EBOOK

DEI in School Communications

SchoolStatus

Overview of DEI in School Communications

Is this topic relevant to you? **Let's find out!**

Take this quick 5-question quiz to find out if this eBook is for you:

1. Every student in my classroom/building/district should receive the services/support they need to be successful, regardless if that looks different from student to student.

    YES   NO

2. Every parent/caregiver in my classroom/building/district should be able to access information about their child's education without barriers, even if that looks different from family to family.

    YES   NO

3. Every parent/caregiver in my classroom/building/district should be able to access support/services for their child's education without barriers, even if that looks different from family to family.

    YES   NO

4. Every student in my classroom/building/district should graduate with the knowledge that their teachers believed in them.

    YES   NO

5. Every teacher in my building/district should have the professional learning they need to empower all their students to thrive and succeed, even if different students require different approaches.

    YES   NO

Did you answer yes to one of these questions?

Likely, you answered yes to every question, which is why this eBook is for you. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) aren't about the demographic makeup of your school district or politics about curriculum.

DEI is about ensuring that every student has what they need to graduate and enter into the world a productive, healthy citizen of our democracy.

What is DEI exactly? Let's break it down!

Diversity:

The range of differences among people, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religious affiliation, age, physical abilities, and intellectual perspectives.

Equity:

The fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a community, ensuring that every individual has what they need to reach their full potential.

Inclusion:

Creating a culture where everyone feels welcomed, respected, valued, and supported, and has a sense of belonging. It involves creating an environment where people from diverse backgrounds can participate fully and be themselves without fear of discrimination or marginalization.

For K-12 educators, this means creating a classroom and school environment where all students (& their grownups) feel safe, respected, and valued, regardless of their background, learning needs, or abilities, and where all students have equal access to resources and opportunities that will help them succeed, even if that looks different from student to student.

Equality vs. Equity

Equality and equity are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings and implications for K-12 education.

Equality refers to treating everyone the same, regardless of their individual needs or circumstances. Providing the exact same resources to all students in a classroom or school would be an example of equality.

Equity, on the other hand, refers to ensuring that everyone has what they need to reach their full potential. This often involves giving more resources or support to those who need it the most.

This image is a great visual example of of equity:

EQUALITY   EQUITY
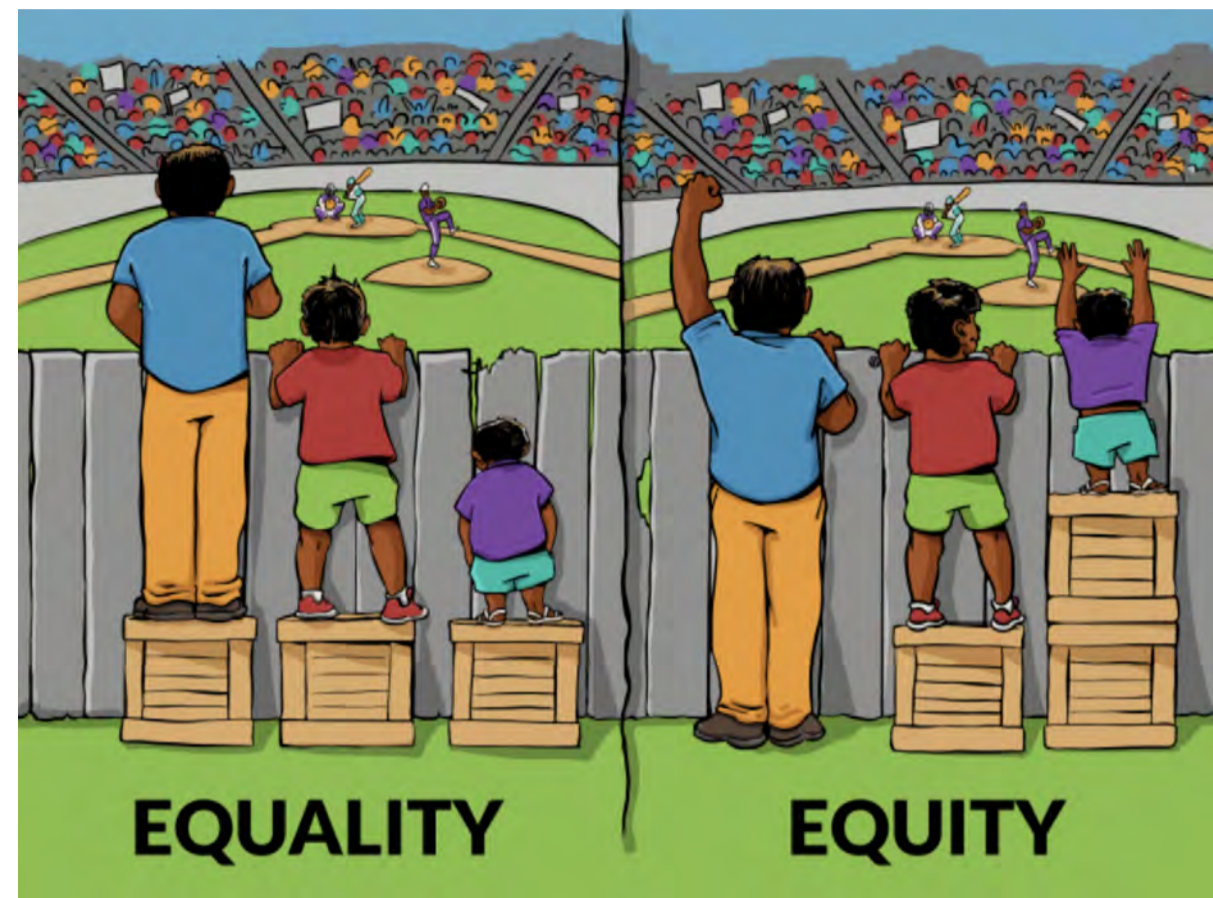
For K-12 educators, applying the concepts of equity in teaching and learning means that every student receives the support and resources they need to succeed.

Some common equitable classroom approaches likely happening in your school:

1. **Differentiated instruction**
2. **Flexible grouping**
3. **Formative assessment**

Sound familiar?

Ok. Tell me something I don't know. Like, what does this have to do with school communications?

On a macro-level, school communications are about building strong relationships between parents, caregivers, school leaders, and teachers, creating a culture of transparency and support.

Home-School Communications

<u>Research</u> shows that consistent family communication leads to:

- Higher attendance rates
- Higher academic achievement
- Improved behavioral outcomes and social/emotional functioning
- Lower drop-out and higher college attendance rates

Amazingly, there's a single simple but powerful reason behind all this improvement and it's trust.

The more the adults hear from their child's teacher & principal, the more they feel in the know about what's happening with their child at school. The more parents/caregivers feel involved in school life, the more they trust the adults in the building. And that's the key. The more parents trust the adults at school, the more they support their child's learning. This is equally important for students from immigrant families as students whose parents attended the same school a generation back.

In other words, family communication is as integral to a child's learning and development as choice of curriculum or instructional methods.

Leader-Teacher Communications

Research also shows that open leader-teacher communications leads to:

- A strong learning culture
- Better supported classroom teachers
- Lower teacher burnout
- Improved teacher practice & growth

When teachers are supported and valued, they can help their students achieve their full potential — academically, socially, and emotionally. Creating a school culture where educator learning is prioritized gives teachers a chance to build and reflect on their practice. Their learnings and reflection can translate into positive action. This important cycle leads to an environment of continuous learning and growth that naturally extends to students.

What's the bottom line?

Student absences cost schools $10.7 billion per year.

What about the cost to students?

1 out of every 5 high school students is chronically absent. A report by the federal government found that irregular attendance is a better predictor of dropout rates than test scores, and has a higher likelihood of future involvement in the criminal justice system.

Which means investing in a 360° school communications program *literally saves lives.*

What does DEI in school comms look like?

- It removes technology, language, and access barriers to parent engagement via tools that automatically translate into a parent's preferred language and don't require an app or any kind of download.
- It offers the capacity to meet parents and caregivers where they are, on any device they have, or no device at all.
- It enables educators to text from a private number, video chat, share engaging weekly updates, and easily keep a log of all communication.
- It gives educators — both leaders and teachers in classrooms — access to the data and information they need to make evidence-based decisions that move them closer to achieving their overall instructional goals while supporting the growth of individual students.

Sounds pretty good, right?

When it comes to tools that optimize DEI in school communications, the SchoolStatus suite of K-12 solutions supports both educators and families. Our tools can be implemented individually or in combination. All are designed to support the hard work of improving student outcomes as districts work to help students recover from COVID's impact on learning.

SchoolStatus - a data-centric communication tool

School Innovations & Achievement -
a 360° approach to reducing absenteeism

Smore - easy school newsletters parents actually read

TeachBoost - tools to support educator learning and growth

Operoo - automates all forms & operational tasks

DEI + School Communications = Improved Attendance

"The teacher is engaged not in teaching the subject, but in teaching the student." **-John Dewey**

The first full academic year of the pandemic (2020-2021) saw a <u>25% rise</u> in chronic absenteeism to 10.1 million students. Researchers expect to see those numbers double for 2021-2022.

Certainly, this spike in absenteeism is a central cause of the alarming drop in 2022 NAEP scores.

Who is most impacted by chronic absenteeism?

Children living in poverty are almost 3x likely to be chronically absent. Students from communities of color, as well as those with disabilities, are also disproportionately affected.

A great many of these are excused absences, tied to health problems that persist in historically disadvantaged communities, like asthma, diabetes, and dental and mental health issues. Additional barriers include lack of a nearby school bus, a safe route to school or food insecurity. <u>AttendanceWorks noted</u>, "In many cases, chronic absence goes unnoticed because schools are counting how many students show up every day rather than examining how many and which students miss so much school that they are falling behind."

In other words, our students who are most at-risk, who most need to be at school, are the ones most often absent from it. And we might not even notice.

6 simple communications steps to reduce absenteeism:

1. Share weekly digital, translatable Principal Updates that clearly communicate procedures. Post across multiple channels.

2. Use an analytics & communications platform to understand which students are experiencing patterns of absenteeism.

3. Implement an automated attendance management solution to reduce the burden on staff & more easily reach all families in their preferred language.

4. Share weekly, digital, translatable classroom/homeroom updates that build a communication bridge from home to school. Post across multiple channels.

5. Work with teachers and counselors to reach out individually to families via private 2-way auto-translated text messages, no app needed, to encourage their child's participation in school.

6. Eliminate all paper-based forms, including field trip management, that serve as barriers to attendance with a simple automated, cost-saving solution.

DEI + School Communications = Improved Student Performance

How can you help if you don't know?

When parents and caregivers have ready access to what their child is learning, what the class expectations are, what the assignments are and when they are due, and what support systems exist at school should their child be struggling, they are far better able to support their child's education. Just because a parent doesn't know, doesn't mean they don't want to know.

In theory, most educators truly believe they're already communicating this information home, and, on a certain level, they are! But if we think back to DEI principles, more often than not, every family gets the same size box to stand on.

Let's make sure that every family has access in the way they need, so that every student has an equitable education.

How would you grade your school's communications with respect to DEI & student achievement? Take this 2 question quiz:

1. Our district's parents/caregivers can translate IEPs, parent conference reports & college counseling information to their preferred language in a click.

   YES   NO
   ◯   ◯

2. Our faculty can engage in 1:1 text chat with caregivers via a private number, translated into the parent's preferred language (and back into English), automatically transcribed and logged, with no app required.

   YES   NO
   ◯   ◯

If you answered Y to those two questions, you are already earning an A+ in this subject!

If you answered N, not to worry. You're here, and reading this guide, because you're looking for a solution. You're taken the right steps towards getting that A+.

PART 4

DEI + School Communications = Improved Parent Engagement

As educators, our goal is to meet students where they are, and bring them along the learning continuum.

Investing in a comprehensive digital communications plan is about meeting families where they are. Think about it: in 5 years, 100% of the K-12 parent population will be millennials. Millennials have their own communication style and set of needs: they are the first generation of digital natives, their mobile phones serve as their base of operations, they chronicle their family lives on social media, they schedule everything – including leisure activities, and they hate phone calls.

A flier in a backpack is simply not going to cut it with the millennial generation.

By 2025, 1 in every 4 US K-12 public school students will speak a different language at home.

Multilingual parents and caregivers have different barriers to engagement. Their work schedules might not allow them to participate in the PTA or other volunteer activities. Transportation or childcare needs might make attending school functions challenging. And then there are the challenges that come with being an immigrant parent: struggling with the social and cultural mores, struggling with the language, being unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the US public school system. A one-size fits all approach to school-home communication will not work for what is soon to be 25% of the school age population.

This group of families requires a bigger box to stand on for an equal chance of success.

At-risk families require the biggest box, and those numbers are increasing, too.

Studies show that the families most at risk of food insecurity are also often least likely to fill out the forms they need for free and reduced lunch. Children living in poverty have the highest absenteeism and drop out rates. Arguably, engaging this group of parents and caregivers is our most important task, and that means removing every barrier we possibly can.

Let's make forms easy, make teacher communication easy, and make all families feel welcome and included.

6 simple communications steps to improve parent engagement:

1. Introduce families to the counselors, the building, the classroom, & the principal via <u>translatable digital newsletters</u> welcoming students back to school.

2. Use an <u>analytics & communications platform</u> to understand which parents & caregivers are not engaging and compare to student success measures.

3. Reach all families via a tiered, automated <u>parent intervention solution</u> with communications in each family's home language.

4. Share weekly, digital, translatable <u>classroom/homeroom updates</u> that build a communication bridge from home to school. Post across multiple channels.

5. Work with teachers and counselors to reach out individually to families via <u>private 2-way auto-translated text messages</u>, no app needed, to encourage their participation in their child's schooling.

6. Eliminate all paper-based forms that serve as barriers to participation and services with a simple automated, <u>cost-saving solution</u>.

PART 5

DEI + Teacher Professional Learning = Better Overall Communications

The best tools in the world don't make a difference if teachers aren't supported in developing best practices.

As essential as home-school communication is, intra-school communication is equally important in establishing the tone and supporting a school's DEI values and practices. Principals need to both model and communicate instructional goals and professional practices with teachers, and employ data tools to review teacher progress. Instructional coaches need the same. Teachers need ways to collaborate with one another, reflect on their progress, and demonstrate growth.

Data-driven communication is as integral to success as data-driven instruction.

When school districts/buildings invest in robust communications tools, leadership has a 360° degree view of communications across their entire community — how teachers are communicating with families, how leaders are communicating with teachers, and how teachers are supporting students and communicating home. Aligning professional learning with DEI-related district priorities, like student attendance, student achievement, and stronger home-school engagement is far easier when there's data to support the goals.

From district and building leadership to instructional coaches to faculty, using data to guide your DEI professional development plan just makes sense.

3 easy steps to align DEI communication goals with teacher PD:

1. Use SchoolStatus for a one-stop shop data & 1:1 family communications platform that enables principals, counselors & teachers to get a full picture of every student.

2. Align the district evaluation process and instructional coaching program with district priorities, using TeachBoost.

3. Use Smore newsletters to help coaches and building leaders work with all teachers to strengthen DEI practices and improve communications with parents and caregivers.

Sample District Communications Plan

Strategy	Purpose	Timeline	Audience	Distribution	Persons Responsible	Measures of Success
District-level						
Superintendent Update	Leadership vision for the district; district in the news; highlights & wins	Monthly	Parents/ caregivers, faculty/staff, School Board, community members	Smore Newsletter via Social Media; MNS; website	School PR team; Superintendent	Opens & clicks on analytics dashboard
Achievement Initiative	Engage families & increase attendance (daily & @ transition points)	Automated	Home adults	Mail, email, text	SI&A	Increase in attendance numbers
Building-level						
Principal Update	Welcome & engage families with weekly accounts of school life & explain procedures	Weekly	Parents & caregivers at each building	Smore Newsletter via MNS; social media; website	Principal & assistant	Increase in percentage of readers
Library NL	Encourage literacy, reading for pleasure, tech support & make families feel welcome. Celebrate National Theme months.	Monthly	Families in each building	Smore Newsletter; MNS; social media, website	Librarian	Percentage of opens; increase in families using library
Classroom Update	Keep home adults informed about week-to-week classwork	Weekly	Home adults of students in class or homeroom	Smore Newsletter via email, social media	Teacher	Percentage of readers

Strategy	Purpose	Timeline	Audience	Distribution	Persons Responsible	Measures of Success
Graded work on portal	Keep students and parents up-to-date on academic progress	Ongoing	Students, parents/ caregivers	Portal, Messaging Alerts through SchoolStatus	Teachers	Percentage of parents accessing portal; timely updating of grades
Teachers' messages to parents/ caregivers	1:1 communication for check-ins, challenges, praise not included in weekly update	As needed	Parents/ caregivers	SchoolStatus platform	Teachers, counselors	Improved patterns of attendance, student success, & parent engagement
Conferences & Conference Reports	Individual meetings to discuss student progress; translatable reports for parents unable to attend	Twice yearly; as needed	All parents/ caregivers	Event announcements on principal & teacher updates	Teacher	Participation
Student progress reports/report cards	Communicate successes & opportunities for improvement	Quarterly	Students and parents/ caregivers	Portal; MNS; translatable versions on Smore	Teacher	Student improvement; graduation rates
Counseling						
Counselor Updates	Keep families informed about academic support services; mental health services; college counseling	Variable	Families in each building	Smore Newsletter; social media	Counselors	Percentage of opens; numbers of click throughs for services
College Counseling	Keep families engaged; encourage attendance & college/career readiness	Monthly	High School families	Smore newsletters & automated A2A letters	College Counselors	Percentage of opens; numbers of click throughs for services; attendance numbers
Faculty Professional Learning						
Teacher Professional learning & growth	Digital tool for coaching teachers	Ongoing	Teachers & coaches	TeachBoost	Coach	Teacher improvement across goals
District Coaching NewsletterNL	Tips and strategies for faculty	Monthly	Faculty	TeachBoost; Smore Newsletters; social media	Instructional coach leadership	Engagement rates
Faculty Building Newsletter NL	Alignment with building & district goals; events; PD; rewards	Weekly	Faculty	Smore Newsletters	Building principals	Faculty retention rates

Summary

If you're pressed for time and skipped to the end, we got you!
Here's a quick checklist of takeaways from this eBook:

1. School districts & buildings must consider diversity, equity & inclusion in developing their school communications plan.

2. Why? Because school communications are about building school connectedness – which means different families have different needs.

3. Building specific DEI practices across district and building communications can decrease absenteeism.

4. Infusing DEI practices into your school communications will improve parent engagement.

5. Opportunities abound to communicate, coach, & model DEI values with faculty.

6. Check out the sample Academic Communications Plan we put together for you in Part 6!

Almost 50 million children are enrolled in US public schools. Let's make sure we're reaching their families like we should be. To do that, DEI in school communications is a necessity! So, click the link below to learn how our tools can help your district. We can help shape a plan for how to help you move forward with tools to engage your families, support your faculty, and get those seats filled.

SCHEDULE A MEETING