



5 Online Tools to Increase Parental Engagement

Parent engagement is critical to student success. Research consistently shows that high parental involvement strengthens student outcomes in a number of ways, including better attendance, higher grades and test scores, and better social skills and behavior.

To reach busy parents, your school's communications must be convenient and quick to read. Target outreach efforts in a way that makes them more readily received and digested. Here are five practical online tools and relevant practices that you can adopt today to build more effective parent-school partnerships:

1) Responsive Website

Your school's website is your information hub! The majority of web searches are conducted on smartphones, so design your website in an active, responsive format for any device or browser. Feature dynamic content that drives parental traffic to the site and appeals to families such as a student-of-the-week column and/or a student-run blog that allows for a variety of contributors.

Optimize access to your school's online information by creating a parent portal. Parents sign in with their unique ID and password to view their child's progress, class assignments, teacher communications, and any other important communication.

2) Social Media

While parent portals are great vehicles to keep families connected, they must be effectively promoted. Use social media to cross promote your parent portal. Numerous no-cost social media options are available. Rather than attempting to keep up with them all, choose two or three that work best for your school community and dedicate time daily to connecting with your families through fully mastering the potential of these channels. The most popular and versatile choices include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Periscope (see #3).

3) Periscope

Periscope is the revolutionary live-streaming app that allows real-time remote access to your parent community. Periscope is like Facetime for an entire school community, allowing families to better understand and experience your school's mission!

Use Periscope to:

- broadcast your open-house, parent meetings, field trips, and events
- provide a virtual tour of the campus
- showcase student activities and projects to families who cannot come into school
- hold virtual meetings and Q&A sessions for parents to attend in a very real and personal way even from their own homes or workplace

4) Storytelling through Video

Promote engagement by sharing the stories of parents who are actively involved. Ask your involved parents to contribute to your school's blog or online newsletter. Maybe a parent who volunteers in a classroom could share his or her story and why volunteering is so beneficial. A parent who helped organize a school function could write about his or her positive experience and share it with other parents.

Parent testimonials are made even more compelling and powerful through video. Family-created vlogs, or video blogs, are an easy way to create a paperless portfolio of student projects. Whether you house videos on your school's website or on a dedicated YouTube channel, capture your school's best moments by preserving them on video.

5) Online School Reviews

Encourage your satisfied parents to post a steady stream of positive reviews online. Feature select testimonials on your school website. By facilitating a steady stream of positive parent reviews, families expand your school's goodwill both internally and into your broader community.

Great Philly Schools (GPS), <http://greatphillyschools.org/>, is our area's most widely consulted directory. Additional benefits of GPS participation for your school include:

- ▶ Nurturing an informed school community that better serves students and families
- ▶ Building trust and confidence in your school's standards and commitment to quality
- ▶ Improving focus in your enrollment and marketing effort
- ▶ Providing annual measurements of quality improvement initiatives and trends
- ▶ Engaging and empowering parents, faculty, and staff in the assessment process
- ▶ Pushing demand and helping families navigate best fit for their students
- ▶ Communicating your school's featured programs to over 100,000 Philadelphia-area parents annually for free