

Calling All Parents..... At Once

Technology

Autodialer

Online communication

Need

Like nearly every school, Cortney Junior High (Las Vegas, NV) wants to boost parental involvement, one of the leading contributors to student success. They needed a way to inform parents of school activities and reminders who might not receive a flyer at home. Whatever they used also had to bridge the language gap for schools with culturally diverse populations which could include many first-generation students.

Description

Cortney Junior High is one of thousands of schools across the country using Edulink's InTouch Autodialer and InTouch Online to help keep its students' parents informed and in tune with what's happening at school. The autodialer merges with the school's database to select a target audience, allows teachers and administrators to record information about news and upcoming events, and then makes the calls to parents. The system leaves an automated message at each home in the native language of each family. The autodialer is also used to inform parents when a student is absent.

The system also allows teachers to communicate with parents through the Internet by posting test scores, homework assignments, emergency procedures, disciplinary actions, grades, class schedules, attendance records and other vital information on a password-protected web site. Students can receive passwords and some types of information. Parents and students who don't own a computer or have Internet access can also use the system by telephone to receive limited information.

Results

Cortney, which has used the this system for the past couple years, reports good success. The school uses the autodialer to invite parents to school-wide events such as a recent barbecue designed to provide information college scholarships and savings accounts. "Since we've used it, we've had much better turnout at those kinds of events," stated Suzanne Bageant, English Language Learner and GEAR UP coordinator. Cortney also uses the autodialer to inform parents about fundraisers, alert them when report cards are coming home and notify them of student absences.

Teachers at Cortney post their grade books, homework assignments and attendance reports online, giving parents an up-to-date snapshot of their children's academic progress. The system helps fill the inevitable communication gaps between students and parents and keeps them on the same page for discussions about grades and behavior. "That's been incredibly successful, especially when students are dealing with disciplinary issues," Bageant said. The online system also allows parents and teachers to stay connected via e-mail.

"A kid can say he's doing all the work but the parents can pull up (the information) and see five missing assignments and say, 'Hey, what's going on here' " Bageant said. "It's so helpful. There shouldn't be a point at which parents are unaware of what's going on."

Challenges

- Some families simply don't have the technology to use the InTouch Online system at all, or to its fullest. For those children, the opportunity gap only gets wider.
- Not all families have voice mail to receive automated messages. Some don't have phones or periodically have their lines disconnected. "A lot of our students are technically homeless and they live in temporary hotels," Bageant said. "Sometimes, (the autodialer) goes straight to the hotel office and the office managers get upset."
- No automated system is without its snags. "The only negative feedback we had is one time we only sent the message in Spanish," Bageant said with a laugh. "The English-speaking parents had no idea what was going on."

Contact

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