

**BOARD BRIEF**

Date: December 17, 2021

**BOARD INFORMATION:**   X  

**MEETING PREPARATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FROM:** Taneika Tukan, School Engagement & Community Outreach Manager  
Kurt Huffman, Executive Director of Community Partnerships & Engagement

**THROUGH:** Julia Burgos, Chief of School and Community Relations  
Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

**TO:** The Honorable Meagan L. Alderton, Chair, and  
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

**TOPIC:** Information on New Mass Notification & Classroom Communication Platform

**ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:**

- Goal 1: Systemic Alignment
- Goal 4: Strategic Resource Allocation
- Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

**SY 2021-2022 FOCUS AREA:**

- Focus Area 1: Social Emotional and Academic Learning Recovery
- Focus Area 2: Hispanic Males
- Focus Area 3: Middle School Educational Experience
- Focus Area 4: Early College
- Focus Area 5: Talented and Gifted

**FY 2022 BUDGET PRIORITY:**

- Implementation of 2025 Strategic Plan
- Continue Engagement with Hispanic Families to Improve Graduation and Chronic Absenteeism

**SUMMARY**

In order to streamline the number of digital applications used to communicate with families across Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and ultimately increase family awareness and engagement, the Office of Community Partnerships and Engagement is collaboratively working with the Department of Technology Services to replace the division’s current mass notification system and consolidate several direct messaging tools used for classroom communication.

The new communication system will be piloted in select schools and programs in Spring 2022; division-wide implementation will begin with the start of the 2022-23 school year. We are currently concluding the procurement process.

## BOARD BRIEF

### BACKGROUND

Among its recommendations, the 2019-20 ACPS Family Engagement Evaluation referenced the importance of implementation of a streamlined communication platform(s) be used across the division at the school, classroom and individual levels to better meet the communication needs of families. The evaluation found that while the volume of digital communication tools already in use at ACPS created a perception that the majority of families were reached, it also required a constant learning curve that stakeholders cited as a challenge to actually using the apps to send or receive communications.

Accordingly, the Department of School and Community Relations began working with the Department of Technology Services in June 2021 to develop a scope of services and conduct a messaging platform review. With input from the Family and Community Engagement Center staff, school-based staff and members of the Office of English Language Learner Services, we selected ParentSquare's unified communication management platform to provide consistent, efficient communications that better serve internal and external stakeholders. The new communication platform will make it easier for families, especially those among underrepresented populations, to access information and engage with ACPS on a range of topics from student progress and classroom matters to division-wide issues. Implementing ParentSquare's platform will:

- \* **Streamline and unify communications.** Administrators and teachers will be able to use the same platform to send everything—mass notifications, classroom posts and one-to-one messages— via text, email, robocall, and app notifications using tools that were designed to work together. (Please note that downloading the app is not required for families to receive or send messages.)
- \* **Open up greater dialogue between English Learner families and schools.** With the instant two-way translation feature, all families and teachers can send and receive direct messages (text, email) in their preferred language. ParentSquare has the ability to translate into 100+ languages. This critical feature will play a tremendous role in helping ensure equity for all by giving every parent the chance to engage in two-way communication with teachers and staff.
- \* **Facilitate family involvement.** By integrating school services like conference appointments, volunteer requests, permission slips and RSVPs into a single platform that supports translation, all parents will have the opportunity to easily connect to traditional family engagement opportunities.
- \* **Increase efficiency of mass notifications:** When an email is not sufficient, the new platform will initially notify families and/or staff via text, but if delivery fails, it will automatically follow-up with a voice message — ensuring the message was delivered and received.
- \* **Focus outreach efforts.** With real-time insights and analytics from ParentSquare's dashboards, we will be able to improve family contactability by analyzing data regarding who we are not reaching in order to guide the outreach work and follow-up efforts for teachers, support staff and family engagement staff.

## **BOARD BRIEF**

Principals and administrators were informed of the plan to shift to a unified platform at an October principal's meeting. Family members will be asked to support the implementation phase in an advisory capacity.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the information in this memo and familiarize themselves with this new, exciting tool that will have a significant impact on the outreach and engagement of our families.

### **IMPACT**

By streamlining the digital tools used to support real-time communication with families, ACPS is reducing barriers to accessing information and family engagement while helping build trust with family and community members in support of the ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan: Equity for All.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

2020 Family Engagement Evaluation  
ParentSquare Features  
Overview – Unified Communication Platform

### **CONTACT**

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