “Handling everything manually was taking a lot of time,” said the district’s Director of Testing and Technology, Tara White.

The same process was used for phone calls, which were also managed through the district’s SIS. “That’s how we sent messages, along with the papers that were being sent home—and that we know parents probably weren’t even receiving,” White added.

## Falling in love with ParentSquare

Central Access Corp. introduced Pearl River County School District to the ParentSquare secure platform for school communications and communications-based services. “We sat in on a ParentSquare session where they were asking schools across the state to pilot the program,” White said. “We all said, ‘we have to do this,’ and may have been the first ones to sign up.”

The district started its ParentSquare pilot in January 2022 by asking for volunteers to test out the platform. Those early users soon became “champions” for the new platform as it was rolled out across the district. “We went into the 2022-23 school year saying that ParentSquare was going to be the only form of communication we’d be using, and that no one would be allowed to use the other apps they’d used for years,” White explained. “So, the fact that people had already fallen in love with using the platform was a big help in getting everyone else onboard.”

With three children of her own attending three different schools in the district, White saw the immediate benefits of consolidating all communications onto a single platform. Before, she was getting emails and reminders about band practice, class schedules and parent participation.

“One day I was standing in the store, knowing I needed to bring something for the kindergarten classroom and not remembering what it was. The paper was sitting on my counter at home,” she recalled. “If only I’d had ParentSquare then, I would have had that information right on my cell phone.”

## Reaching every single child

The district is also using the StudentSquare safe and secure platform for all student communications at school. The platform is available to all middle and high school students, many of whom use it for sports and extracurricular groups. Students simply download the app and begin receiving instant notifications about upcoming events and activities.

Switching to ParentSquare is already saving Pearl River County School District time and money. In the past, the district was emailing registration codes to parents and guardians—a process that could

easily take a full day to complete. To get families enrolled with ParentSquare, it used the Secure Documents feature and asked them to sign in, verify all of their information and obtain a code.

By midway through the 2022-23 school year, the district's contactability rate reached 100 percent. "In the past it was amazing how many students said, 'well, I didn't get this' or 'my phone number and my email are wrong,'" White said. "Now we know that we're reaching somebody for every single child."

The district is also saving money once spent producing and mailing correspondence to families. It's using ParentSquare for attendance notices, which are now much easier for parents and guardians to view, track and pay attention to. "This is a huge win because we really need to be able to reach families immediately to let them know that their children are missing school," White added.

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Director of Testing and Technology

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Putting everyone at ease

Pearl River County School District's food services department uses ParentSquare to send out lunch money balance due alerts. Teachers use it to manage field trip permission slips and to send out information and reminders about those events. And school nurses built a customized form in the platform for incoming students, reminding parents and guardians to submit the required health and immunization data.

Last fall, the district realized yet another benefit of using ParentSquare when someone called to report a possible shooter on one of its campuses. All schools immediately went into lockdown and the rumor mill began to churn pretty quickly. To keep everyone informed and calm during the tense situation, the district superintendent used ParentSquare to send an alert, updating everyone on the situation.

“We were locked into our offices and didn’t know what was going on,” White said. “When the superintendent let us all know that the district had received a report and was now checking every school, it helped put the teachers, students and parents at ease.”

To other districts that want to consolidate all school-home communications on a single, secure platform, White says getting “champions” onboard early can help quell any potential resistance to change. “We hit some opposition early on, and particularly from coaches who had been using one particular app for years; they didn’t want to change,” White explained. “Fortunately, ParentSquare had a good answer to every one of their objections and changing to ParentSquare was simple and easy.”

Ready for a Better Way?

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