Enhancing School Communication
Updating Processes and Tools for School-to-Home Communication

Greetings!

Communicating with families is some of the most important work we do in schools. That said, the "kidmail" system schools have traditionally used (sending flyers home in student backpacks or providing kids with verbal reminders) is inherently unreliable, for all the obvious reasons. Let's be honest, every parent knows that kids sometimes forget papers in their backpacks, or they don't remember to share important information about school when they get home. With more effective and convenient tools at our disposal, we can do better - but we need your help.

For years, we've used SchoolMessenger to send voice messages and emails about school events, delays and cancellations, emergencies, and other general updates. SchoolMessenger has become a trusted and valued tool for school-to-home communication. That said, a recent audit of our call logs showed that 9% of the phone numbers called by SchoolMessenger were reported as being either disconnected or "unknown." As it pertains to email, 26% of parents/guardians haven't provided their child's school with an email address. This is where you can help.

Contact information in SchoolMessenger comes directly from the district's student information system, Skyward. **Building secretaries enter contact information when students register for school, but after initial registration, families can use Skyward Family Access to update personal contact information.**

- Links to Skyward Family Access are on the district website and on each school's website. Once logged into Skyward Family Access, click on the "Skylert" tab in the navigation bar on the left side of the screen to verify and/or update your family's contact information or even change where you receive school alerts. Using Skylert, you can choose to receive alerts at *additional* phone numbers and you can also verify, update, and/or add an email address.

- **As always, contact information can be verified or updated by calling the main office of the school your child attends; our building secretaries would be happy to help!**

- SchoolMessenger has a new phone app and web-service to enhance school-to-home communication. If you have an email address on file with the district, you can use these tools to control contact preferences and access all the communications sent to you from our schools – but again, in order to login to the SchoolMessenger tools you must first provide the district with an email address, as *your email address serves as your SchoolMessenger username.*

  Using your iOS or Android device you can download and install the SchoolMessenger app on your smartphone. Alternately, you can open a web browser from any computer and visit the following URL: **www.schoolmessenger.com/start**. By using the email address you provided to the district as your username, you can log into the SchoolMessenger app. Once logged in, you'll be able to listen to and read previous school communications and you'll also be able to customize your contact preferences – **one more tool for you to control how you receive important communication from our schools**.

Should you have any trouble logging into SchoolMessenger, please call the main office of the school where your child attends and building secretaries will be happy to verify your username (email address). One final important note: The sync process between Skyward and SchoolMessenger happens once every 24 hours; *you will need to wait 24 hours before logging into SchoolMessenger after adding a new email address into Skyward.*

peachjar | flyers

In addition to connecting with families about school-specific events and updates, Deer Park's Board of Directors has long recognized that non-profit and community-based organizations occasionally wish to use schools to distribute informational flyers that are non-curricular but that have social, recreational or educational value for students. It has always been the case that *registered non-profit groups or other community organizations wishing to distribute information to families must first submit a statement of the social, recreational, or educational value the program provides in order to obtain approval for distribution from the superintendent.*

As mentioned previously, we've traditionally used the kidmail system to get these materials from school to home, and we know this has been an inherently unreliable approach. **As part of the district's efforts to streamline school-to-home communication, be environmentally friendly, and embrace the convenience that digital solutions offer, Deer Park has partnered with an e-flyer distribution service called Peachjar.**

Peachjar is digital platform used by schools throughout the nation, allowing non-profit, charitable, civic, and school-based organizations to distribute information to families via email. Once approved by district, the Peachjar platform can reliably deliver flyers to the inboxes of our families, while simultaneously posting the flyers to the respective building website(s).

Here's the best part: **Other than ensuring you have a home email address associated with your enrolled child(ren), *you don't have to do a thing*!** As has always been the case, please be assured that your *email address will never be shared with agencies outside the district.* While organizations outside the district can create and submit flyers for review using the Peachjar platform, **they cannot see parent contact information or send flyers** – these functions are reserved for school personnel only. Of course, you'll be able to opt-out at any time should you decide you do not want to receive informational flyers from the district.

Soon, every family with an email address in Skyward will receive a welcome message from Peachjar. From that point forward, schools in Deer Park will use the Peachjar platform to share materials that may be of interest to your student(s) and/or family. For the 2019-20 school year, we plan to allow outside organizations to submit a limited number of paper flyers to ou schools while we work with families to ensure they have an email address in Skyward.

We believe this represents a step forward in how we communicate with you and we're excited to get started. Again, if you have any questions, please reach out to our district office or the main office where your students are enrolled. Our building secretaries are *amazing* and would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Thanks so much for your ongoing partnership – we are incredibly fortunate to have such wonderful community support!

Yours in Education,

Travis W. Hanson, Superintendent