

# UNIFIED PARENT COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY TO STRATEGIC COMMUNITY BUILDING

**SAN MARCOS CISD DEMONSTRATES  
TRANSFORMATIONAL REBRANDING  
THROUGH ONE-ON-ONE  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS**

**The 7500+ student district is the home of the Rattlers. A fanged purple and white snake adorns district signage—friendly intimidation for the neighboring sports teams.**

When Andrew Fernandez joined San Marcos Consolidated School District in 2017, one of his very first tasks was rebranding.

District brand is the way stakeholders—including parents, staff, and community leaders, perceive their district. For San Marcos, district consolidation and an unfavorable news item had contributed to a deterioration of community spirit. Ultimately, they wanted feelings toward the district to be positive—to project trust and authority within the community. Leadership at San Marcos prepared for the effort strategically. “Yes, we improved the logo, yes, we improved the colors,” says Fernandez. “But ultimately, my main goal was about building the community relationships that we have today.”

**Building a community is about offering a seat at the table to every stakeholder; getting every stakeholder to the table starts with communication.**

Communication from the district-level to the classroom level must be two-way. But tools that deliver on the concept of relationship building can be hard to find.



**ANDREW FERNANDEZ**

*Executive Director of Communications and  
Community Relations, San Marcos CISD*

**“For us, it really is about relationships,” says Fernandez. “There’s a quote: In order to touch their brains, you’ve got to touch their hearts.”**



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Fernandez explains that most platforms don’t support the type of communication he wanted to establish for San Marcos CISD. The problem was that, “A lot of times it was us telling the families what to do, what they need, or what’s going on.” While the outgoing information was important, parents couldn’t adequately respond. Selecting a tool that supported conversations was top of the to-do list.

In 2018, after a process of evaluation, the school district, located just south of Austin, Texas, chose SchoolStatus—a comprehensive communications solution powered by district student data.

“SchoolStatus allows us to have authentic relationships with our families,” explains Fernandez. “And they’re able to share with us what they need and what they want and what they desire out of their school journey and their school system. So we get to build better systems because we can hear from our families, and not just tell them what we want them to hear.”

The city of San Marcos is now a veritable sea of school colors. “When you drive around San Marcos, you’ll see purple, you’ll see white,” says Fernandez. “And it’s not because they’re more proud of being a rattler; it’s because they are rattlers. That’s the culture that we’ve built.”

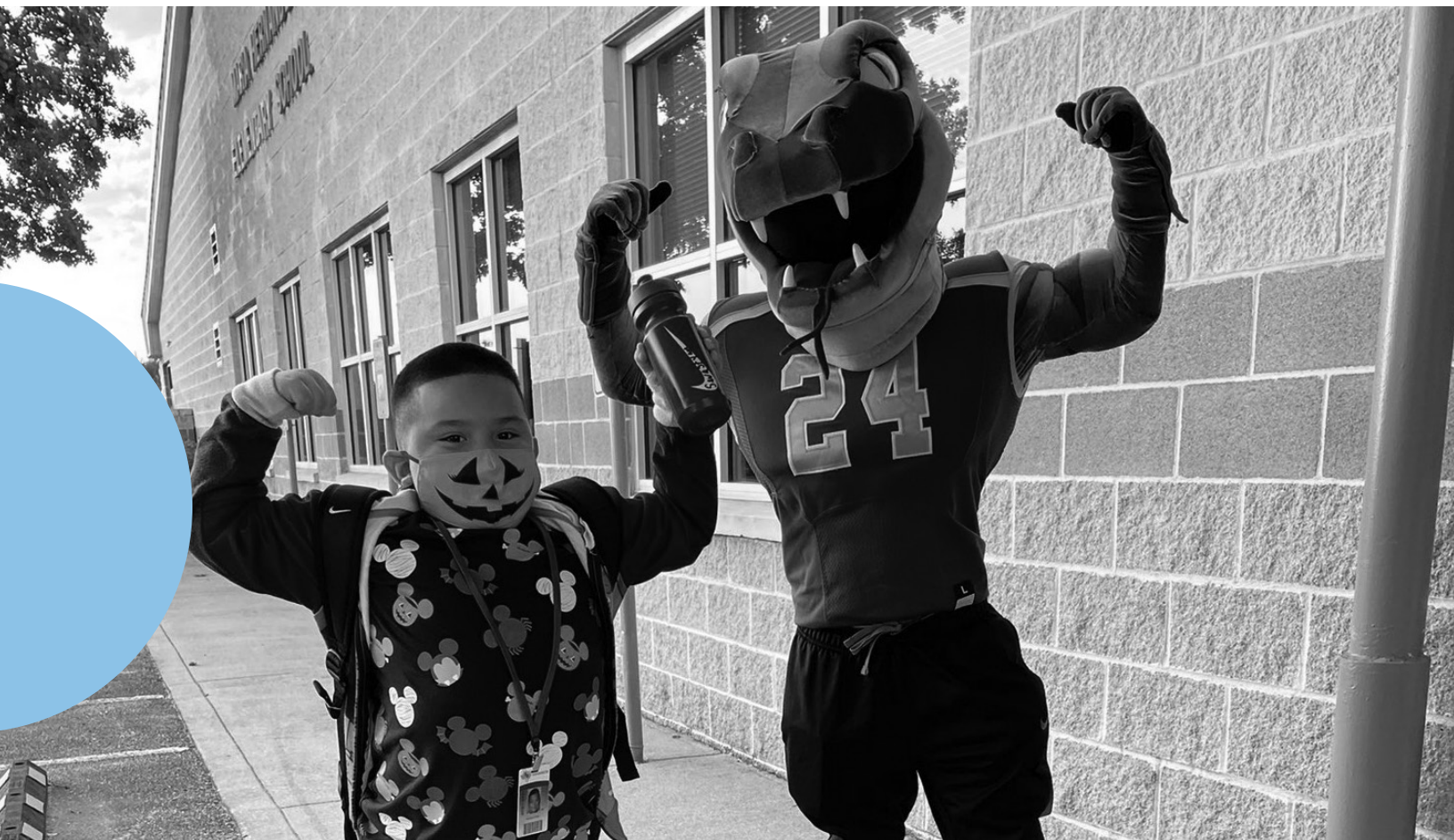


## **In the years since San Marcos began working with SchoolStatus, communication frequency has grown exponentially.**

As educators within the district became accustomed to using the new tools, district and school-wide metrics reflected the back and forth conversations with parents and family members.

**Over 1.5 million text messages were exchanged in the 2020-2021 school year.** That's up from 840,504 in 2020 and 109,539 in 2019—numbers all visible on their engagement dashboard.

Successful two-way communication needs to be both equitable and provide accountability. If establishing open lines of communication between home and school is a goal for your district, Fernandez would advise you to choose your communication solution carefully.



## EQUITY: Communication for Everyone

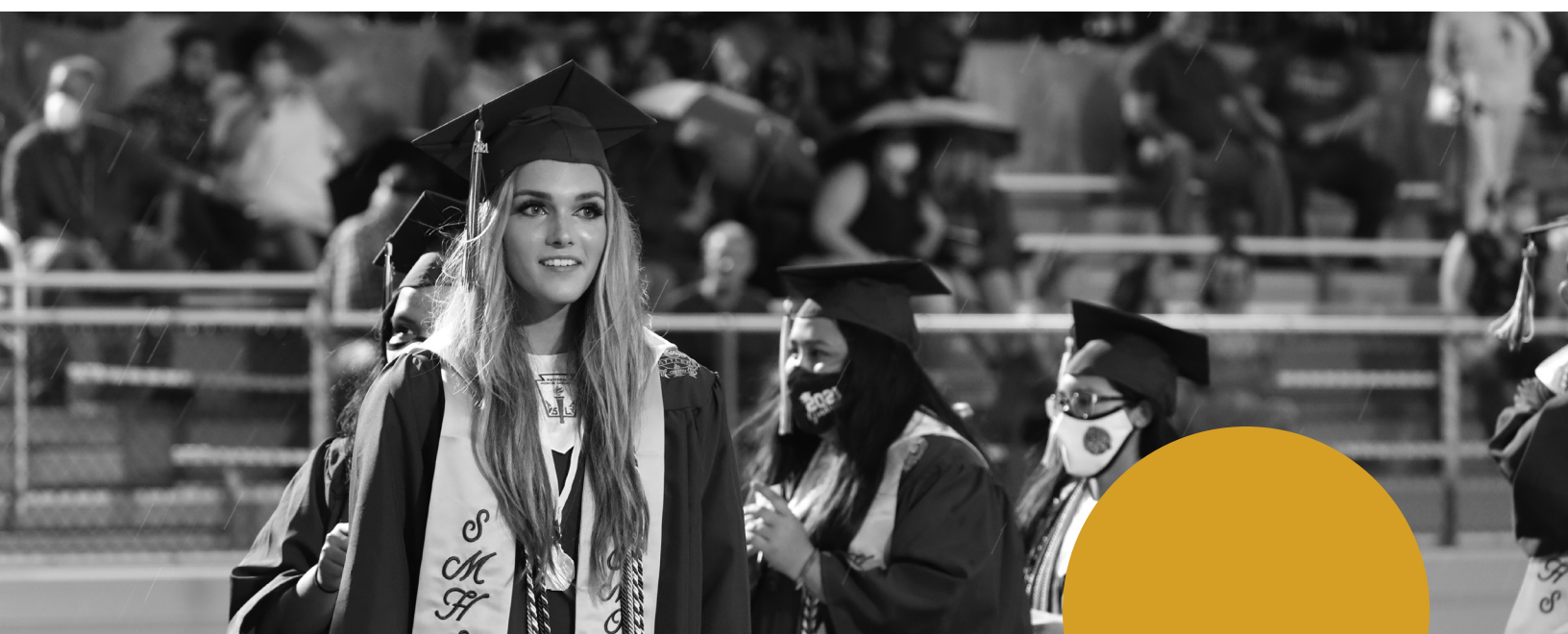
Most communication solutions have built-in economic or social barriers such as requiring parents to own a smartphone or computer, have reliable wifi, have time to spend communicating, and too often, to speak English. Equity in K12 parent communication is about breaking through barriers and reaching them in ways that are direct and convenient.

SchoolStatus offers “direct communication to their messages that they use on an everyday basis,” says Fernandez. “And it feels authentic.”

From the dashboard or mobile app, teachers can text straight from their computers or phones and translate the message into 100+ languages. “I love the translation options,” says middle school teacher Vanessa Jackson. “[SchoolStatus] was a godsend during quarantine.” When parents return messages, the teacher simply has to click a button to read it in English.

SchoolStatus also reaches parents without requiring them to download anything or login anywhere. “Downloading an app was just one extra step for our families,” explains Fernandez. A step they wanted to eliminate.

“SchoolStatus has really allowed us to be equitable towards all families and adjust to their needs and their desires because they are our customers,” explains Fernandez. “And we want to treat them with the utmost respect and respect the boundaries that they’ve created.”





## **ACCOUNTABILITY: Eliminate the “He-Said, She-Said”**

Strategic, manageable parent communication tools should include a way to go back and pull up old conversation records without consulting a three-ring binder or file cabinet. SchoolStatus does exactly that.

All communication logs in SchoolStatus are automatically attached to the Student Card™—a digital hub for students that includes assessment scores, absences, notes, communication history and more. “It’s easy to make contact,” says SPED teacher Rosalba Merchant. “And the documentation is there when you need it.”

“The number one factor of SchoolStatus that we are the proudest of is accountability,” explains Fernandez. “Not only does SchoolStatus allow us as a district to remain accountable by tracking conversations with district staff and families, but it also allows families to be able to look back on conversations. We hold each other accountable because of SchoolStatus.”

SchoolStatus may even protect your district in difficult legal circumstances—essential when trying to manage your district image. “There have been times where grievances were filed against the district or against the teacher,” says Fernandez. “And we were able to go back and track those messages. It was an important factor for us.”

Automatic call transcriptions and text logs in SchoolStatus eliminate the “he-said, she-said” that every administrator dreads. “When we turned over that information to an attorney, it was black and white. There was no room for interpretation because we could see the conversation that took place.”

Communication records are scoped on a user-by-user basis. Teachers can see their own communication records but not those of others. Principals can access the whole school—district administrators can access the entire district’s logs. “It’s not his word or her word versus anyone. It’s just the facts of the conversation,” says Fernandez.



## SUCCESS

As Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations, Andrew Fernandez knows how community relationships, positive perception, and engaged families affect student achievement. When he talks about his district, every word bears his pride and sense of accomplishment. Fernandez knows the importance of details and foundations.

**“Some people may think of it as just communicating with family, but honestly, communication is the foundation of building relationships so that students can be successful.”**



## ABOUT SAN MARCOS CISD

[San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District](#) is in the heart of the Texas Hill Country between San Antonio and Austin, the state capitol. The district serves a growing population in San Marcos, Hays County, Caldwell and Guadalupe Counties. San Marcos CISD covers 210 miles and serves more than 7,500 students who attend seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

San Marcos High School (SMHS) students, the fighting Rattlers, hit the college track on the first day of their freshman year. The school offers advanced placement courses, career technology courses and dual enrollment at Texas State and Austin Community College.





## 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. Contact with us at [schoolstatus.com](http://schoolstatus.com), like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @schoolstatusapp.



**SchoolStatus**