Practice Brief

Improving Communication Between School Professionals and Students' Families Using AI Technology-Based Platforms

Charles R. Davis, Ellen Moskowitz, Michael Plotkin, and Nichole Kelly

Importance of School–Home Communication

The importance of the relationship between school professionals' (e.g., administrators, teachers, school nurses) and families, mediated by communication, and a students' academic achievement, growth in social and emotional learning and behavior, and attendance throughout their K–12 years is clearly established. In particular, Barnard (2004), Fan and Williams (2010), Rumberger (2011), and Sirvani (2007a, 2007b) identified a positive relationship between school outreach to families and student outcomes, including lower high school dropout rates and overall improved classroom performance. In addition, Hughes and Kwok (2007) found that during the early school years, parents and guardians having strong, supportive, and interactive relationships with teachers led to greater student academic motivation and performance, including measurements such as fewer required redirection interventions and higher homework completion rates. Furthermore, Basch (2011), Davis et al. (2024), HeadStart.gov (2024), Jackson and Schlitt (2019), Matingwina (2018), Shaw et al. (2015), and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013) all report that students who have regular physical and mental health services have fewer absences, are more social, are less likely to participate in risky behaviors, and have higher standardized test scores.

Communication between school professionals and families is clearly an important contributor to placing the student in the optimum position for overall success and well-being. Such communication can take many forms including (a) phone calls; (b) traditional mailings; (c) emails; and (d) texts or direct messaging (henceforth, text, texts, or texting). However, according to a recent report from the Institute of Education Sciences (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020), only 66% and 40% of public-school families received an email or phone call, respectively, about their child. It is important to note that the Institute of Education Sciences' (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020) contact percentages did not differentiate between families who spoke English and those whose language was other than English.

Meeting the Challenges of School–Home Communication

Dialogue between school professionals and families is paramount for the success and well-being of many, if not all students. However, data show that there are significant opportunities for improvement in this space.

Since there are numerous benefits to school professional–family communication for the student, educational thought leaders must identify ways to (a) improve communication, including in terms of absolute numbers reached and frequency of contact; and (b) make the communication process more efficient and effective—and importantly—easier, especially when the frontline school professionals and families do not share a common language. The latter issue clearly adds an additional and significant challenge to the overall communication process.

Communication between schools and families can be challenging for myriad reasons—reasons that lead to interactions that are well below optimum. Thus, an important, key question for educational thought leaders to address is, "How do we improve the effectiveness and efficiency of school–home communication at minimal cost, especially when a common language is not shared between the communicating parties?"

A valuable, potential solution to address this challenge is **texting**, particularly, texting that uses the school's workstations that are connected to the internet. This solution can be an ideal, first-line option for school professionals for many reasons. For example, texting can be used (a) simultaneously as a complementary outreach method to a phone call and/or email; (b) when an urgent connection needs to be made (i.e., a text message only requires a quick, brief glance by the receiver); or (c) when the family speaks a language other than English, since many translation applications are readily available (it is acknowledged that translations may not always

be idiomatic vis-à-vis the language of education, but they are a good start). The use and value of texting is further validated by a Pew Research Center's (2024) report stating that 97% of Americans own a cellphone with texting capability. Furthermore, it is important to identify that, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013), "texting student health information between the school nurse and a parent or guardian does not violate Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPPA] regulations" (p. 1). It is equally important for school professionals to know that many texting solutions, including applications or "apps," are also compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Promising Avenues for Improving School–Home Communication

To summarize, compared to other forms of communication, **texts** can be more effective and efficient than:

- **phone calls** because (a) of the ease with which the school professional can send a brief, succinct text message; (b) the possibility that phone calls can be ignored, since they require active engagement that may not be possible for the family member at that particular moment; and (c) the challenge that when a language difference exists, having a dialogue or leaving a message if no one answers is not a viable solution.
- **email** and **traditional mail** because even though translation applications are available to convert messages to the receiver's desired language, these methods can easily be ignored, kicked back (email), and overlooked. In addition, if there is a sense of urgency associated with making contact, email and traditional mail may not be an efficient means of communication.

Table 1 shows a comparative analysis of three distinctly different texting solutions that school professionals and school districts can use to communicate with families to foster and facilitate student academic success, social and emotional growth, and overall health and well-being. Two of the solutions presented are free, while one has a cost. In another two cases, the solutions have an integrated artificial intelligence (AI) processor that converts the school professional's communication to the parent's or guardian's primary language prior to the latter's receiving it and vice versa in the event of a language difference. The remaining solution requires manual translation on the school professional's part prior to sending a message, using an application such as Google Translate (n.d.), and another translation action

Table 1. Workstation to Cellphone Texting—Unique Requirements and Number of Steps Required for Different Applications

Texting Options	**Texting directly through a workstation's email**	**Texting using a commercially available, individual solution application**	**Texting using a commercially available, comprehensive, communications platform solution designed for the whole district**
Texting Options' Unique Requirements	**3** Must identify and enter the parent's or guardian's cellphone number and service provider, e.g., AT&T or Verizon	**2** Must identify and enter the parent's or guardian's cellphone number	**0** Information is loaded on the front end as part of the student's enrollment
# of Steps Required	**8**	**4**	**4**
Texting Steps: Elements and Details	1. Select parent or guardian to text and enter cellphone information 2. Type message 3. Translate message to parent's or guardian's language, e.g., using Google Translate 4. Copy and paste translated text into texting app and send to parent or guardian 5. Parent or guardian reads text and responds in native language 6. School professional copies and pastes parent's or guardian's text into translation application, e.g., using Google Translate 7. School professional reads text 8. Repeat process as necessary	1. Enter parent or guardian cellphone, language, association with student information 2. Type message and hit send. A commercial individual solution application automatically translates message into parent's or guardian's spoken language 3. Parent or guardian reads text in native language and the commercial individual application automatically translates response into English 4. Repeat process as necessary	1. Enter parent or guardian name in direct messaging Recipients field 2. Type message and hit send. A commercial, comprehensive communications platform designed for the whole district automatically translates message into parent's or guardian's spoken language 3. Parent or guardian reads text in native language and the commercial, comprehensive communications platform automatically translates response into English 4. Repeat process as necessary
Total # of Steps	**11**	**6**	**4**

when the parent or guardian responds. The analysis illustrates the differences and advantages of three examples of texting applications evaluated using (a) a workstation's email account; (b) an industry solution application that is accessible for no cost at the individual level; and (c) a commercially available, comprehensive communications platform solution designed for whole district implementation, which often requires payment.

Reviewing Table 1, the effectiveness and efficiency of two of the three options are clear. These options are:

- A commercially available, individual solution application is an excellent choice when compared to conventional texting when it has these features: (a) action to use is initiated at the individual professional level since it is a cost-free option, requiring no approval of any financial outlay; (b) the program has a fully integrated, AI-supported translation processor; and (c) the number of steps that a school professional is required to perform is six (commercially available, individual solution application) versus eleven (workstation texting).
- A commercially available, comprehensive communications platform solution designed for the whole district is an excellent choice when it allows all relevant family and student information to be uploaded on the front end, thus making school professional–parent or guardian communication easier, simpler, and less cumbersome. In addition, a districtwide communications platform solution should offer: (a) a fully integrated, AI-supported translation processor; and (b) fewer steps that a school professional is required to perform—four, versus eleven or six, for workstation or an individual solution application, respectively.

Regardless of the texting method used, keeping statements simple, direct, and succinct, without euphemisms, colloquialisms, or slang results in a higher degree of translation conversion accuracy.

Table 2 (Common Sense Education, n.d.) is a nonexhaustive compilation of several available tool options with general, brief comments that school districts and professionals can consider when seeking a texting solution with an integrated AI translation processor.

Table 2. Examples of Available Applications Allowing Workstation to Cellphone Texting

Communication Option	Comments
Bloomz	Free, but offers a subscription for additional features: https://www.bloomz.com/
ClassDojo	Free with limited features; subscription for greater options: https://www.classdojo.com/v2/
Illumine	Free with limited features; subscription for greater options: https://illumine.app/https://illumine.app/
ParentSquare	Not free, but is a comprehensive platform solution for districts: https://www.parentsquare.com/
Remind	Free, has merged with ParentSquare: https://www.remind.com/
TalkingPoints	Free for individual users. Not free when implemented at the school or district level: https://talkingpts.org/

Conclusion

Research shows that when school professionals—such as administrators, teachers, and nurses—communicate with families, students have improved academic achievement and attendance and are less likely to drop out (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Williams, 2010; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Rumberger, 2011; Sirvani, 2007a, 2007b). In addition, research has demonstrated improved social and emotional learning characteristics among students and shown that they are less likely to participate in risky behaviors as well as experience overall better health and well-being when school professionals have a habit of communicating with families (Basch, 2011; Davis et al., 2024; HeadStart.gov, 2024; Jackson & Schlitt, 2019; Matingwina, 2018; Shaw et al., 2015). Educational thought leaders need to emphasize to frontline professionals the importance of improving communication between themselves and students' families.

One ready method of school–home communication is texting that uses platforms already ubiquitous in the school setting, that is, a laptop or workstation connected to the internet. Furthermore, texting is a highly suitable option, since 97% of Americans have cellphones with texting capability. Finally, two of the highlighted solutions presented are free: (1) workstation texting using a manual translation application such as Google Translate

(n.d.); and (2) a commercially available, individual solution application, an example being TalkingPoints© (2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d), while a third option requires payment—the commercially available, comprehensive communications platform solution designed for the whole district an example being ParentSquare™ (2025). Of the three applications evaluated, the comparative analysis found that the commercially available, comprehensive communications platform solution designed for the whole district, and the commercially available, individual solution application are both simple and easy for school professionals to use and can be highly efficient and effective for family communication. Furthermore, most texting applications including ParentSquare™ (2025) and TalkingPoints© (2024a; 2024b; 2024c) offer the additional advantage of incorporating an integrated AI processor that permits nearly seamless communication to occur in real time, even when a common language is not shared between the parties. In addition, families incur no costs when using many of the identified texting applications. Finally, it is important to reiterate that, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013), texting student health information between the school nurse and a parent or guardian does not violate HIPPA. It is equally important for school professionals to appreciate that many texting applications that can be used for family communication are also compliant with FERPA. However, understanding the restrictions and limitations associated with texting and FERPA are the responsibility of the texting application user.

Future Outreach

Future outreach in school–family communication should include advocating for leading-edge technical companies to recognize the value of integrating advanced, pioneering digital and AI tools into the K–12 setting that will allow school professionals to communicate more effectively, efficiently, and directly at the next level with families, for example, face-to-face, including those families whose first language is one other than English. This advocacy must include educating these companies about the value of such work, especially the significant, positive outcomes that school professional–family communication has on students' (i.e., future employees') outcomes. This work must also include short term cost and long term benefit analyses along with the generation of creative solutions so that new tools in the digital and AI space can be made available for minimal or no cost to our public schools. Educational thought leaders must also reach out to leading-edge technology companies to make them recognize that public schools can be valuable beta-test sites.

References

Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*(1), 39–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2003.11.002

Basch, C. E. (2011). Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap. *The Journal of School Health*, *81*(10), 593–598. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00632.x

Common Sense Education. (n.d.). *Best messaging apps and websites for students, teachers, and parents.* https://www.commonsense.org/education/lists/best-messaging-apps-and-websites-for-students-teachers-and-parents

Davis, C. R., Eraca, J., & Davis, P. A. (2024). Improving students' access to primary health care through school-based health centers. *Journal of School Health*, *94*(7). https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13455

Fan, W., & Williams, C. M. (2010). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology*, *30* (1), 53–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410903353302

Google Translate. (n.d.). https://translate.google.com/

Hanson, R., & Pugliese, C. (2020). *Parent and family involvement in education: 2019* (NCES 2020-076). Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020076full.pdf

HeadStart.gov. (2024). *Healthy children are ready to learn*. https://headstart.gov/school-readiness/article/healthy-children-are-ready-learn

Hughes, J., & Kwok, O. M. (2007). Influence of student–teacher and parent–teacher relationships on lower achieving readers' engagement and achievement in the primary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(1), 39–51. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.1.39

Jackson, J. H., & Schlitt, J. (2019, April 10). Students can't learn when they're not healthy: Here's what schools can do to help. *Education Week*. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-students-cant-learn-when-theyre-not-healthy-heres-what-schools-can-do-to-help/2019/04

Matingwina, T. (2018). Health, academic achievement, and school-based interventions. In B. Bernal-Morales (Ed.), *Health and academic achievement*. IntechOpen. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.76431

ParentSquare. (2025). https://www.parentsquare.com/

Pew Research Center. (2024, November 13). *Mobile fact sheet*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/

Rumberger, R. W. (2011). *Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it*. Harvard University Press.

Schlitt, J. H. J. (2025, February 13). *Students can't learn when they're not healthy. Here's what schools can do to help* (Opinion). *Education Week*.

Shaw, S. R., Gomes, P., Polotskaia, A., & Jankowska, A. M. (2015). The relationship between student health and academic performance: Implications for school psychologists. *School Psychology International*, *36*(2), 115–134. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034314565425

Sirvani, H. (2007a). Effects of teacher communication on parents' attitudes and their children's behavior at schools. *Education, 128*(1), 34–47.

Sirvani, H. (2007b). The effect of teacher communication with parents on students' mathematics achievement. *American Secondary Education, 36*(1), 31–46.

TalkingPoints. (2024a). *About us*. https://talkingpts.org/about-us/
TalkingPoints. (2024b). *Home*. https://talkingpts.org/
TalkingPoints. (2024c). *News*. https://talkingpts.org/news/
TalkingPoints. (2024d). *Privacy, security, and accessibility*. https://talkingpts.org/privacy-and-security/
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2013). *Does the HIPPA privacy rule apply to an elementary or secondary school?* https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/faq/513/does-hipaa-apply-to-an-elementary-school/index.html#:~:text=In%20most%20cases%2C%20the%20HIPAA,under%20FERPA%20and%2C%20therefore%2C%20is

Authors' notes: This work received no funding or support. Furthermore, the authors have no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise to disclose. Finally, none of the manuscript's material was generated using AI tools.

Charles R. Davis is the professional school nurse at Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. Charles is also a family nurse practitioner with Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY. He is author of numerous healthcare related presentations and publications, is a member of the Stony Brook University's School of Nursing's Alumni Board and numerous expert healthcare committees and advisory boards. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Charles R. Davis, Health Office, Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School, 3 Glen Place, Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520, or email charles.davis@chufsd.org

Ellen Moskowitz serves as the director of technology and innovation at the Croton-Harmon Union Free School District in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. She has been a K–12 public educator for over 20 years and prior to her present role, she held positions that included classroom teacher, literacy specialist, special education teacher, and instructional technology coach. Dr. Moskowitz is a curriculum and instruction specialist, and her work has been intimately tied to supporting the needs of new teachers.

Michael Plotkin is the district superintendent for the Carmel Central School District, Patterson, NY. Michael's educational career spans three decades as a teacher and administrator. He received NY State's *Outstanding Assistant Principal of the Year Award* in 2015. Michael is also an adjunct professor at Pace University's School of Education.

Nichole Kelly is currently serving as interim principal at Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School in Croton-on-Hudson, NY. Recently she was certificated in School Management and Leadership through Harvard Business School. Nichole's educational career spans two-plus decades as a teacher and administrator. Nichole is currently the co-facilitator of the Regional Assistant Principal's Forum.