

Parents Say Email is Most Effective Vehicle for School-to-Home Communications

Timely Information Pushed to Parents is Preference

Irvine, Calif. – Eighty percent (80%) of parents say personal email is the most effective way for schools and districts to communicate with them, according to Speak Up data released by Blackboard Inc. and Project Tomorrow in their latest trends report, *Trends in community engagement: Text, Twitter, email, call—new expectations for school-to-home communications*.

The new report analyzes feedback from more than 514,000 K-12 students, parents, educators, and community members who shared their views between October 2016 and January 2017 as part of the annual Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning, facilitated by Project Tomorrow. The data shows that parents and administrators are not always on the same page when evaluating the most effective ways to engage and communicate.

Parents value email messages, auto phone messages and text messages for receiving non-student specific information such as announcements and alerts. For general communications, principals also identify auto phone messages and email as effective tools, but place a much higher value on school and district websites and social media tools like Facebook than parents do. Nearly half (45%) of parents want information texted to them; only 19% want to have to go to a website to find the same type of information.

“The data shows that parents value having information *pushed* to them rather than having to search and find it on their own,” said Dr. Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow. “Given the time pressures faced by most parents, this is not surprising. What is surprising is the disconnect we see between what parents and administrators say are the best communications tools. Asking parents these questions – instead of guessing – is important for schools and districts to be sure they are spending their time and resources in the most effective ways.”

When it comes to social media, this disconnect is large. Almost five times as many district communications officers (78%) as parents (16%) identify Facebook as an effective way to communicate school and district information.

“Social media channels, websites, and online newsletters provide a highly efficient way for communications staff to manage messages, build their brand, and disseminate information,” as noted in the report. “However, this new data states those tools might not be used appropriately to both inform and engage parents and other community stakeholders in the education system.”

“With more than 6,000 U.S. public school districts relying on Blackboard’s solutions to power their communications with parents, we view The Speak Up Project as an indispensable source for guiding each district’s quest to optimize their community engagement,” said Katie Blot, Chief Strategy and Portfolio Officer at Blackboard. “We hope this report provides administrators with helpful insights about how to effectively develop communications strategies and plans that meet parental needs.”

Other key findings from this year’s community engagement trends report include:

1. School principals say effective communications with parents is a major challenge for them; a challenge that may even be “waking them up in the middle of the night.”

2. Parents of elementary-aged children report higher levels of satisfaction with teacher and school/district communications than parents with children in middle school or high school.
3. Schools and districts need to learn how to differentiate their messages and the tools they use to meet the needs of parents who are increasingly tech-savvy and value greater communications with their child's teacher and school.

The report also breaks down what social media networks parents are using on a regular basis. While Facebook is still the most used, YouTube and Instagram are being used in greater numbers by younger parents. For instance, while 18% of parents aged 40-49 use Instagram "all the time or often," 37% of parents aged 29 or younger report that level of use of Instagram.

Since 2003, Project Tomorrow, a global education nonprofit organization, has facilitated the annual Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning. A key aspect of the research project is to track the growth in student, educator and parent interest in digital learning, as well as how the nation's schools and districts are addressing that interest with innovative learning experiences in and out of the classroom. Project Tomorrow and Blackboard have collaborated since 2007 to create a series of annual reports that focus on the year-to-year trends in the use of digital learning tools to change the classroom-learning paradigm through an in-depth analysis of the latest Speak Up data findings.

All schools and districts can use the Speak Up research tools for free to collect feedback from their parents, students, staff and community members. Speak Up 2018 will open in October.

About Project Tomorrow & Speak Up

Project Tomorrow is the nation's leading education nonprofit group dedicated to ensuring that today's K-12 students are well prepared to become tomorrow's leaders, innovators and engaged citizens of the world. The Speak Up Project for Digital Learning is a national initiative of Project Tomorrow. Since 2003, the annual Speak Up project has collected and reported on the views of more than 5 million K-12 students, teachers, administrators and parents representing more than 30,000 schools in all 50 states. This represents the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered stakeholder input on education, technology, schools of the future, science and math instruction, professional development and career exploration.

About Blackboard Inc.

Our mission is to partner with the global education community to enable learner and institutional success, leveraging innovative technologies and services. With an unmatched understanding of the world of the learner, the most comprehensive student-success solutions, and the greatest capacity for innovation, Blackboard is education's partner in change.

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