



Level Up: Removing Communications Barriers To Transform Outcomes

July 2026



Grand Salon 7-10



Scan for live
captions and
translation!





I spent 10 years as a Senior Chief Communications Officer in Florida and South Carolina.

I now serve as the Apptegy Strategic Communications Advisor for K-12 districts.

Hi, I'm Greg!



Disney's latest customer service addition! Memory Maker Photopass Magic Shots!



Meet Maria:

A Story About Too Many Channels and Zero Answers



Maria has three kids in your district and she is trying her best to stay connected.



District App,
School App



Lunch
Accounts
Login



ClassDojo (for youngest,
teacher's preference)



Remind texts
(2 teachers & a
coach)



Registration
System



District, Classroom
Newsletters



Parent Portal
(trying to
check)



Unmanaged
Parent Group



School Website & Portal
Calendars (don't always
match Parent Group)

Family engagement starts with the experience of trying to **connect**. Right now, that experience is often exhausting.



By the most conservative count:

Twelve Platforms, Fourteen Logins, and No Single Place to Go when she has a real question.



Last Week's Question



Eighth grader: Missing assignments? (Grading period closes Friday)



MONDAY MORNING: Emailed teacher.



WEDNESDAY: No reply. Called main office.



WEDNESDAY: Transferred to counselor. Counselor left voicemail for teacher.



WEDNESDAY: Sent message through school app.

She is still not sure anyone received it.

FRIDAY: Grading period closed.

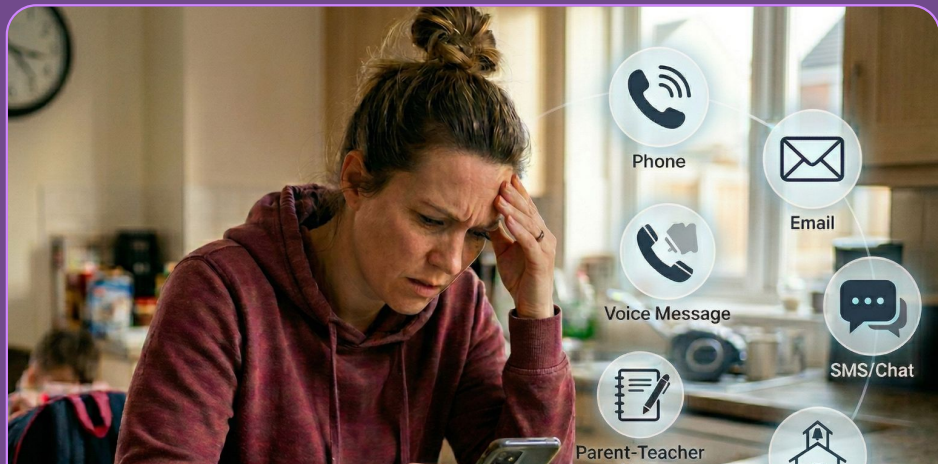


The Simple Question

Who owns a parent question from start to finish in your district?

If the answer is:

- “it depends”
- “multiple people”
- “whoever gets it first”



Then **no one** owns it.



The Charter School Across Town



One App.



One Number.



A Person Answers
before the third ring.



Helping Maria

Maria didn't need **more** communication

She needed one **clear** answer

Communication is **not** sending information

It's resolving questions



The Outdated Model

Broadcast



Response



Resolution

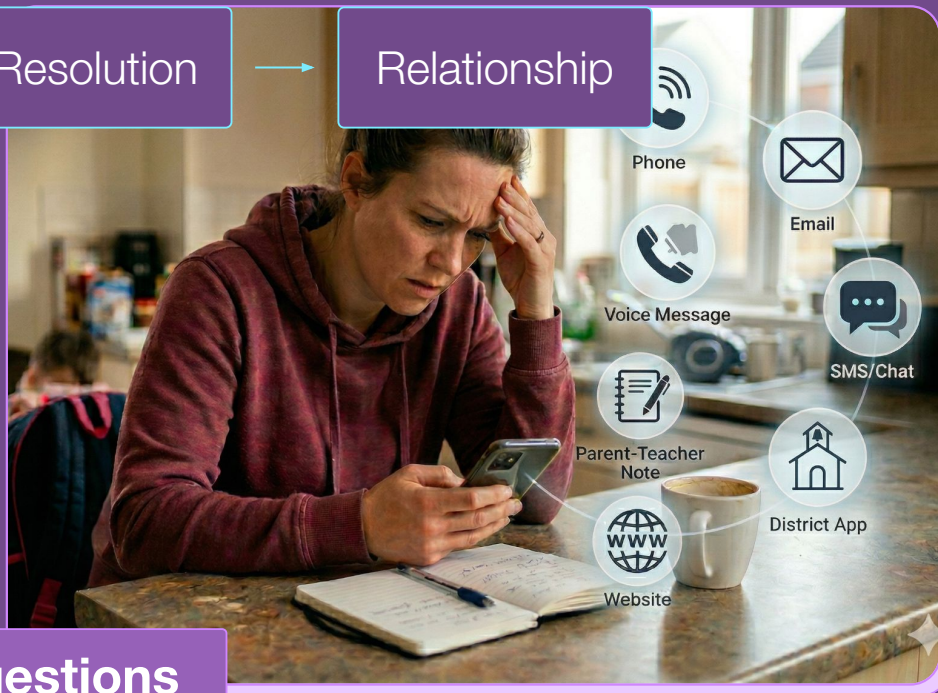


Relationship

- Most districts live in broadcast
- Some reach response
- Few deliver consistent resolution
- Fewer build relationships at scale

Your goal is **not** better messaging

Your goal is **fewer unanswered questions**



Helping Maria

Most districts are optimized to send

Families need you to resolve issues

You don't have a **communication** problem

You have an access problem



The Outdated Model

Schools control the channels



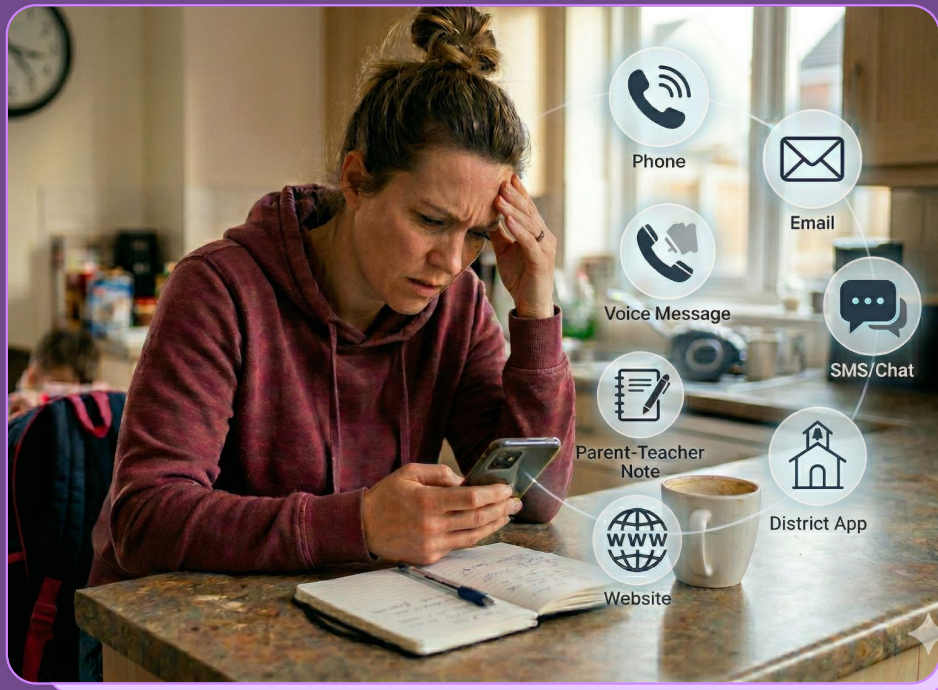
Families carry the burden

Schools decide:

- Where info lives
- Which tools to use
- How communication flows

Families have to:

- Figure out where to go
- Try multiple places
- Follow up when no one responds





- Can a parent get an answer to a basic question in under 2 steps?
- Is there exactly one place you tell families to go with questions
- Can you see unanswered questions in real time?
- Do you have a defined response time expectation across roles?
- If a parent emails the wrong person, is it rerouted or restarted?



Communication as Infrastructure



Transportation
gets students to
school



Instruction
teaches them



Communication
connects
everything

When communication breaks,
everything still runs.

Just *worse*. And *slower*.
And **with less trust**.

This is not a
department.

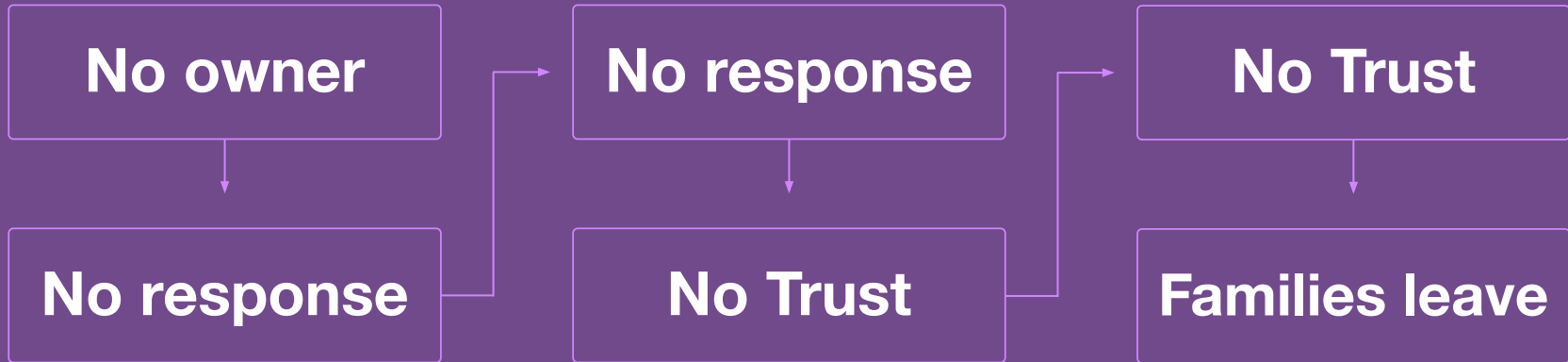


This is **core
operations**.



The Cost of Chaos and Confusion

↔ The issue is unowned communication.



What Families Expect



Not advanced,
it is **expected**.



Competition drives
the demand.



The baseline
to **build trust**.

If families can get instant answers everywhere else,
they expect the same from your district and schools.



The Parent Test

Your child wakes up sick.

You need to report the absence and find out what they'll miss.



Navigation:

Where did you go first?
Was it obvious?



Interaction:

How many clicks so far?
Did you hesitate?



Resolution:

Who found the answer in 1–2 steps?
Who needed 3–5?
Who needed more?

This is your system.
Not your org chart.
Not your intention.
This!



The Parents View: What Your Website Says

 District Five

English ▾



Welcome to the Spartanburg District Five Virtual Assistant!
I'm here to help you navigate information based on content from our official website.

Disclaimer: For the most accurate responses, we encourage you to:

- Use the feedback feature to help us continuously improve.
- Rephrase or add more detail to your question if you don't receive the answer you're looking for.

Your input helps us serve you better—thank you for partnering with us!

How do I report an absence?

Send

 Contact Us

Powered by AlwaysOn

How do I report an absence?



To report an absence, you need to complete the Student Absence Form available online. You can fill out the form by providing necessary details such as your email, the date of absence, and an explanation for the absence. If you have a medical excuse, you can attach it to your form response or email it to the school. The form can be accessed here: [Absence Form]([Forms | Reidville Elementary](#)) ([Forms | Reidville Elementary](#)).

[Feedback on this answer?](#)



The Parents View: What Your Website Says

To report an absence, parents have two options to submit a note: 1. A signed handwritten note from the parent. 2. An email note sent to the school's attendance email address. All absences are considered unexcused until the school receives a written explanation from the parent/guardian within three days of the absence. If a student has excessive absences, a doctor's note may be required ([Attendance](#) | [Imagine Palmer Ranch](#)).

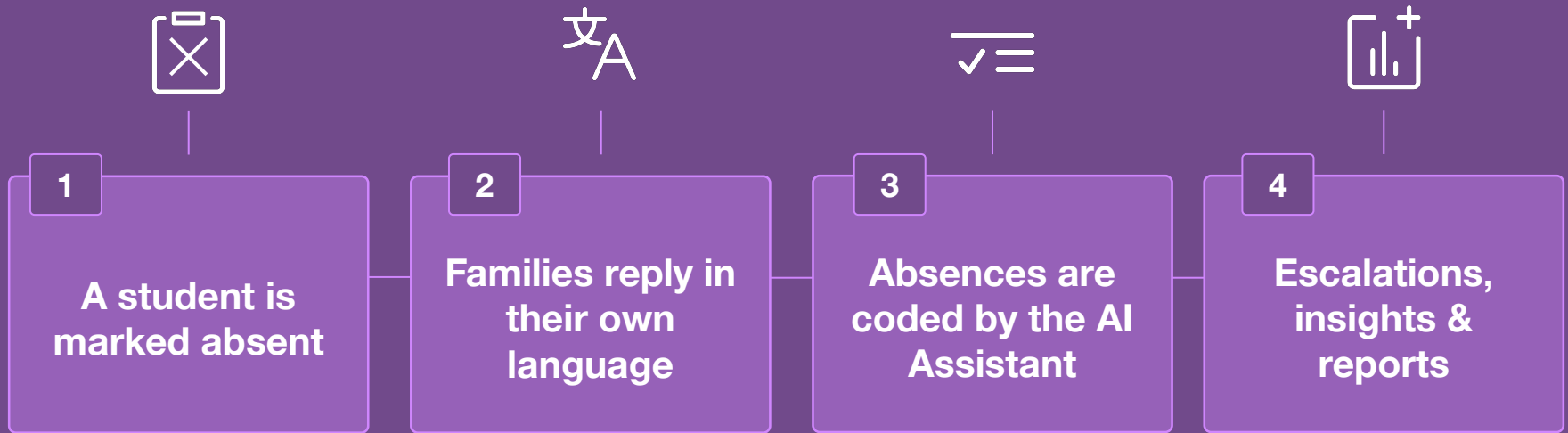
Thank you for your inquiry!

To report your child's absence, parents or legal guardians are required to notify the school within twenty-four (24) hours of the absence. You can do this by:

- **Telephone Call:** A phone call on the date of the absence prior to 10:00 a.m. is preferable.
- **Written Note:** If a phone call isn't possible, please send a note with your child on the day they return to school explaining the absence.

It's important to provide the reason for the absence. If the school is not notified within 24 hours, the absence will be recorded as unexcused, regardless of the reason. In

A New Way for Attendance



*Where one-way
existing solutions
stop*



The New Customer Service Standard



Every question
has one clear
entry point.



Every message
has a known
owner



Every inquiry has
a response time
expectation



Every family
knows where to
go before they
have a problem

If families have to navigate your system to get help, the system is failing.



The Five-Level Communication Maturity Framework

1



Reactive

2



Structured

3



Strategic

4



Engaged

5



Community-Driven



The Five-Level Communication Maturity Framework

As of 1/12/26

Maturity Curve for School District Communications

	Informal	Process Building	Trust Building	Relationship Building	Advocacy Building
Dimension	Level 1: Reactive Communications	Level 2: Structured Communications	Level 3: Strategic Communications	Level 4: Engaged Communications	Level 5: Community-Driven Communications
Channels <i>Where</i>	Ad hoc: Communication is urgent or informal. There is no consistent platform.	Core channels set: SMS, email, website exist with little personalization.	Integrated & branded: The district has a multi-channel communication strategy with consistent identity and messaging.	Two-way & tailored: Communication is strategic and specific to stakeholder needs.	AI-personalized: Analytics optimize timing and channel for maximum stakeholder efficacy
Roles & Culture <i>Who</i>	A few individuals: No defined comms ownership or structure exists.	Central office leads: Principals and other leaders send updates via district-approved templates.	Staff contribute: Teachers and coaches share campus stories with role-based permissions.	Widespread adoption: Most staff proactively communicate with their audiences.	Everyone's a storyteller: Students, families, and community partners share too.
Processes & Systems <i>How</i>	Manual & fragmented: No documentation. Staff departures disrupt communications.	Basic workflows: Some templates exist, but systems are still disconnected.	Integrated systems: Role-based permissions exist and documentation is thorough and consistent	Analytics-informed: AI improves accessibility. Staff are trained and onboarded to communication best-practices.	All-in-one platform: Data is centralized, systems are aligned to stakeholder needs and transitions are seamless.
Alignment & Brand <i>Feel</i>	No identity: Communication is reactive to crises with few or no visual standards.	Brand documented: Logos, colors, and messaging guidelines are available for primary users.	Consistent brand: District messaging priorities are recognized across all touchpoints; guidelines widely followed.	Internal aligned: Staff storytelling reinforces district messaging.	Brand = culture: External comms reflects internal values and family communications.
Audiences & Stakeholders <i>Reach</i>	Enrolled families only: One-way broadcasts with no segmentation.	Campus-focused: Some two-way communication exists, primarily among enrolled families.	Prospective audiences Tailored messaging for prospective families and staff.	Community input: Community shapes communications with tools like AI chat plus two-way tools.	Brand ambassadors: Families and community members actively advocate for the district.



The Three Transitions That Matter Most

Level 1 to Level 2

From Reactive to Structured.

Establishing a real communication plan, consistent channels, and documented processes without overwhelming existing staff.

Level 2 to Level 3

From Structured to Strategic.

Building a branded presence, involving campus staff without losing brand control, and beginning to reach prospective families.

Level 3 to Level 4

From Strategic to Engaged.

Building two-way communication systems. Answers come to families instead of them having to chase them down.

Level 4 to 5: From Engaged to Community driven



What Each Level Costs Districts in the Real World

Level 1 districts:

You are losing families before they ever step on campus.



In a school choice environment, families decide how easy you are to work with based on their first interaction.

A search, a website visit, a phone call.



If they can't quickly find answers or reach someone, they make a decision.

They just choose a system that feels easier to navigate.



What Each Level Costs Districts

Level 2 districts: Absenteeism starts earlier than you think.

Chronic absenteeism rarely begins with a disengaged student. It begins with a family that learned the system is hard to navigate.

A missed question. A delayed response. A moment where getting help takes too much effort.

Over time, families stop asking. Then they stop engaging. **Then attendance slips.**



What Each Level Costs Districts

Level 3 districts: You are building awareness, but not earning trust.

You are reaching more people, more consistently, with better messaging.

But trust is not built through what you send. It is built through how you respond.

If families still have to chase answers, wait for replies, or try multiple channels, your system is still costing you trust every day.

Level 3 is where districts talk more, but still don't resolve enough.



What Each Level Costs Districts

Level 4 districts:

Families get answers without chasing, and everything changes.

When questions are resolved quickly and clearly, families stop bouncing between channels and start trusting the system.

Call and email volume drops, not because families disengage, but because confusion disappears.

Staff capacity improves as a result, but the real shift is this:

Families no longer have to work to get help. The system works for them.

Districts that move to Level 4 identify attendance issues early, because two-way systems surface problems before they become patterns.



What Each Level Costs Districts

Level 5 districts: The system answers questions instantly and adapts to families automatically.

- AI-powered tools provide real-time answers around the clock, eliminating waiting and reducing frustration.
- Attendance issues are addressed within hours, not days, surfacing problems early.
- Messaging adapts to each family's language and preferences without adding staff workload.
- Leaders see what families are asking in real time and adjust accordingly.
- And the community actively contributes to the district's story.

At Level 5, communication is no longer reactive. The system removes waiting, guessing, and barriers.



Where is your district right now?

1



Reactive

2



Structured

3



Strategic

4



Engaged

5



Community-Driven



What each Level Costs in the Real World

Building trust



Every unanswered question is a **withdrawal** from trust.
Every fast, clear answer is a **deposit**.

Losing families



Districts do not lose families all at once.
They lose them **one unanswered question at a time**.



Level Up



**Fix the systems,
not the symptoms**



**You need a
system, not more
effort**



**This is not about
messaging!**



The Cost of Communication Friction

Districts at the lower levels of communication maturity consistently see:



Overburdened staff

Higher inbound call and email volume as families cannot self-serve basic information



Chronic absenteeism

Later identification of attendance concerns, allowing small issues to become chronic patterns



Frustrated families

Lower satisfaction scores from families who rate communication as a primary frustration



Enrollment attrition

Enrollment vulnerability as competitor schools communicate more effectively



Your Level = Your Outcomes

Name the single biggest **structural barrier** to moving forward...
...and commit to **one specific action** within 30 days.



The goal



Answers instantly

Personalized communication

Smarter two way communication systems

If you called/messed your own district today as a parent with a problem

How confident are you that you'd get a clear answer on the first try?





Chaos



One clear system



Sending



**Intentional
engagement**



Broadcasting



**Questions get
answered**



Back To Maria



What would have changed her experience?

Not more platforms

Not more communication

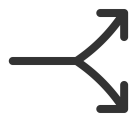
- One place
- One owner
- One answer



If families have to work to get answers, the system is broken.



Moving Forward: Districts Need to STOP:



**Adding new
channels**



**Letting every
staff member
choose their
own tool**



**Treating
communication as
everyone's job but
no one's
responsibility**



**Measuring
what was sent
instead of what
was resolved**

Pull all communication into one central system.



The Result

Maria didn't complain, she left.

Families don't leave all at once

They leave one unanswered question at a time

Response speed builds trust.
Customer service silence kills it.



Next steps:



Name your Level

First 30 days

- Pick one entry point for family questions
- Make it clear and visible everywhere

Find Your Gap

Next 60 days

- Define ownership and response expectations
- Train staff on where conversations live

Fix One System

Next 90 days

- Audit top 10 parent questions
- Ensure clear, fast answer paths
- Then show what changed:
 - Call volume
 - Parent satisfaction
 - Staff time



See you in Dallas?

September 28-29, 2026

Use this special discount code:



 **apptegy** × **schoolceo**

