

Challenge & Solution

Yakima School District needed a communications platform that could handle multilingual messaging across eight languages for 15,000 students, as the district had never communicated routine messages in any language other than English and Spanish. After researching options, the district launched ParentSquare for the 2021-22 school year, enabling two-way translated communication from the district to the classroom.

Results

- Contactability increased from 60% to 97% after updating parent contact data and training staff on the platform
- Transportation office sends targeted bus-specific delay notifications to affected families instead of school-wide blasts
- Teacher posts became a source of positive content for district communications, social media, and the website

Eight languages, one platform, and a district transformed

Coming into a new school year, one of the Yakima School District's primary goals was to secure a feature-rich communications system for the 15,000-student district.

Kirsten Fitterer, the district's Chief Communications Officer, set about analyzing various communications systems and talked to other districts about what they were using. Her thorough research led her to learn about ParentSquare from another school district that was using it successfully in California. After a careful review of the school-home communications platform, the district launched ParentSquare at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year.

One of Fitterer's biggest concerns when adopting a new communications platform was whether it could handle multilingual communications for the district, whose students speak eight different languages. "If you take Spanish out of the mix, we've never communicated using the seven other languages before, unless it was an IEP or something else that had to be translated," Fitterer said. "We've never communicated our normal messaging out in languages that impact our families; we just hoped they could figure out their own

translations.”

That changed when the district in central Washington state adopted ParentSquare. “Right away we were able to communicate with those families on ParentSquare in their authentic language; we’ve never done that before,” said Fitterer. “This happens at the teacher level and then also at the department, school and district level.”

Teacher and parent feedback on the platform’s translation capabilities has been extremely positive. “For Spanish, I hear from teachers that it’s a breeze to use. They like being able to communicate back and forth with translation that works in a two-way environment,” Fitterer explained. “One of our goals was to increase two-way communication between two different language speakers. And at least digitally, we’ve accomplished that.”

Empowering different departments

ParentSquare also empowers the district’s transportation office to send out timely targeted messages to families regarding a specific route or bus. Previously, this was handled on a schoolwide basis (e.g., “Martin Luther King Bus number 15 is running 15 minutes late”) and distributed to a large audience. “It now just goes to the families of the 30 riders on the bus,” said Fitterer. “That has been a great way to connect with our families in real-time and that has been huge for us.”

Yakima School District also uses ParentSquare for student attendance notifications. Parents are alerted to any issue and can then write in their own comments and/or get the attendance excused right in the ParentSquare platform.

Additionally, the district’s communications office writes positive stories about district activities and shares them via the school-home communications platform. These efforts proved especially valuable during the pandemic, when classroom educators were occupied with other issues and they weren’t submitting as many positive stories to the communications department as usual.

To fill in those gaps, Fitterer scoured through teacher posts that were being sent out to parents to find the positive nuggets in them. She then reached out to teachers to get their permission to write a story and share photos about it.

“We actually wound up with more content than we normally do for positive, engaging stories

because the teachers were sending that type of information out to parents all the time using ParentSquare,” Fitterer said. “Those stories are now distributed via social media and our website, so it saves time for the teachers and principals.”

“Right away we were able to communicate with those families on ParentSquare [in their authentic language](#); we’ve never done that before.”

Kirsten Fitterer

Chief Communications Officer

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

“District Contactability rate...it’s awesome”

Since the district started using ParentSquare, its contactability rate has increased from 60 percent to a current 97 percent. “It’s awesome,” Fitterer said. “The increase came as a part of getting all parent and guardian contact information current while also training staff to make sure things were updated.”

Yakima School District has recently started using StudentSquare, which teachers and school staff use to communicate directly with students in high school and middle school (and, students also use to communicate directly with their instructors). Fitterer said coaches and activity sponsors find that aspect of the platform extremely useful because it creates both a safe and secure communication tool and workflow center between educators and students.

“We’re planning a more official launch of StudentSquare for the 2022-23 school year, but we’ve already empowered a few coaches to help lay down the groundwork for it. We’re getting the early adopters on board by promising them a pizza party at the end of the sports season,” said Fitterer. “I already have three coaches in line for that, so it’ll be fun.”

Ready for a better way?

Bring ParentSquare to your school or district

[Sign up for a demo](#)