

INCREASED COMMUNICATION DURING COVID-19

by Ellen Lee

**DISTRICTS THAT MEASURE
COMMUNICATION ALONGSIDE
STUDENT DATA BENEFIT DURING
SCHOOL SHUTDOWNS**

“I think that before, particularly in high school, parents’ perspective was, ‘You deal with them at school and we deal with them at home.’ Even with my own daughter I was very much that way!” Beth Sullivan laughs. The Texas middle school teacher finds humor where she can while leading remote learning during a pandemic. “I think what’s happened now is that parents realize more that it’s a three-way team. It’s the teachers, the student and the parent—and that our communication is really important.”

Educators are feeling the change in parent-school relationships everywhere—an unexpected side-effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Now they understand how critical it is that we have that direct communication. Right to the teacher and the teacher right to the parent,” Deputy Superintendent Lee Willis is pleased to see communication gain strength in his Alabama school district. “One of the greatest challenges we faced was communicating with parents—our expectations and what we are going to try to do.”

Barriers between school-home relationships include language differences, absence of internet at home, parents in essential positions outside the home, and lack of smartphones. Any one of these can sever the home-school connection that was already threatened by the sudden shutdown.

Nevertheless, communication between parents and educators soared during the first few weeks of the shutdown. Teachers and administrators rushed to establish contact and stability with parents and provide continuity in instruction. Whether setting up remote learning structures, developing a paper-based curriculum, or offering emotional support, educators and parents began talking more than ever.

A black and white photograph of a man with short, dark hair and glasses, wearing a textured sweater over a collared shirt. He is sitting at a desk, drinking from a white cup with his right hand, and his left hand is on a laptop keyboard. The laptop is open in front of him. In the background, there is a large window looking out onto a cityscape. A large green circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing a quote in white text.

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- Lee Willis

THE RIGHT TOOLS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

“What would have been a heavy lift for us became so much lighter for our teachers that they were able to reach out to 100% of our parents the first week and that was our ultimate goal,” Dr. Carla Evers left no stone unturned in her Gulf Coast district. “We were able to use SchoolStatus to touch and communicate with all of our parents, and I’m not sure teachers would have been willing to call from their personal cell phone or their homes, but this made a way for them.”

Further north near Memphis, Desoto County educators have had a similar experience. “SchoolStatus has been the best, because we can continue to communicate back and forth with parents—that’s easy!” explains Principal Sara Jane Russell. “The apps, the Bloomz, the Reminds, all of that is not as personal.” Instead of wondering if we’re just another app, “parents like that our messages just come in as a text. They feel the ease of communication, the ease of contact.”



The shutdown has shown that having a tool in place to reliably, demonstrably, reach every parent is essential to maintain continuity in the coming school year. “Prior to my district buying SchoolStatus, what I did was I went into our grade program, copied down every parent’s email address, made a group file, and was sending out weekly emails to parents as a group email,” explains Sullivan. “It’s not individualized, it’s not personalized, it’s not in their language in some cases. It was not nearly as effective as this is.”

Principal Russell has a process in place that helps her speak to everyone, “I communicate *en masse* through SchoolStatus a lot. I send one mass message a week, to let them know I’m still here. I use Broadcast which creates the one-to-one [conversations] which then creates lots of open communication with parents. They’re sending me pictures of their kids, and what’s going on. Most of it is just about their well-being. Smiling, letting me know how they’re doing.”



**“I THINK PARENTS
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- Djuna Dudeck

The increase in parent communication will be a benefit in the fall when districts restructure schedules and manage many other changes that cannot happen without clear communication. “I think the parents are going to be more receptive [in the future],” Djuna Dudeck shares. With close to 1200 students in her Arkansas middle school, Professional Development Facilitator Dudeck knows a thing or two about keeping tabs on moving parts. “I think this is going to change the vision of the families.”

Education in the United States has taken a drastic turn, and many details remain unknown. It’s unlikely that our schools will ever go back to being exactly as they were. But with parents more involved than ever, now is the time to establish communication processes, frequency and consistency—while parents are engaged and informed.

“Across the board, SchoolStatus has been a tremendous partner in helping us to bridge that gap in communication,” says Deputy Superintendent Lee Willis. “It’s not a one-way dialogue, it’s two-way dialogue with parents and teachers and that just helps us in so many ways.”

THANKS TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS!

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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 us at schoolstatus.com, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @schoolstatusapp.



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