



PARENT COMMUNICATION THAT IS “EASIER, MORE TRANSPARENT, AND QUANTIFIABLE”

LUMPKIN COUNTY SCHOOLS BUILDS PARENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY WITH COMMUNICATION OVERSIGHT

“There was no clear plan in place,” says Director of Community Engagement, Jason Lemley. His North Georgia school district wasn’t always as well-positioned for parent engagement as they are today. “We had strategic performance objectives and goals, but we didn’t have a tool where two-way communication was happening.”

There's no question in education about the importance of two-way communication. The unexpected COVID interruption in March of 2020 drove home the necessity of parents and schools coming together as a team. Districts across the United States saw a dramatic increase in communication with parents. Today, many school districts want to build on that momentum and apply strategy and administrator oversight to their parent engagement. But they don't always know where to start.

When Superintendent Dr. Rob Brown joined Lumpkin County School District in 2016, he made parent communication a central component of the district's strategic plan.


He also tasked Jason Lemley with finding a new tool that gave leaders the ability to see what was happening.

"When we developed our school system strategic plan, we wanted to include the necessary components that would help every student in our district have an avenue for success," says Superintendent Dr. Robert Brown. "Because we believed that Parent and Community Engagement was such a critical piece, it became one of the four pillars of our plan. Schools cannot reach the highest levels of success without parental involvement and clear communication. We wanted our schools to become better facilitators of partnerships rather than just the local educational entity."



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-Dr. Rob Brown, Superintendent



Some communication tools were already active throughout the district but were not providing the details Brown and Lemley wanted. Teachers were using a variety of apps like Remind and Class Dojo. “Of course, you also had teachers who weren’t doing any of those things,” says Lemley. “They weren’t using any specific tool.” Lemley will tell you that none of those solutions quite fit the bill. “There was no oversight.” With hundreds of conversations taking place each week between the school and home via teachers, principals, nurses, and more, Lumpkin County Schools needed organization and transparency.

“Parents send us the most important piece of their lives each day: their children,” says Superintendent Brown. “We need parents to see our schools as their partner in, not the owner of, their child’s education. Our efforts to be proactive with purposeful communication is to develop that collaborative mentality. We believe our students have the best chance for success when their parents and the school have a positive relationship. All relationships need effective, frequent communication to thrive.”

FINDING THE RIGHT SOLUTION

With a vision in place, Lemley and his team began searching for a tool that would show where communication with parents wasn’t happening, where it was, and what was being said. “We needed a way to evaluate and measure engagement with parents,” shares Lemley. “We were going to do our due diligence for what we were looking for, which at the time was just two-way communication with some oversight.”

Lemley and his team researched many parent communication options, with three choices making it into a final evaluation.

“We heard from and demo-ed the paid version of Remind, Kininvolved, and SchoolStatus,” says Lemley. Lumpkin chose SchoolStatus for the engagement metrics and transparency.

“What we found was that SchoolStatus would provide that solution with the oversight and the measurements that we were looking for,” states Lemley. Lumpkin County School District soon found that SchoolStatus delivered even more than the district was originally looking for. “What was more impressive was that SchoolStatus provided us with a method for informed conversation.”

DATA-DRIVEN CONVERSATION

SchoolStatus integrates assessments, benchmarks, and more to put student data on the same screen as parent communication tools. “SchoolStatus was the only platform where a teacher or an educator or a principal or counselor, whoever it may be—when they’re having that two-way communication with parents it is informed by the data,” says Lemley. Each communication whether a call, text, email, or video chat becomes a record in the digital student profile. The combination of traditional student data and parent communication data creates a comprehensive view with a whole-child approach.

The ease of accessing the data is appealing to principals and teachers alike. “Two clicks to make a phone call,” says Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction Whitney McPherson. “And it’s right on your computer screen.” Communication with parents increases once the methods are as easy as possible. “It takes the excuses away,” she explains. “It’s easy. Everything’s all in one place.”



BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHERS

One of the benefits of administrator oversight is the ability to share best practices with teachers based on situations from within the district. “I can pull real-life examples,” shares Lemley. Lemley has made this practice a regular part of his engagement strategy with a newsletter. His bi-weekly email includes basic research, a communication tip, and a specific task to try in their communication with parents.

Communication oversight is particularly helpful with Georgia’s Teacher Keys Effectiveness System. “There are 10 standards in TKES,” says Lemley. “Two of those standards are communication and professionalism.” Parent communication typically happens outside regular classroom time—making it hard for an administrator to observe.

“SchoolStatus is the perfect tool for an administrator,” states Lemley. “When you go into a classroom and do a 25 or 30-minute observation, you might be able to see content knowledge and use of differentiated instruction, or whether or not that’s a positive learning environment—but you’re not going to see communication between the teacher and parents.” Administrators are able to listen to automatic recordings of parent conversations in SchoolStatus and read text messages and emails. “With SchoolStatus, they are able to click on a teacher and look at their engagement data,” explains Lemley. “They can also use it in their school as examples of best practices or to be able to give a shout out to a teacher who sent 5,000 texts in the last month, for example.”

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-Jason Lemley, Director of Community Engagement



COMPLIANCE

K-12 educational institutions must follow laws, regulations, and internal policies to ensure the smooth running of activities. That means providing proof that parents have been informed on things like Special Education measures. “Our Special Ed Department, our Special Ed Director, and our Special Ed Coordinator, they love SchoolStatus,” shares Lemley. “They’re able to go in and see the conversations. Record keeping and communication is such a big deal in special education.”

Indeed, documentation is essential so parents know what to expect, know their rights, and also so information isn’t misconstrued. “There could be contentious conversations. And to be able to listen to those conversations is crucial,” Lemley explains. “They’re not going to remember all the details of everything. To be able to log in and view those text messages or listen to those phone conversations has been really important.”

Contentious conversations occasionally happen district-wide. “Prior to SchoolStatus, it was his word against her

word,” says Assistant Principal Whittney McPherson. “If we had a parent that was upset about a phone call or a text message, it was hard to support your teacher because you didn’t actually know what really happened.”

McPherson describes an issue she had recently with a parent who was upset, “I pulled up SchoolStatus and I hit play. Five minutes in, I hit pause, and I set up a meeting with the teacher.” McPherson quickly found what she needed by listening to the original conversation instead of second-hand accounts. “They enabled us to deal with the issues directly.”

Assistant Principal McPherson says it also adds a layer of protection for teachers for when a student fails a class, for example. “With SchoolStatus we see a record of everything—every text that was sent, every phone call that was there, every voicemail that was left,” she explains. “With all of the data in front of you, it is easy to ensure parents are well-informed of the academic progress of students through SchoolStatus.”

SUCCESS

Communication transparency and oversight have been a game-changer for administrators, but Jason Lemley shares that teachers love the ease of communication as well. “We are now in year two of our relationship with SchoolStatus, and our staff would have my job if I even thought about changing!”

Metrics in SchoolStatus reflect the enthusiasm teachers have for reaching out to parents. “The total engagement for one school alone between calls, emails, and text is over 72,000 engagements in three months,” Lemley shares. “1,200 of those are phone calls,” Lemley explains that teachers are often less likely to want to make phone calls. “To see that they’ve made 1,200 phone calls in the three months of August, September, and October, and over 70,000 text messages.” Lemley says the rest of

the district is performing just as well. “The other schools are right there with them. It’s impressive.”

“SchoolStatus has provided us a tool to make communication easier, more transparent, and quantifiable,” says Superintendent Dr. Rob Brown. “We have an expectation for our staff to communicate frequently and professionally with parents, and now we have a tool to monitor that expectation. The old adage that we should ‘inspect what we expect’ is now something we can do easily and without adding an extra burden on our staff to track and record each conversation or communication. SchoolStatus gives us an efficient and effective avenue for each employee to develop partnerships with parents.”



ABOUT LUMPKIN COUNTY SCHOOLS

Lumpkin County School District is a public school district in Lumpkin County, Georgia, United States, based in Dahlonega. It serves the communities of Auraria and Dahlonega. The Mission of Lumpkin County Schools is to educate and empower life-long learners. Their Vision is to prepare all students for successful and productive lives in an ever-changing world.



ABOUT SCHOOLSTATUS

SchoolStatus is the only data analytics platform turning student insights into parent conversations. Through powerful reporting tools, automatic integrations, and customizable data points, educators easily identify students most in need of engagement. Then using the communication tools built right into the platform, instantly connect with guardians through calls, texts, or e-mails to reach families where they are. We focus on the data, so educators can focus on education.



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