

Challenge & Solution

Dover Area School District's previous platform supported only English and Spanish, leaving families who spoke Haitian, Ukrainian, German, and other languages without access to critical information. After learning that ParentSquare integrated with its Skyward SIS, the district rolled out the platform in a phased approach, gaining multilingual translation and targeted messaging.

Results

- Contactability increased from 70% to 100%
- Families across 10 different languages now receive and open communications in their home language
- Staff target messages to specific groups like bus routes and IEP families for faster outreach

Opening the door to multilingual communication

Contactability has increased from 70% to 100%, and the district now uses a single, powerful tool to engage with its growing and diverse student population.

When Dover Area School District in Pennsylvania saw that its current school-home communication platform was no longer meeting the needs of its changing demographic, it decided to take action. For example, the district's previous system only supported English and Spanish, yet many of its families also spoke Haitian, Ukrainian, German, and various other languages.

This created a communications gap between the district and its growing, diverse student population. With 3,500 students and six schools, Dover Area School District faced additional challenges with its communication platform, which, for example, was unable to effectively manage student food service balances.

To compound existing challenges, when the district asked its vendor for support, the company was slow to respond (if it responded at all) and was not particularly helpful. As a

longtime Skyward student information system (SIS) user, Dover Area School District learned about the SIS' integration with ParentSquare and decided to make the switch.

"We reached out to ParentSquare, set up our account and we were sending messages that same afternoon," says Brad Perkins, Director of Public Safety, Public Relations, and Child Accounting. The district used a phased-in approach to move all of its school communications over to the secure, unified platform over time.

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A whole new communication avenue

The benefits of migrating to ParentSquare were quickly apparent. "With so many new families moving to the area, we needed a platform like this to accommodate a wide variety of different languages," says Perkins, who oversees Central Registration and Child Accounting. "When we implemented ParentSquare, we were absolutely flabbergasted at the demographics that we actually ended up with."

For example, the district serves two German-speaking families, two that speak Vietnamese, three that speak Arabic and four that speak French (among others), for a total of 10 different languages. Being able to communicate with families in those languages has been a total game-changer for the district.

"ParentSquare has opened up a mass communication avenue for us that we didn't even know existed," Perkins explains.

Establishing 100% Contactability with student families

Unless there is a school delay, closing, or other time-sensitive message, most of the communication the district sends goes out via email. Today, the district can use

ParentSquare’s dashboard to determine which communication mode is best. “Being able to break the data down demographically and see who opened their email is very helpful to our parent and family outreach goals,” says Perkins.

In fact, families who are not native English speakers are now opening and reading their emails more frequently (on a percentage basis) than the district’s English-speaking families. Perkins attributes this to the impact of the language translation feature and the district’s diverse demographics.

The district can also track the opening of messages and see if someone using a specific email address or phone number opened the message on a specific date. “Parents are opening the messages and reading them, which we weren’t able to track before,” he points out. “When we first started rolling out ParentSquare, contactability was around 70%. Now, we’re sitting at 100%.”

The district regularly sends a newsletter that is automatically translated into each recipient’s native language. The system also keeps track of emergency contact information and provides access to vital support services for individuals in crisis.

“Statistically speaking, we know that the holidays can be a rough period for some people,” says Perkins. “We started including 988 suicide hotline numbers to let everyone know that they’re not alone and that there’s help available. Knowing that families are receiving that information in their native language is comforting.”

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A platform to address any challenge

Dustin Boyd, the district's Director of Technology, really likes the control that his team now has over the data in the Parent Square platform. The previous system was cumbersome, requiring a lengthy process to implement changes. "With ParentSquare, we can directly input our desired actions," he says. "For instance, if we want to send a message exclusively to the families of students with an IEP, we can simply filter our audience and send the email. It's straightforward and efficient."

Recently, Perkins received a call from the district's busing provider about a bus that couldn't get through due to a road blockage. Using ParentSquare, he was able to quickly identify the affected bus and send a targeted message to the impacted parents and guardians.

"I can simply enter 'high school bus L7' and send it out," he explains. "Ideally, they'll see it right away, but at the very least, we've made sure they're informed—parents and guardians can't say they weren't notified." Reflecting on the lack of support that the district got from its previous vendor, Boyd says working with ParentSquare is like night and day. "ParentSquare is awesome, and I cannot speak more highly of their customer support compared to other vendors," he explains. "When you call ParentSquare, somebody actually picks up the phone. They pretty much know what they need to know, and they're able to help you immediately."

Ready for a Better Way?

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