

Challenge & Solution

Hampton City Schools' outgoing communication contract limited messaging to principals and administrators, leaving teachers, coaches, and counselors without a platform to reach families. The district implemented ParentSquare across all 32 schools to expand access to every staff member and enable two-way communication with direct PowerSchool SIS integration and Secure Document Delivery.

Results

- Teachers, coaches, and counselors now communicate directly with families through one district-supported platform
- Direct SIS integration syncs contact data nightly, streamlining attendance tracking and electronic report card delivery
- Transportation department uses the platform for real-time bus delay notifications, eliminating calls to the service provider

Giving every staff member a voice in family communication

With the contract for its existing school-to-home communication solution winding down, the Hampton City Schools District in Hampton, Va., began looking for a platform that would serve all of its communication needs. "We wanted an all-encompassing solution that everyone could use and that was also a one-stop shop for families," said Kellie Goral, the district's executive director of PR and marketing.

The district's previous contract included a set number of licenses, and was primarily for principals and administrators—not for the entire staff. It was also based on one-way communications and was used primarily by administrators who needed to broadcast urgent messages or upcoming school information (e.g., testing, school dances, PTA meetings).

Knowing the existing system's limitations and being a believer in the value of transparency and communication in the K-12 environment, Goral went in search of a better solution.

"We wanted our teachers, coaches and guidance counselors to be able to communicate, but

we weren't giving them a platform to be able to do that," said Goral, who learned about the ParentSquare's unified school-home communications platform and invited the company on campus for a demonstration.

"We went through that exercise with several different companies," said Goral, "and ParentSquare was the one that topped our list."

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Kellie Goral

Executive Director of PR and Marketing

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Meeting their needs

Hampton City Schools was finalizing its ParentSquare contract and implementation plan when the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. It trained its principals on the system that summer and teachers piloted the platform during the fall of 2020.

"The expectation was for everyone to be using ParentSquare by the second semester of the 2020-2021 school year," said Goral. "Because the training was self-paced, it gave everyone the flexibility they needed at a time when we all had a lot on our plates."

The district's 500 earliest adopters of ParentSquare helped other teachers get onboard quickly. The district's Innovative Professional Learning (IPL) department, which focuses on instructional lesson development, also became involved with the ParentSquare implementation at the beginning and helped more teachers learn and use the platform.

"Once people start using the platform's newest features, they'd start talking about those capabilities with one another," said DeWitte Wilson, programmer analyst, Student Information Systems. "The interest and usage rates increased exponentially from there."

Most-Loved features

Goral likes being able to post graphics, links and visually-appealing content that recipients will open and engage with. She also likes ParentSquare's contact verification feature, which

allows parents to correct contact or related information right in the app. This cuts down on phone calls to the school to fix incorrect information and ensures a higher message open rate.

With ParentSquare, Hampton City Schools can also translate messages into many different languages for its increasingly diverse population. Previously, they pre-recorded messages about school closings, weather events and other news, and then families had to use Google Translate to get the information in their home language.

From the IT perspective, Wilson likes how the platform integrates directly with PowerSchool, the district's student information system (SIS). "All of our contact data now flows directly from PowerSchool to ParentSquare both nightly and on demand if needed. Additionally, we can upload our own data to create groups making it easier to convey information to targeted groups of parents and staff," said Wilson, who adds that the platform also makes student attendance management much easier as well as distributing report cards electronically through Secure Documents.

The transportation department also uses the system to announce late bus arrivals and other updates that keep parents in the know. "Our old system required the division to make calls to our service provider in order to make simple changes such as announcement times. Now we can make changes such as these quickly in the ParentSquare user interface saving staff time," said Wilson. "With ParentSquare tied directly into our SIS, we can also pull period and daily attendance, and send summaries to parents. It's all right there with just a few clicks."

A platform that doesn't sit still

Any time Hampton City Schools has a question or needs to solve a problem related to its school-home communications platform, ParentSquare is always standing by, ready to help. "This takes a lot of stress off of our IT staff," said Wilson. "We know we'll always get an answer when we call, email or text them with a question."

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DeWitte Wilson

Programmer Analyst, Student Information Systems

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Goral said she also likes how the platform continues to expand and grow along with the district, which means a steady stream of new collaborative features, adding different languages and other functionality. “ParentSquare recognizes that just because it created this product, it’s not a one-and-done exercise,” said Goral.

“The company is very good at recognizing that they can’t just stop the work, and that they have to advance the technology in a way that aligns with what’s going on in the world,” she continued, “so that we can continue to communicate properly.”

Ready for a Better Way?

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