Mass communications:
There's no such thing as one-size-fits-all communication

Why relying only on "blasts" like robocalls and emails leaves people behind

Any school or district communications plan isn't complete without a reliable system for reaching your entire community. From important announcements to emergency notifications, some messages need to be communicated to everyone in your community.

However, **effective mass communications requires more than just the ability to send out messages at scale.** Many of the mass communications systems in use today have been in place for years, or retain the same features that have characterized school and district communication for generations of students: email or robocall "blasts" that are sent to everyone from a single point of contact, typically the central office.

When messages need to be sent to hundreds or thousands of people in a school or district, convenience and cost are key. But to make sure these messages are received, **you need a mass communications system that reaches all the populations in your community, all the time** —not just most of them, most of the time.

Here are three requirements that need to be met for effective mass communications.

1. Mass communications need to be reliable.

You shouldn't have to worry about the reliability of any system you need to rely on.

All the communications you send should be delivered to the people you're sending them to. In the case of snow days and other urgent matters, timely communication is critical. In circumstances like these, reliability issues—delays, failures, or misdeliveries—can make a situation exponentially worse.

Reliability also extends to the matter of security. Today, one bad actor can disrupt district systems on a massive scale; **in 2022, 1,981 schools were victims of a ransomware attack.** Appropriate security measures should be in place before you need them, and any communication software you use needs to put security first.

Questions to ask:

~ How long does it take for your mass communications system to deliver messages to recipients? Is this time frame appropriate for emergency situations like lockdowns?

~ Does your mass communications vendor comply with the appropriate laws and regulations about data privacy and safety? Can they provide third-party certification?

~ What steps does your mass communication vendor take to mitigate security risks that may affect schools and districts?

2. Mass communications need to be targeted and personalized.

If you're only sending everyone the same message in the same way, you're leaving people in your community behind.

Today, **nearly 25% of U.S. students speak a language other than English at home.** When families can't get updates in their home languages, or it's diffcult or time-consuming to find accurate translations, they miss out on important information and opportunities to engage. And if families don't have reliable broadband access, as in many rural or remote areas, digital alerts like app notifications and website updates won't even reach them.

Communication preferences matter, too. While robocalls and emails might be easy to send, they aren't nearly as likely to be received: With an increase in spam calls and a shift to mobile messaging, most people no longer pick up calls from numbers they don't know. Even for parents and guardians who make every effort to stay on top of updates, it isn't always possible to answer the phone or constantly check email inboxes. Any system you use for mass communications needs to reach people the way they want to be reached.

Questions to ask:

~ Do families receive your communications in their preferred languages? Are they able to reach out or reply in these languages?

~ Can students and families choose to receive mobile-first notifications, including SMS text messages?

~ Do families need to have reliable access to the internet in order to send or receive communication?

~ Are families required to download an app, create an account, or log in to an LMS or online portal in order to access important updates from your school or district?

3. Mass communications need to be multifunctional and easy to use.

Despite their ubiquity, mass communications systems that only deliver "blasts" from the central offce no longer meet the needs of schools and districts.

Because of their limited focus, these systems have to be augmented by other tools for classroom communication and engagement—but the more apps, logins, and platforms that families are asked to use for communication, the less effective your communications will be.

Ease of use is equally important for the administrators responsible for mass communications, not just students and families. **It shouldn't take a team of specialists to figure out how to use your system,** or for school and district leaders to be tethered to the office in case they need to send a message. If your mass communications system relies on a single point of contact, it creates a bottleneck that prevents families from communicating and connecting with you.

Questions to ask:

- Does the system you use for mass communications support two-way and classroom communication?

- Does your mass communications system require specialized training to use? If the designated mass comms administrator isn't available, are other staff able to send communications?

- If emergency alerts are sent out to your community, how do families reach out with questions? Do you experience bottlenecks with single points of contacts, like office phones ?

The mass communications checklist

This checklist includes questions to ask when evaluating any system or platform that your school or district uses for mass communications.

Reliability and security

	Remind
Does the vendor commit to delivering messages to your entire community in 10 minutes or less?	✓
Does the vendor comply with FERPA?	✓
Does the vendor comply with COPPA?	✓
Does the vendor have iKeepSafe certification?	✓
Does the vendor have ISO 27001:20013 certification or comply with a similar international standard for information security?	✓

Access and engagement

	Remind
Does the platform support mass communications through the following channels?	
SMS/text message	✓
Mobile app	✓
Email	✓
Voice call	✓
Can parents and students send and receive communication without internet access?	✓
Can parents and students use the platform without downloading an app?	✓

	Remind
Can parents and students use the platform without creating an account?	✓
Does the platform automatically translate messages into families' preferred languages?	✓
Does the platform allow parents and students to set their preferred notifications?	✓

Ease of use and functionality

	Remind
Can the platform be used for district, school, and classroom communication?	✓
Can the platform send mobile alerts to all contacts in an emergency situation?	✓
Can messages be automated and customized with data from a SIS?	✓
Can messages be sent to a specific segment of recipients? (e.g., send by grade level, send by student ID, etc.)	✓
Can administrators personalize messages with voice recordings?	✓
Can administrators send messages via mobile app?	✓

One platform for meeting all of your communication needs

When it comes to school and district communication, effective mass communications is only one part of the puzzle. Want to know more about how Remind provides equitable engagement, two-way communication, actionable data and oversight, and best-in-class trust and safety protocols? Visit **www.remind.com/hub**

> **"Remind is second to none when it comes to communicating with all of our school system's stakeholders. The company is innovative and reliable, and the program is user-friendly. I started using Remind upon its inception and wouldn't recommend any other communication platform. Simply the best."**

– Matt Bentley, Director of Technology, Thomaston-Upson County School System