

Challenge & Solution

The Varnett Public School had no centralized system for parent communications across its three campuses and could not confirm whether families were receiving messages. The district implemented ParentSquare with Clever integration, consolidating all communications onto one platform with built-in Spanish translation for the 58% of families who speak Spanish and comprehensive reachability reporting.

Results

- 96% of all communications received and opened by intended recipients, giving the district confidence in message delivery
- Electronic report cards and progress reports replaced printing and mailing, saving time and money each grading period
- Staff share student achievements and award winners through the platform, turning it into a word-of-mouth recruiting tool

A direct line to every family in a High-Performing charter

A Title 1 charter school district with three campuses in Houston, The Varnett Public School focuses on helping Pre-K through eighth-grade students achieve their personal best while learning in a protective and nurturing environment.

About 58% of this open-enrollment district's student population speaks Spanish and 42% of its students are African American. The Varnett Public School's students are high achievers: one of its three campuses received an "A" rating on the most recent state STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) test and the other two were awarded a "B" rating.

In 2020, after realizing that its parent/guardian communication approach was lacking, the district went in search of a platform that would both open up those lines of communication and provide a high level of reporting and analytics on those interactions.

"We couldn't be sure that every parent was being reached," Varnett Director of

Communications and Marketing Pete McConnell said. “We also had no way to keep track of the information that was being delivered.” This turned into a bigger burden in March 2020, when districts were dealing with COVID-19 shutdowns and the need for better, two-way communications with families and other stakeholders.

Varnett’s IT director noted that they were looking for a central way to communicate with parents that they could roll out quickly and connect to the school’s existing Clever (the digital learning resource repository) integrations. The schools didn’t want to have to start importing phone numbers and other data into the new platform; they just needed it to work.

The “must haves”

The Clever integration was an important “must have” for The Varnett Public School, which uses the platform to store and share much of its data. “There isn’t a long list of platforms that integrate well with Clever,” Varnett’s IT director added. “There were some competitors that integrated, but they didn’t have all the communication options that ParentSquare had.”

For example, some of the district’s families don’t use smartphones, so they do need a phone call. “That was one of the features that was unique to ParentSquare,” the IT director said.

ParentSquare also participates in the Texas Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS), the state’s purchasing cooperative. This stamp of approval and the opportunity to acquire the platform through the co-op made it that much more attractive for The Varnett Public School.

The IT director noted that the ParentSquare implementation was “super simple” and that the company provided supporting documents like parent/guardian handouts and flyers, plus Facebook posts. “Just about anything you can think of, they’ve already created one for you,” he added, who likes the platform’s comprehensive reporting and reachability data.

“Just that quick overview we get every week is really helpful to gauge whether we need to get parent information,” he said, “or if it’s time to update someone’s contact information.”

A great time and money saver

In the past, The Varnett Public School would print out and mail report cards and progress reports (or send them home with students). The district now uses ParentSquare for these activities which require less paper and manual intervention; they’re also more trackable.

“Being able to send out report cards and progress reports automatically through our current reporting system is a great time and money saver,” said McConnell, who estimates that 96% of all communications are received and opened by the intended recipients.

“I like the fact that we’re directly communicating with parents and getting evidence that they’re receiving our message,” he continued. “We can use Google Analytics to see how we’re doing, but we don’t have nearly the percentage visiting our website versus connecting directly with us via ParentSquare. It just gives me a sense of confidence that we’ve reached them.”

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Pete McConnell

Director of Communications and Marketing

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Parents love it

The district also uses ParentSquare for staff communications and to serve as a “backup” for any district announcements that are sent via email. Parent liaisons use the platform for posting announcements, calendar items and flyers.

“It gives them the opportunity to be creative by making flyers that are colorful and that really pop,” McConnell said. “Those communications not only capture people’s attention, but they also serve as a backup to relying on the student to bring paper home.”

McConnell uses ParentSquare to share stories and features with parents and staff. If a student wins an award, for example, he will post that information and share it via the communication platform. He recently posted a “Meet the STAAR Interim Assessment Challenge Winners” article focused on the mid-year sample STAAR test.

“The actual test takes place later, but this one gives an indication of where the kids are,” McConnell explained. “I posted the results and congratulated third to fifth graders at the East Campus for earning the highest percentages of meeting and mastering math and science.”

Families and students really like being kept “in the know” through McConnell’s posts. ParentSquare also offers built-in Spanish translation (as well as 100 other languages) that helps McConnell more easily reach the 58% of district families that speak Spanish.

“Parents love it,” he said. “When they see their child has done well or won an award, they like to brag about it. In that sense, the platform itself has become a good word-of-mouth recruiting tool for us.”

Ready for a better way?

Bring ParentSquare to your school or district

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