

Challenge & Solution

Dysart Unified School District relied on its SIS for communications, but delivery issues meant parents were missing critical messages and the vendor offered limited support. After adopting ParentSquare, the district enabled multi-channel delivery in families' preferred languages, digitized absenteeism notices to replace physical mailings, and introduced Community Groups for broader outreach.

Results

- \$165,000 saved annually by digitizing absenteeism notices and reducing mailing costs
- 2,300 staff hours reclaimed per year across 26 schools, redirected to family outreach
- Parents receive timely information in their preferred format and language via text, email, app, and web

Reaching families and reclaiming thousands of staff hours

Districts can send out all of the messages and correspondence they want, but if that outreach isn't being opened and read by the intended audience, the effort is wasted. Then, when recipients don't receive important messages, it's up to the district to determine why this is happening and find a solution. This consumes even more effort, energy, and resources.

With 26 schools and 23,000 students, Dysart Unified School District in Surprise, Arizona, was dealing with this problem in the months leading up to its implementation of ParentSquare. "We were having some issues with the delivery of our email messages, specifically," says Renee Ryon, director of communications and public relations for the district.

"A lot of parents with Yahoo! addresses weren't getting our messages, and we weren't really getting help from our vendor to solve the problem," Ryon continues. She wasn't convinced that spam filters were the problem but rather the structure and delivery method of the emails themselves.

Parents repeatedly spoke up about not being able to access the information being sent. "It is crucial for us to have the ability to share information with parents," she says. "If we can't do

that, or if parents are frustrated by the process—particularly when the communications address sensitive subjects like absenteeism, outstanding balances, and permission slips—it creates a lot of confusion and frustration.”

Alleviating the frustrations once and for all

For a long time, Dysart USD relied on its SIS for school-to-home communications. That changed when Ryon joined the district six years ago. “The district was using what was embedded in the SIS, and it was clear we needed to look at different options,” she says. Ryon had used other tools at her previous district and knew there were distinct differences between what was typically provided in a SIS and a dedicated communication platform.

“We knew we really needed to step it up in certain areas and knew ParentSquare had so much more to offer,” says Ryon, who pitched the idea of adopting the ParentSquare platform to the district’s leaders. They researched numerous tools, did their due diligence, prioritized the district’s needs, and developed comparison charts to evaluate their options.

“We were looking for a platform that offered the most features for reaching parents and allowed them to choose how they wanted to be notified (e.g., via email, app, voice, or text) and in their preferred language.”

Reining in chronic absenteeism

Ryon’s team kicked off its implementation in October 2023, and the pilot was ready to launch within 90 days. “It was quick, but as soon as we got that approval, we just jumped right in,” says Ryon. “We were ready for it.”

The pilot was successful, and all 26 school sites began using ParentSquare for the 2024-25 school year. Initially, the focus was on ensuring absence notices, transportation information (i.e., delays and potential changes to school bus route assignments), and related messages were sent to and received by parents.

“Once the platform was launched and things were going well, we started talking to our student services team about using it for absence accrual notices,” says Ryon. Anytime a student reaches 5, 10, 15, or 18 absences, parents traditionally receive a snail mail notice that must be printed out and mailed by a school employee.

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Renee Ryon

Director of Communications and Public Relations

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At the high school level, where absenteeism is tracked by class, this meant schools were sometimes sending out over 4,000 notices per month. Digitizing that process not only expedites parent notifications but also vastly reduces the amount of manual work and postage needed to keep those families updated on their students’ absence rates.

A few months after activating this feature in ParentSquare, Ryon polled schools to determine how many hours and how much money were being spent on printing letters and mailing materials. Since digitizing the process with [Auto Notices](#), the district has saved about \$165,000 and roughly 2,300 hours annually (for all 26 schools combined).

This time savings freed up staff members to manage more direct, personal follow-ups with the students who were receiving those notices. At the high school level, this equates to more than 20 hours of saved time per month and 3-10 hours per month at the elementary level.

“ParentSquare opened those staff members up to do more personal notifications, pick up the phone and say, ‘Hey, how can we help set up attendance meetings to see what’s going on?’ and put support in place to provide needed assistance,” says Ryon. “We may even learn that there’s a medical issue that the district was unaware of that we can help with.”

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Extending district reach and impact with ParentSquare

Dysart USD is also using [Community Groups](#), which has self-serve sign-up groups that allow schools and districts to extend their communication reach to a wider community beyond

current students, families, and staff. The district uses the feature to broadcast messages about athletic programs, off-season tryouts, conditioning workouts, and other events. Community Groups are particularly useful for connecting with students who intend to start school in the fall but aren't officially enrolled in the system yet.

To other districts that want to upgrade their current school-to-home communication strategies, Ryon says the best first step is to put yourself in the parents' shoes. What kind of information do they need? How do they want to be communicated with? What social platforms are they using?

"To reach most parents, you have to be present in multiple places and communicate through a variety of channels," Ryon says. "Your communication platform should do the same and offer flexibility to meet families where they are and deliver information in the ways they want to receive it."

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