

SMS and SCHOOLS

Can engaging parents via SMS messaging help their student's performance in school? Yes, it can. At least in some ways. A year-long study called the Parent Engagement Project (PEP), ran a trial of sending parents SMS messages relating to their student's schooling. It included over 15,600 students and 36 secondary schools throughout England.

The researchers performed detailed statistical analyses of student's performance in various areas to see if the increase in parent involvement resulted in better scores. They compared to students whose parents did not receive the SMS messaging as well as prior year academic data.

Here's what they found:

- "Children who had the intervention experienced about one month of additional progress in mathematics compared to other children."
- "Children who had the intervention had reduced absenteeism compared to other children."
- "Schools embraced the programme and liked its immediacy and low cost."
- "The vast majority of parents were accepting of the programme, including the content, frequency, and timing of texts."

Initially, they thought there may have been improvement in English as well, but that turned out not to be the case. They also determined that science scores were not impacted at all.

What They Did;

The programme included a well-defined set of SMS messages that would be sent to parents. The initial estimate was parents would get approximately 65 messages per year. There were three types of messages sent:

- Upcoming assessment: Notifications sent four days in advance, and again at 1 day.
- Missing homework: Parents received notice if homework was not handed in.
- Conversation prompt: Parents received a summary of lessons for the day so they could discuss them with their students.

Most of the messages were sent by the “project delivery team”, the rest were automatic. According to the report they were working for the project and not the schools. While there was a liaison (who worked at the school), between the schools and the team “schools in the current study were required to adhere to the protocol described above and were only allowed to modify text content related to the conversational prompts.” The schools themselves had little control over the messaging, but that was necessary to ensure the validity of the study.

Should Your School Use SMS?

By necessity, PEP used a “one-size fits all” approach. Every school received the same messaging schedule, the same training, and the same project support. But not every school is the same.

It’s possible to start small and see how SMS messaging works for your school. Based on the study results, schools that have an issue with attendance might consider using it just to notify parents about that issue. A school looking to improve mathematics results could do the same just for their mathematics programme.

A simple introduction to using the messaging can make it easier for training staff too. One conclusion of the study was that schools felt they’d need a full time coordinator to keep the programme going as it was designed. That’s an added cost to the school beyond the costs for the messages themselves.

But without such a complicated programme, schools could integrate it into their existing systems and staff only as needed. This would reduce the cost to implement a programme and could save on the fees necessary to use the service referenced in the study.

In fact, many schools and service providers (such as doctors and dentists) find that using SMS messaging often saves them money over time because it allows staff to be more efficient. An SMS provider like Alchemy Marketing can offer messaging services for just the cost of the messages sent, without any account or annual fees.

Even though school has already started, we're here to answer your questions about how SMS messaging could work in your school. You can reach us by email, info@alchemymarketinggm.com or phone +220 4498791.