

COVID-19 Communications Cheat Sheet

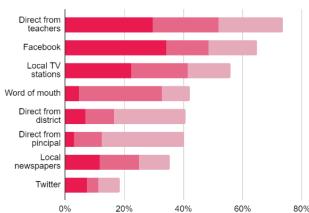
In the age of a global pandemic, our education system will only be as effective as the extent to which school and district communications can reach, guide, and support families. For low-income students with fewer resources to rely upon and more stressors to navigate, that is especially true. That's why the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation asked us to partner with Change Research to understand parents' experiences keeping up to date on their children's education.

Our findings yield five key communications recommendations for school system leaders:

- 1. Remember that teachers will always be your primary spokespeople. Parents trust teachers, and teachers know how to get in touch with parents, including those hardest-to-reach. Nearly three-quarters of parents get information from teachers multiple times per week; that's far more than those who turn to their school district or principal. Because of their critical role in parent communication, keep teachers informed and empowered to share system-wide updates.
- 2. Reach parents where they are—online and off.
 Too many families are without reliable internet and depend primarily on word of mouth for school updates. Consider making explicit asks for families to reach out to friends to share critical information. Also consider building in-person delivery of learning materials into food delivery and other emergency relief efforts. Other untapped channels include Facebook and local television news.
- **3. Plan ahead and set expectations.** Families are generally satisfied with school communication to date, but they worry about what lies ahead. Roughly four in ten want to know more about remote



Where parents are getting school-related



learning expectations for students and parents alike. And most say they have not heard enough about when school is likely to open or policies on student evaluations. Even if you don't have all the answers, setting regularly scheduled updates will go a long way toward easing anxiety.

- **4. Keep it simple.** Most families are busy, overwhelmed, and just want to know how to support their children. More is not necessarily better. Err on the side of keeping your communications short, sweet, and simple to use. Creating a communications calendar and defining roles and responsibilities are essential.
- **5.** Be visible, be human. Parents are understandably fearful about the future. From basic needs to job loss to infection, they are deeply worried about their families' wellbeing—and that fear is higher among lower-income populations. Showing humanity is powerful.