

Two-Way Communications for Educators



New Hampshire
**STATEWIDE
FAMILY
ENGAGEMENT
CENTER**



The Research

Thanks to the work of Harvard professor Todd Rogers and his team, we know more than ever before about effective communication with families. Rogers describes messages as a “tax” on caregivers’ time. In and out of school, we all receive too many emails, too many text messages, too many EVERYTHING every day. Rogers and his team have found effective ways to help parents “pay the tax” of reading and responding to a message from teachers.

Short messages

The shorter and more skimmable a message is, the more likely families are to read it. Decide on the absolute “must have” information in your message. Cut everything else.

Everyday and simple language

Many adults struggle to read at the high school level or above. Ideally, messages to families should be written at a fourth grade level for universal accessibility. If adjusting the readability of a text is new to you, use a tool like <https://www.wordcalc.com/readability/>. Leave out educational jargon and acronyms. Even for highly literate parents, educational jargon is a barrier.

Action messages

People are more likely to remember a message if it gives them something to do with the information communicated. Actions can be as simple as:

- Please check your student's grades and help them come up with a plan to turn in missing work.
- We are writing newspaper articles this week. Ask your student what topic they chose and why.
- Come to the school spaghetti dinner and be sure to stop by my classroom to say hello.

Chunked messages for different subjects

Try to keep to one topic per message. It seems like families might want to receive all the information they need in one big message. Rogers's research is clear that parents are more likely to read messages that have just one subject. To keep from overwhelming your families with messages, work with your team to create a communications calendar.

Scheduled and predictable messages

Parents are more likely to open and read a message if they are used to receiving messages on a predictable schedule. For example, if you send out a brief message every Monday evening, families will know to expect that message and they'll get into the habit of reading it. You can use your communications platforms to schedule messages well in advance so that you don't have to commit to being on your computer at the same time every week.

Messages should appear on mobile devices

Like the rest of us, families depend on their phones. Rogers' research shows that parents are more likely to open text messages than other messages .

"To learn more about the research of Todd Rogers and Team, visit" and then share the links.

1. [todd_rogers_-_write_shorter_messages_-_the_boston_globe.pdf](#) (harvard.edu)
2. [Thinking About Texting Parents? Best Practices for School-to-Parent Texting \(Opinion\)](#) (edweek.org)

Sample Communication Plan

Be sure to check your school's communication plan before making your personal communication plan.

Sample Plan

Time	Action
August	Introductory Communication - Tell your families about yourself. Give an overview of what students will learn this year in plain English. List ways for families to contact you with questions. Invite families to share information about their student with you.
Weekly	Schedule a weekly message about the upcoming week. This message should not take you more than 2 minutes to write. Samples are on the next page.
January	Reintroduce yourself to families. You will have new students since the beginning of the year, and your "old" families may have forgotten a lot of the information from August. Make sure you include your contact information and encourage families to reach out to you with any concerns.
May	Thank your families for the time their student has spent in your classroom. Share school contact information which they may need over the summer (front office, FRYSC, guidance, etc.)

Weekly Message Templates

October 11, 2021

Looking forward to another wonderful week in **4th grade language arts!**
What we're learning: We are finishing our **opinion articles** for the class newspaper.

What families can do to support learning: Ask your student to show you their article. **Ask them what they are proud of** and what they want to improve.

Other news: School pictures are **Friday!**

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm here! You can reach me at 555-5555 or by replying to this email.

Mrs. Smith

December 6

Kindergarten News!

What we're learning in Math: We are reviewing our shapes before Christmas. Ask your child to find shapes around your home.

What we're learning in writing: We are printing our lowercase letters this week. You can help by making sure your child has pencil and paper to play with at home.

Other news: We are going out for recess every day. **If your child needs a coat or mittens,** please reply to this message or contact our Family Resource Center at 999-9999

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm here! You can reach me at 555-5555 or by replying to this email.

Mr. Harris

October 11, 2021

7th Grade Social Studies

What we're studying: the economic systems of the Incas

What you can do to support learning: Ask your student to tell you about one part of the Incan system that is completely unlike our own and one part that is like our own.

Life Skills: We learned how to use a unit study guide to study for a test. Help your child set aside some time this week to use the guide to study for our test on Monday.

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm here! You can reach me at 555-5555 or by replying to this email. I will have grades posted for our unit test by next Friday.

If you have concerns about your student's grades for the nine weeks, please schedule a conference by replying to this email.

Ms. Harris

October 11, 2021

Geometry News

What we're studying: Parallel and perpendicular lines

What you can do to support learning: Lots of your students have been telling me about their driving lessons. As you're teaching your student to parallel park, ask them about how what they're learning in geometry applies to their driving.

Other news: Local College Math Department offers free walk-in math tutoring for the community at 6PM on Thursday evenings.

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm here! You can reach me at 555-5555 or by replying to this email.

Ms. Harris

Troubleshooting

Families complain about getting too many communications from the school: “I get an email, phone call, and text for everything! It’s too much!”

- Explain that most school platforms don’t allow families or schools to choose their preferred way of communication, and that’s why they get messages on all their devices. Explain that the school sends texts, phone calls, and emails because many families can only get one kind of message. Thank them for sharing all of their contact information with the school since that allows the front office to contact them quickly in case of an emergency. Thank them for putting up with the different types of messages so that all families can get communications.
- Afterwards, work with your team to make sure you’re streamlining the number of messages you send.

I don’t speak the same language as some of my students’ families

- Always look for ways to avoid asking a student to interpret for their family.
- Work with your school’s ELL teacher.
- When talking with the family without an interpreter, use your phone’s translate app when you run into confusion
- Use Google Translate for written communications you are sending home. Make sure your families know that you’re using an app and there are likely to be some errors.
- Talking Points is a free app similar to Remind that lets you message families and get responses in over 100 languages. Go to [TalkingPoints](#) to set up an account.

We have a lot of “Grandparents as Parents” in our school, and they don’t respond to my messages.

- Grandfamilies need a warm, personal welcome from the school to know that they are wanted. They are often experiencing grief or shame about the situations that led them to become guardians of their grandchildren. They need to know that you really want to hear from them.
- School has changed a lot since the grandparents were children. Whenever possible, make your classroom as transparent as possible for them so that they know how to help their student.
- Many grandparents are young and tech-savvy. Others face real technological barriers and require personal attention to connect with you.
- Use inclusive language with your students and with your families.
- Grandfamilies feel excluded when they only hear the term “parents.” So use “families” and “caregivers” in your newsletters. Talk to your students about their “grownups.”

Learn More

For source material for the previous pages and to go more in depth, check out these helpful links.

Todd Rogers' Research and Best Practices

Write Shorter Messages – Start here with a brief news article.

EveryDay Labs Resources | Toolkits for Educators on Attendance – Communications toolkit with focus on absences and rebuilding communications routines after pandemic school closures

The Science of Corresponding with Busy People Webinar | Harvard University – Webinar with much of the same information in the listed articles. For folks who prefer to watch or listen to learn

Engaging Parents Through Better Communication – Research summary in an engaging article

Todd Rogers - How to Communicate with Families Effectively – overview of the research, with a particular focus on communicating during school closures

Thinking About Texting Parents? Best Practices for School-to-Parent Texting – digging deeper into texting strategies

Grandfamilies

Grandfamily School Engagement Brief – Six core strategies for engaging grandfamilies

Learn More

Language Barriers

TalkingPoints – nonprofit texting service that will allow you to messages families in 100+ languages. FREE for teachers

Family Engagement and Its Impact During Distance Learning – a deep dive into how communication with ELL families has been impacted by COVID-19