



A Blackboard Reach Case Study:

## New London Public Schools Reimagines Their Teacher and Family Communication By Putting Translation And Diversity At The Center of Their Strategy



### The District

New London Public Schools is nestled in New London, Connecticut. The district serves 3,300 students who come from more than 40 towns across the state. Their all-magnet style schools allow them to educate a diverse set of students who come from a variety of racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds.

### The Challenge

Successfully reaching parents with classroom level updates posed an increasingly complex challenge for New London Public Schools during the pandemic. Communication between teachers and families became more frequent, yet insight into those conversations became less transparent. Toby Mathew, New London Public Schools' Visual Information and Marketing Specialist, described the state of classroom-to-home communication at his district,

**“Our teachers were using free tools to communicate with parents. However, the reality was that there was no management of that data. We couldn't track any messages sent at all.”**

Without oversight and records of what was being sent home, the district decided to go back to basics. They asked teachers to contact parents via phone calls until a district approved messaging tool could be implemented. Because of the rich diversity among the student population at New London, this interim phone call period exposed another challenge with two-way communication between teachers and families – language translation.



▲ Toby Mathew,  
New London Public Schools'  
Visual Information  
and Marketing Specialist

“Almost 40% of our families are Spanish speaking and have their native language preferences set as Spanish. We also have 4% Haitian Creole speakers. We have a couple translators on site who had to three-way in for calls and be the translator for the teacher and the parent,” explained Toby.

The search was on for a solution that enabled simple two-way communication for teachers and families with language translation and messaging insight.

## The Partnership

With their key needs identified, New London began talking with potential vendors and set up a meeting with Blackboard.

“We had two Blackboard representatives come here and meet with us at the district. The personal interaction was great. They helped us understand the entire communication solution that Blackboard offers and how we would work with their team,” said Toby. “We really wanted a partner we could work well with. As soon as we met the Blackboard team it just made sense.”

Blackboard Reach is now helping their teachers and parents stay connected in an environment that accommodates everyone’s needs. Their teachers and parents can message back and forth with automatic language translation, eliminating the need for scheduling translators and using three-way phone calls. Administrators can also review messages to help teachers craft communications that align with the district brand and voice.

But Blackboard Reach is just one part of the communications solution that New London has implemented. They also decided to build out their entire community engagement strategy with Blackboard. They now use Web Community Manager for their website, Mobile Communications App for their mobile app, and Mass Notifications for their broad outreach communications. These tools all integrate together to simplify communication for district administrators and create message consistency for families receiving information across different channels. For example, Blackboard Reach is built into the Mobile Communications App. This integration allows families to receive and send messages to teachers within the app they’re already using to view district and school updates.

44%

of parents have downloaded the messaging app

622

people have viewed messages from teachers



## The Result

After just one month of launching Blackboard Reach, nearly half of the district parents have downloaded the app. The district's efforts to promote the new tool and encourage teacher and parent communication are just ramping up. Some of their outreach initiatives thus far include:

- ▶ Holding a family engagement night focused on Blackboard Reach. Topics of discussion included how to download the app, read messages, and reply to teachers.
- ▶ Distributing flyers to parents and teachers via email and social media with step-by-step instructions on how to use their new messaging tool. (They even created New London branded versions of the promotional materials they received as part of implementation!)
- ▶ Recording and sending voice messages in English and Spanish to families explaining the new communication tool and how to get started.



▶ [Discover how Blackboard Reach can help your district create stronger communication between teachers and families.](#)

▶ [If you're still deciding if you need a two-way teacher and parent communication tool, check out this guide for a list of considerations to keep in mind.](#)