

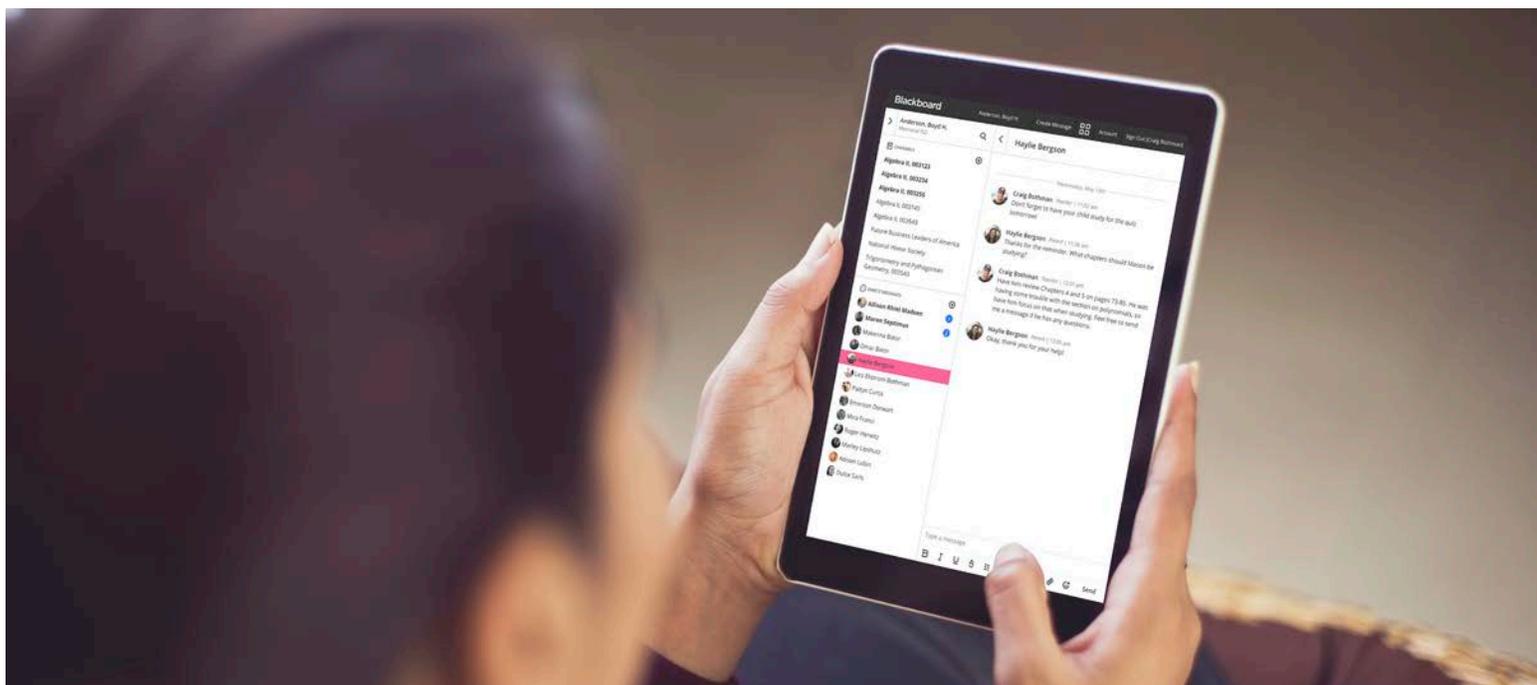
Blackboard

Tipsheet: How to Connect Parents and Teachers in the New Normal

Six strategies to consider when forming your teacher and parent communications plan

1. Enable two-way conversations

A mutually beneficial relationship starts with meaningful two-way communication. Relevant, regular, and personalized updates will create a culture of openness between teachers and parents. Parents will naturally have questions about their child's education and teachers will likely hold the answers. This type of back and forth communication will allow equal participation by both parties. This is especially important during times of change. Virtual and blended learning environments are new to many schools. Fostering this adjustment with two-way conversations will be beneficial to making the change a positive one.



2. Zero in on consolidated and preferred communication channels

Teachers have to reach parents where they are if they want to establish long lasting communication. Research shows parents prefer messages that are pushed to them through channels that can be accessed on their smartphone. Bonus points for using a consolidated channel (such as a mobile app) where parents can also find district and school information like calendars, menus, and news.

Keep in mind that not all parents have the same preferences. Variances in age, demographic, and income-level may also play a role in how parents prefer to be reached. For example, 22% more millennial parents prefer to communicate with teachers via a district mobile app than baby boomer parents.



3. Ensure privacy of student data and teacher and parent contact information

Both teachers and parents have enough on their plate adjusting to a new learning environment. The last thing they need to worry about is sharing their personal cell phone number. Protect everyone by mandating the use of communication channels that don't require the exchange of personal contact information. But don't stop there. Personal contact information isn't the only thing that needs to be kept private. Teachers and parents will likely discuss grades, behavior, and academic updates. This sensitive information needs to be shared in a safe, district controlled environment as well.



4. Use reporting and oversight for more than just safe communication

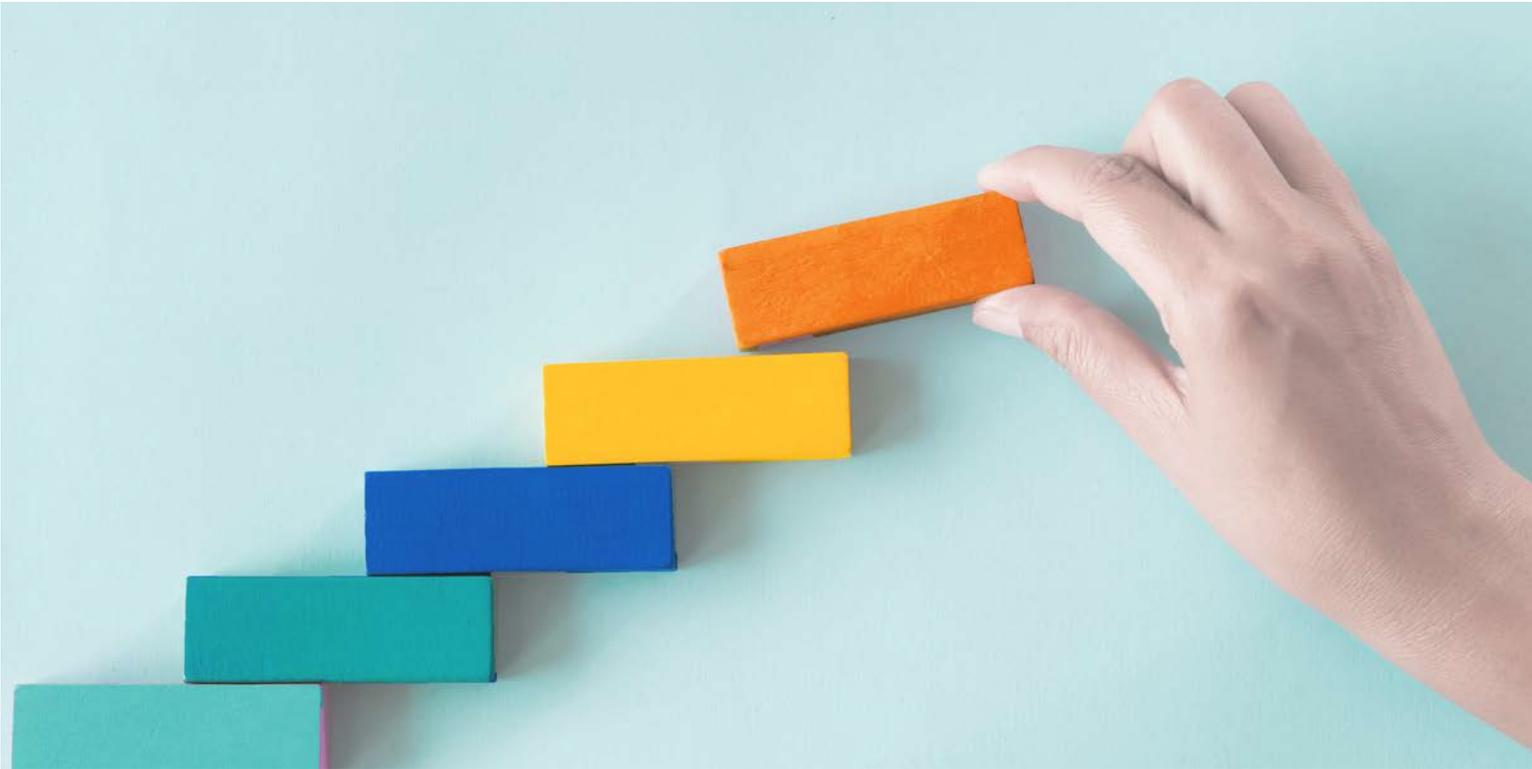
There are endless reasons to keep records of conversations between teachers and parents. In-context message history keeps all parties safe and accountable and maintains a level of legal protection for the district. If you look beyond those benefits, you can also put those saved communications to work in other areas too.

-  Teachers can use tracking to identify parents that are actively engaged and those that could benefit from additional outreach.
-  School administrators can use the messaging history for training. They can highlight response times, proper handling of tough conversations, and ways to engage busy parents using real conversation examples.

5. Set expectations early

Providing certainty is key to creating strong communication between teachers and parents. Encourage teachers to set expectations early for what parents can expect.

-  Set office hours that are dedicated to quick responses. This lets parents know when they can and cannot expect immediate replies.
-  Establish a schedule for how frequent personalized outreach messages will be sent. Explaining intentions and expectations upfront can eliminate confusion and help foster adoption.



6. Be positive and constructive during conversations

There will be circumstances in which tough and uncomfortable conversations will have to happen with parents. Establish a positive relationship at the start of the school year to build rapport for those hard talks. Send home positive updates, even if they are about small achievements. This may also make parents feel more comfortable reaching out to teachers for help throughout the year.

7. BONUS TIP! Expand communication stakeholders to coaches, parent helpers

Once you nail down a successful strategy with your teachers and parents, open up the opportunity for two-way conversations with coaches, room parents, assistants, and aids too.