

Challenge & Solution

Mill Valley School District was among the first K-8 districts in California to return to hybrid learning in November 2020, but had no unified way to communicate new protocols or manage message fatigue. The district chose ParentSquare to consolidate all school-home messaging with built-in forms, surveys, and real-time dashboards.

Headline

- 99.9% contactability rate, with dashboards making it easy to identify and personally reach families not engaging with messages
- District newsletter open rate reached 65%, a 16% increase and well above the ~25% benchmark for mass emails
- Built-in survey tools capture per-child learning mode preferences, giving the district accurate, family-level data for planning

First back to campus, fully prepared to communicate

In November 2020, Mill Valley School District became one of the first K-8 districts in California to transition back to school with an in-person hybrid model. Naturally, this raised additional concerns for district leaders, including communicating the new protocols and shifting learning scenarios to families, and ensuring everyone remained safe and healthy upon return. Mill Valley School District needed to strategically address these challenges to ensure a smooth transition back to in-person learning.

Communicating with and preparing families

When shifting to in-person/hybrid learning, families had a lot to learn to manage the new safety protocols, school schedules, student requirements, and school updates. Mill Valley School District needed a solid communications strategy to ensure that all parents understood district expectations and knew what to do to support their students.

Keeping students and staff healthy and safe

A return to in-person learning cannot work unless everyone makes safety the number one

priority. Mill Valley school leaders worked all summer to ensure optimal safety protocols were in place (including HVAC purifiers, safety modifications, and school-site protection plans approved by Marin County). In addition to new safety measures, the district needed a way to identify individuals with any symptoms of COVID-19, exposures, or positive COVID-19 test results.

Managing message fatigue

Along with changing learning scenarios came a large amount of new information and increased communications at all levels. Parents were becoming overwhelmed trying to navigate all the messages and what they were supposed to do with them. It was important for Mill Valley to make communications as manageable as possible to combat message fatigue.

“One thing we have found by using the [Forms within ParentSquare](#) is that when we ask questions, we can say with certainty what the answer is for every family; and what we’ve also found from that is that if we ask them about their preferences for learning modes—whether that be in-person or distance learning—parents can also answer those questions per child, so it gives us [really accurate information about each student.](#)”

Dr. Kimberly Berman

Superintendent

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One platform from district office to classroom

Mill Valley School District chose ParentSquare’s unified communications platform to consolidate all levels of school-home messaging, encompassing the district to the classroom, for needs as diverse as emergency mass notifications, district/school announcement, and direct messaging with a teacher. They also leveraged many of the communications-related tools available in ParentSquare, such as forms, event RSVPs, and surveys/polls.

Some of the ways that ParentSquare helped Mill Valley School District streamline operations and ensure a safe and smooth transition to in-person/hybrid learning include:

- ParentSquare’s survey tools allowed Mill Valley to easily collect important feedback from families regarding the return to in-person learning plans. Built-into-the-platform, surveys

and polls are secure and don't require parents to re-enter their student or contact information each time. Surveys automatically capture known parent and student data, allowing for faster completion and processing of results.

- Parents of students fill out the ParentSquare [Health Screening Form](#) before school each day to inform their schools if their child has any COVID-19-related symptoms or exposure. In the case that a parent forgets to fill out the form for their child, teachers can easily complete the form on a student's behalf. With the Health Screening Form built into the ParentSquare platform, users don't have to re-enter their contact information each time, and staff can access the data in real-time after it's submitted. This streamlined process allows for clean reports and the ability for staff to instantly see if a student is cleared or not to attend school.
- Mill Valley district leadership can instantly share ParentSquare posts to their website through the Social Share feature, saving them time while informing their parent community. Furthermore, this feature allows for the public sharing of information across the website and social media accounts when information adheres to student privacy regulations.
- ParentSquare's dashboards provide Mill Valley School District with detailed usage and participation reports in an instant—allowing them to gauge the success of their communications and easily identify families that are not contactable, so they can take action to re-establish contact.

Measurable gains in engagement and Contactability

With the help of ParentSquare, Mill Valley School District experienced a highly-successful return to safe, in-person/hybrid learning. Staff is communicating with families to keep them informed every step of the way, parents are engaging with messaging, and the school community remains healthy and safe with daily COVID-19 screenings.

Streamlined communications

By using ParentSquare's features, Mill Valley's school-home communications have greatly improved. Mill Valley uses a consistent posting schedule for newsletters and other messaging, so parents know when to expect information. They also have scheduled daily messages to remind parents to fill out health forms before the school day begins to keep

manual screenings at drop-off extremely low. Since their adoption of ParentSquare, the district newsletter open rate is at 65%—a 16% increase—and well above the ~25% benchmark for mass emails.

99.9% Contactability

With dashboards and reports making it easy to identify inaccurate family contact data, Mill Valley has improved its contactability rate to an impressive 99.9%. What's more, Mill Valley administrators can see who makes up the small percentage of families who are not reading or engaging with school and district communications and personally reach out to them to ensure they get the information they need.

Healthy students and staff

With an easy and efficient way to keep families and staff informed of COVID-19-related issues, Mill Valley School District helps keep their entire community safe. Furthermore, with a communications plan to reach all families, every parent is aware of evolving safety protocols and guidelines required of them and their students.

“The [Health Screening form](#) has absolutely been helpful. For any student who doesn't have the form filled out in the morning, the teacher does it on their iPad for the student.”

Amanda Finlaw

Executive Assistant to the Superintendent & Communications Specialist

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