

Challenge

Gilroy Unified School District's existing communications system was not configured to support mass communications—especially in a crisis.

After experiencing two emergency situations: the Gilroy Garlic Festival shooting in July 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that the district had to find a way to communicate with its school community quickly and effectively. “In both incidents we needed rapid and direct crisis communications,” said Melanie Corona, Public Information Office for the Gilroy Unified School District, “and we did not have all the functionality we needed.”

Unfortunately, there were challenges in getting initial communications out to everyone when they were needed most during the festival shooting. And when the pandemic struck, the district was challenged yet again with communicating school closures when they happened on Friday, March 13th, 2020 and the entire district shifted to a 100% remote learning scenario the following Monday.

Solution

After experiencing two significant events that required mass communications to staff, students, parents, and guardians, Corona said, “We began to prepare for a communications system transition in June 2020 and made the shift to the ParentSquare platform in August in the middle of the pandemic.”

Staff training with ParentSquare was minimal as teachers, administrators and other staff members were already being trained on a great number of instructional technology platforms. “Even without planned staff training, our experience with ParentSquare has been second to none,” said Corona. “I recommend the platform to anyone who asks and even to people who don't ask.”

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Melanie Corona

Public Information Officer

01 / 01 [Previous](#) [Next](#)

Results

After a districtwide rollout, the overall sentiment was that staff and parents found the ParentSquare platform easy to use. “The app is fantastic, and families can revisit messages when needed,” said Corona. She reported that the platform’s intuitive, user-friendly interface made it easy to engage the staff. “There are few silver linings to the pandemic, but streamlining our communications has been one of them,” she said. “We are now able to funnel all our information through one place, and everyone knows to access ParentSquare if they’re looking for information.”

“Another one of the really wonderful things about ParentSquare is that it looks like other social media platforms that parents are using, so it is familiar and easy to navigate.” Corona believes that ParentSquare has made her job as the district’s public information officer easier as it has allowed the district to build communication and family engagement with reliable, consistent messaging.

“We think a lot about the user’s experience on our website and in our communications,” said Corona. “It’s important that we have oversight for all of our messaging and even something as basic as synching all the school calendars,” she said. “ParentSquare just makes everything so easy.”

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01 / 01 [Previous](#) [Next](#)

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