



THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGE

Creating **Proactive** Parent Engagement

Why parent engagement is one K-12 leadership challenge that can't wait

Your district's parents can be your greatest ally or your staunchest foe. So how do you make sure you're on the right side of the fence? Is there something you can do as a leader to forge a stronger bond with your largest stakeholder group?

The first step in getting ahead of the problem is understanding why parent engagement needs to be a priority. In short, the reasoning goes something like this:

Negative press. First, we need to make a distinction between disengaged parents and apathetic parents. A recent [Gallup poll](#) defined "disengaged" as "emotionally detached...if changing schools is not an option, they may voice their negativity about the school to others."

Unless you're a statistical outlier, nearly 23% of parents in your district fall into this category. That 23% will make more noise than all the rest of your parents combined. Whether their angst is based on misconceptions or legitimate concerns is of little consequence. Perception is indistinguishable from reality in the tricky world of public relations and the "us against them" mentality is contagious.

10 years ago, this may have been a matter of simply putting out fires, but the rise of social media has added a viral element to

these negative conversations that can quickly snowball out of control.

Lower achievement ceilings. Students who grow up being told that their school is not right for them will never reach their full academic potential. "School attitude" is the term we use for how students view school in general – and there is a [litany of research](#) (PDF study) showing the correlation between attitude and outcomes. If a student has a negative perception of his school, school attitude is going to suffer.

Declining communities. In the long term, districts that are poorly perceived have a debilitating impact on their community. According to a [recent survey](#) by the National Association of REALTORS®, an astonishing 29% of home buyers listed school quality as an influential factor in their decision making process. We're talking about higher stakes than just school choice here. Many of the parents who are in a position to be selective about where to live will choose an alternative if your district is not perceived as the best option for their children.

If the escalating consequences of disengaged parents are really that bad, it stands to reason that parent engagement is and must continue to be a critical component for your sustained success. But it's not always that easy. Matthew Kraft, one half of the research team responsible for one of the more revealing parent engagement [studies](#) of this decade, outlined the problem with parent

communication in a recent [article](#) for Mind/Shift:

“There’s no clear expectation on best practices, or what that communication should look like.”

It's not easy to admit, but more often than not, it's true. From a parent's perspective, engagement starts with teachers – that's why many of the technology tools, research, and professional development strategies have been geared specifically toward the classroom. But one of the primary objectives a district leadership team is to develop and support those teachers toward common, strategic goals, is it not?

It's strange, then, that you've gone this long without the tools you need to carry out your mission. Here at Skyward, we believe that transformation needs to start at the top, and – when it comes to parent engagement – we've actually done something about it.

Skyward's Gradebook Tracker

Our **Gradebook Tracker** was designed specifically to give administrators the kind of visibility into their teachers' activities that has not been possible with traditional technology solutions.

This powerful tool in the quest for positive parent engagement will enable you to see how well your teachers are using the resources at their disposal so you can hold your team accountable to the level of consistency and transparency your parents need.

THE BENEFITS

The majority of your parents want to be involved in their child's school (65% wish they could be doing more according to a 2012 Public Agenda [survey](#)), but they rarely have access to the information they need until it's too late to make a difference.

One common theme in a big picture engagement strategy is the need to provide parents with visibility to upcoming tests and assignments in a timely manner, so they can motivate and work with their children on what's coming up, rather than what's already passed.

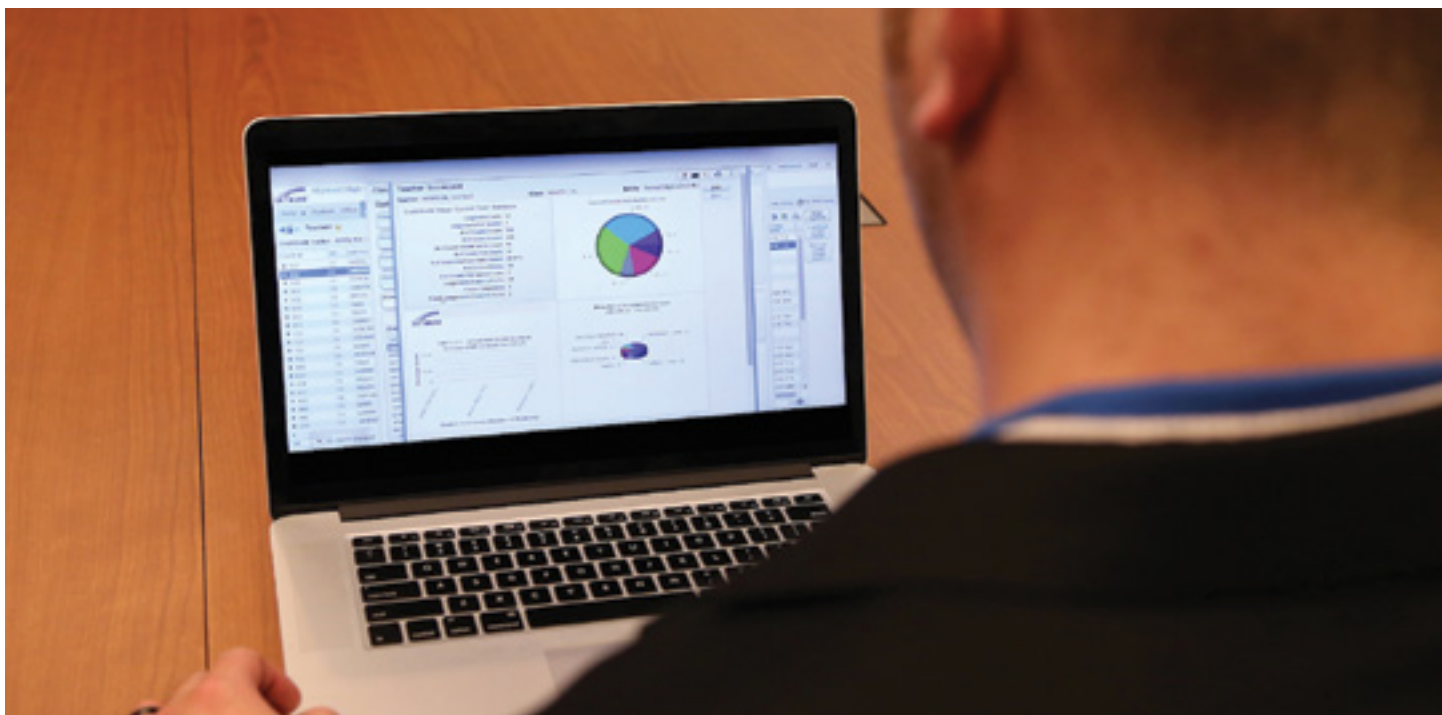
With the Gradebook Tracker, you can see – at a glance – how many non-graded assignments your teacher has posted. You'll know which of your teachers are planning ahead, so you can have a better idea of how well they are equipping their parents to be partners in the educational process.

Light touch communication and personalized messages are another critical engagement factor cited by parents. Until now, you've had to rely on word-of-mouth and haphazard paper trails to form an understanding of your teachers' communication strategies. Not

anymore. With the Gradebook Tracker, you'll be able to easily run reports on Message Center usage and see the total number of parent portal logins for every course you are offering.

Just think about what that means from an employee management standpoint. Not only will it be readily apparent which courses parents are most involved in, but you can even differentiate between sections of the same course to pin down which variables are contributing to parental involvement – both positively and negatively.

Are certain teachers moving the needle more than others? Are various segments of your parent population less likely to engage than others? With this level of data at your fingertips, you can be proactive about taking the necessary steps to get all of your teachers and parents on the same page.



SUMMARY

One-way communication is no longer cutting it. If you recognize that monthly newsletter from your own time in school, maybe it's worth revisiting your district's practices.

The Gradebook Tracker won't improve your parent engagement numbers on its own. Ultimately, that task falls on your shoulders. What it can do is empower you to make data-driven decisions for the good of your district and your community. It's just one of the many ways that Skyward is working to help educational leaders do what they do best – lead.

To learn more about how your principals can benefit from the Gradebook Tracker at the school level, click [here](#) to watch a brief video demonstration.