



Better communications for a better future

School Communications During COVID-19: Poll Summary

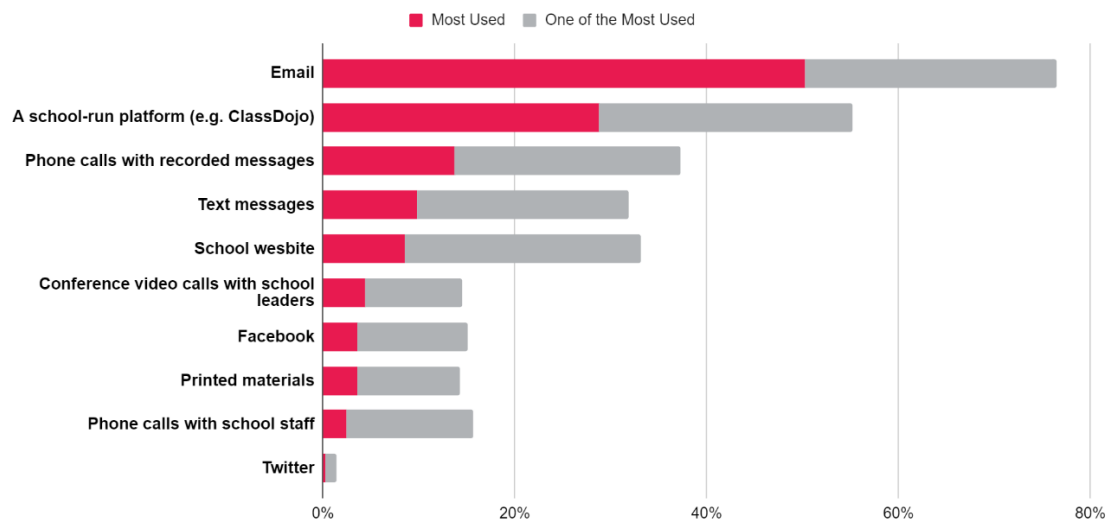
In partnership with **Change Research**, and on behalf of the **Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation**, we asked a representative sample of 440 parents with children in kindergarten through 12th grade nationwide about their experiences staying up to date on their children’s education amid widespread school closures. We also conducted a series of stakeholder interviews over the phone with school and district leaders. Here are the key findings:

Topline Findings

In overwhelming numbers (90%), American families have transitioned to remote learning to continue their children’s education. For those who have access, it’s working pretty well (75% somewhat or very satisfied), with students spending three to four hours on online learning per day. Most families are combining district- or school-provided content and other digital content, and despite some frustrations, they generally want to draw from sources both within and beyond their school.

Mostly, they’re receiving resources and guidance through email (the most-used source for 50%) and from their child’s teacher (63%), with one-third reporting multiple communications a day from or with teachers. The district ranks well behind teachers as a source of learning information. Digital platforms like Remind and ClassDojo (29%) rank only behind email as a most-used way of connecting. Robocalls, websites, social media, and other sources run far behind, and actual phone calls with school staff are rare. Interestingly, 63% of low-income respondents use social media multiple times a day, but that’s not how schools are reaching them, which may indicate a missed opportunity.

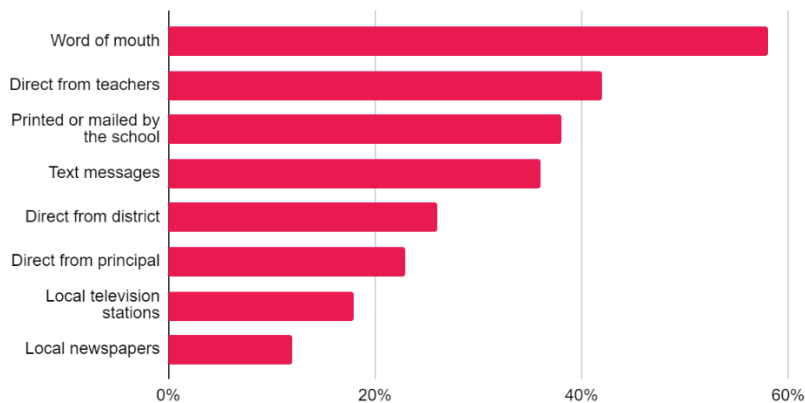
How parents are hearing from schools



Half of Americans know someone who doesn't have access to the internet or a device, and as millions lose jobs, interviews indicate that many low-income parents are having smartphones and digital connections cut off. In our poll, **40% of low-income parents have been laid off** because of the pandemic; only 26% feel secure in their jobs. Based on interviews with school leaders, ostensibly generous offers from phone and internet companies are undercut by fine print that makes it impossible for many low-income families to take advantage, including requirements to sign year-long contracts and to pay off existing balances.

Respondents see the lack of internet access as a major threat to education. Respondents say such families are still reliant on their children's teachers for information—but via word of mouth and printed materials. This suggests an urgent need for both schools and telecom providers to address.

Where parents say friends without internet access get information



Families are fearful about the future. Huge numbers have questions about the future: about how students will receive grades, the reopening of school, etc. Eighty one percent of low-income parents have concerns about how and when their children will go back to school. Basic needs like food and childcare are serious concerns for 50% of low-income respondents, loss of learning is for 61% of all respondents and even more of low-income parents, and loss of interaction with peers is an even greater concern. Sixty three percent of low-income respondents have very serious concerns about their kids getting COVID-19. Sixty-five percent are worried about the pandemic's impact on educational progress for their children, with 27% rating their anxiety as a ten (extremely worried) on a scale of zero to ten.

While families are pretty satisfied with their digital learning, they are under great stress. Fifty eight percent find balancing homeschooling with their work challenging. On a scale of zero ten, twenty five percent rate that challenge a full ten out of ten, and that's 35% for those with incomes below \$50,000.

In their own words...

In interviews, school leaders shared how digital and resource divides are driving equity concerns amid the crisis.

"We took for granted that parents receive our communications when we send them home, that parents speak Spanish and/or English, that there's someone at home who can translate, and that they own a phone." – California school leader

"We pay bills for people and help go to the grocery store, but we can't sustain that." – DC charter school leader

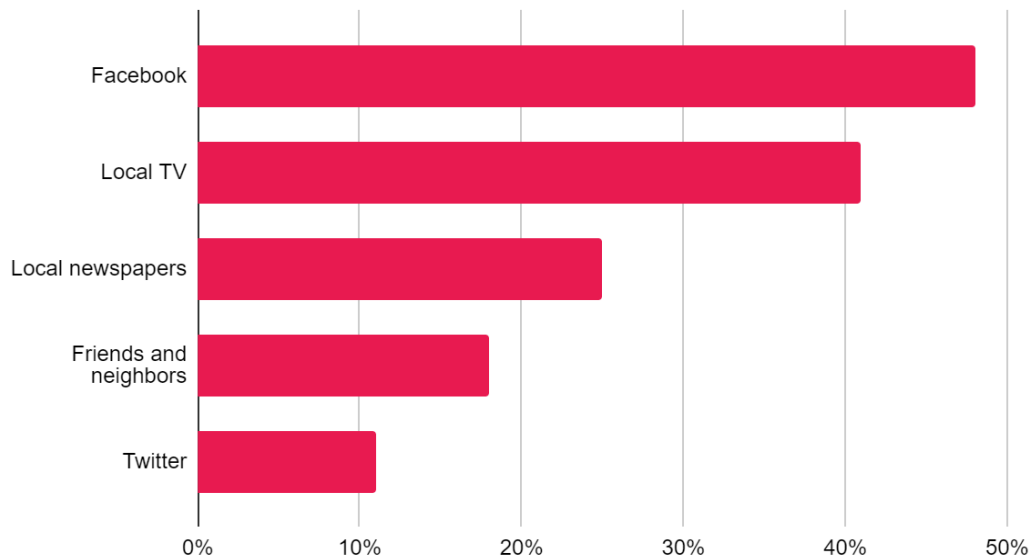
"Last week we updated the parent phone numbers that teachers had and they alerted us to so many out-of-service numbers. We now can't communicate with those families. We lost a week of communication because of this. We were trying to deliver Chromebooks and found out-of-service numbers that way too." – California school leader

"I visited someone at her home (with six feet apart) and we tried to call Comcast together. Even with her son translating, she didn't understand half of what we talked about. In the end, we couldn't get it done." – California school leader

Additional Communications-Specific Findings

Facebook and local TV are primary news sources. Forty eight percent of parents report following coronavirus-related news updates on Facebook at least once per day. Forty one percent say the same about local television news.

Where parents turn for COVID-19 news at least once per day



Parents crave information about what comes next. Parents report receiving the most information about immediate needs but want to hear more about their children’s educational futures. Sixty two percent say they have heard “no information” or “not enough information” about policies on student evaluations and grade-level promotions.

Proportion of parents reporting “no information” or “not enough information”

The policies on student evaluations and promotions to the next grade level	62%
When your school is likely to re-open	57%
The expectations for parents with remote learning	40%
The expectations for students with remote learning	37%
Learning packets or other school-provided learning materials	32%
Access to technology resources for students learning at home	31%
How to access resources such as school lunches or supplies	21%

About the poll: Change Research applied its proprietary Dynamic Online Sampling Engine to randomly poll parents with children in K-12 school nationally. The sample size is 440 with a MOE of 4.7%. Weighting was performed using the Census’ American Community Survey.