

BACK TO SCHOOL

ANTICIPATING PARENT CONCERNS

What Is Possip?

At Possip, we know that communication can make or break a relationship or even a school year. We help schools and districts routinely access feedback from their stakeholders - families, staff, and students. Working with over 1,000 schools and organizations across 34 states, Possip uses Pulse Checks™ translatable in more than 100 languages to capture trends, praise, and feedback for schools and districts.

We have been collecting and analyzing parent feedback for school leaders for over seven years and for the past two years we've released trends that we recognize appear time and time again. To start off this year, we have gathered historical data from August and September to help you know what parents are thinking as the school year begins - and help you prepare so you can get ahead of many of the common concerns and issues school leaders typically hear.



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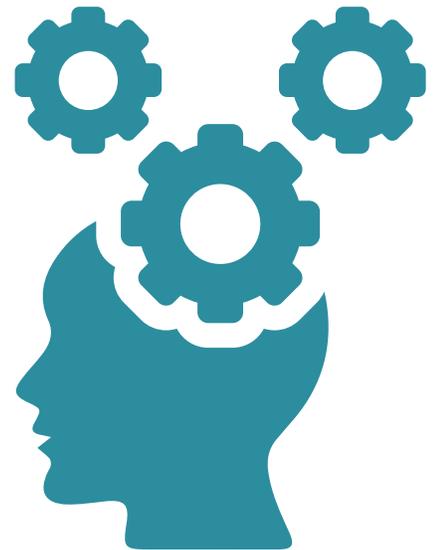
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**Tips for Possip Partners
& Conclusion**

Read Their Minds

Through analyzing 99,749 survey responses, these are the top issues that parents wonder about in the first few weeks of school, in this order:

1. **Communication**
2. **Car Lines / Transportation**
3. **School Safety / Campus Security**



Other contenders after the top three include:

Teacher Feedback - Curriculum Feedback - Academic Support
Student Discipline / Bullying - Extracurricular Activities
Facilities and Cleanliness - Cafeteria Feedback
Administrative Feedback

Top Trend #1 Communication

Get in Front of Parent Concerns: Communication

Communication in general is always a top concern of parents throughout the school year. Families will let you know what they appreciate or when they feel overwhelmed with school messaging from too many sources. Generally, families consistently provide feedback throughout the year about the communication they get from their child's teachers, the frequency of school communications, and the content shared in communications from the school.

As the school year continues and students get familiar with their new teachers and classmates, parents will give increasing amounts of feedback, questions, or concerns about the responsiveness of teachers and administration as well as how their child's performance is measured in grades.

At the beginning of the year, however, families express more questions and concerns about communication tools than they do any other time of the year. This makes sense, as parents get used to new and different platforms and learn when they will receive information about their child and their experience at school.



Top Trend #1 Communication

Here are some real, unedited questions and comments from parents regarding communication tools collected through Possip's Pulse Checks:

Why are some of the teachers using the Remind app to make announcements to students outside of school hours. Not all kids have cell phones. Why not use Schoology?

I need to know as a parent what do I need to log in to?

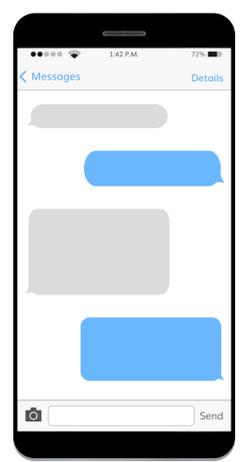
Will you have Remind this year?

I love how involved and encouraging all of the staff are with the children. It's good to see all of the pictures and videos of the kids as well. I do feel like more information could have been provided to the parents on the PikMyKid App, the new PTO, as well as more information to the Kinder parents on the Million Word challenge.

There are too many apps to keep track of. Teachers should email weekly reading logs and newsletters directly to parents. It's confusing when important documents are posted in various places - anything critical should be emailed.

Stop emailing and call more!

I haven't received information on any tool used for communication with teachers other than email which is fine but if there's something like Class Dojo then I'm not aware.



Top Trend #1 Communication

Strategies for Improving Communication

1. Communication Tool Roundup and Analysis

Take advantage of knowing this top beginning of the year parental concern by reviewing all of the tools you and your teachers use to communicate with families, how often parents can expect to use each tool, if the tools vary by classroom or by grade, etc.

Questions to consider:

- What do new families need to know and what can you streamline for returning families?
For returning parents: What is the same from last year, what is different or new?
- Looking at your communication tools, how often will a parent hear from the school?
- How often is your communication general, such as information about upcoming events?
- How often is your communication specific and positive for the individual child?
- What communications are families getting from the district or network and how often?

Possip School Communication Tool Worksheet

Example:

Tool	Delivery Method	Why	Frequency	Grades / Classrooms	Unique message / broadcast	Use for Urgent Situations?	Need internet/ smart phone?
PickThemUp	app	Dismissal coordination	Beginning of year, then as needed	All	customizable	Maybe	Y
School Robocall	Phone (voice)	Upcoming events or to inform parents of critical events on campus during school day	Weekly or as needed	All	broadcast	Y	N
School Newsletter	email	School news / upcoming events /	bi-weekly	All	broadcast	N	Y - unless printed
Grade level newsletter	email	Grade or classroom news / upcoming events	weekly	grade	broadcast	N	Y - unless printed
Sticker on student	Physical	Important reminders for next school day	Infrequent	K-2	broadcast	N	N
Flyer home with students	Physical paper	Important reminders for next school day	Infrequent	3-8	broadcast	N	N
Teacher calls	Phone - voice	Urgent situations / check in with family / individual student needs	Infrequent/ can be structured	All	Unique message	Y	N
Teacher texts	Phone -	Urgent situations / check in	Infrequent/	All	Unique	Y	N

[Click here to create your own communication tool roundup!](#)



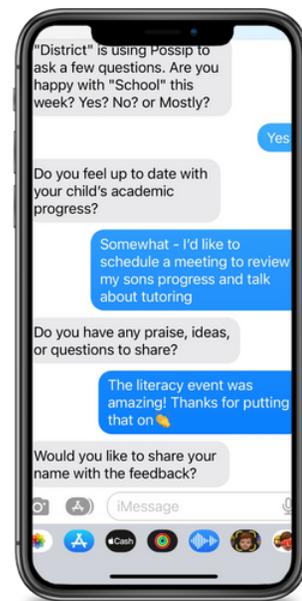
Top Trend #1 Communication

Strategies for Improving Communication

2. Poll Families

Using the beginning of year excitement, ask parents how and when they want to receive information. Make a plan to address those needs when applicable. A few ways to gather that input include:

- “Get To Know You” forms
- Beginning of year surveys
- Customizable Bonus Question in a Possip Pulse Check



3. Beef Up Your Staff's Communication Skills

In addition to educating and caring for children, your community can benefit tremendously from improving your team's communication and customer service skills. Here are some low-cost ways to help bolster skills:

- Invite teachers to listen in on parent calls to get experience. Make sure families know everyone who is on the call and why from the onset.
- Use summer preparation time and training to reiterate how important clear and consistent communication is for everyone on the team, especially when interacting with parents.
- Evaluate every piece of communication to ensure that what you are sending to parents contains direct information, not fluff, and a call to action. Think through the lens of a parent who is scanning the information. What do they need to see, have, or do? How can you make that abundantly clear?

Top Trend #1 Communication

Strategies for Improving Communication

3. Beef Up Your Staff's Communication Skills (Continued)

- Create systems for consistency. In addition to the Communication Tool Round Up and Analysis, think through the at-school events, field trips, and other major happenings that parents will need to know. Create a plan to make sure you communicate the details consistently so that parents can trust they will get the information they need and know when to expect it.



For example, one administrator realized that many families had questions about their school's after-school programming:

"Parents wanted more information about after-school, or how to sign up for after-school, or can they go every day, or exactly what the hours were."

Based on those questions, their team "...did a lot of thinking not only about making our after-school program more robust (and we did that this year), but then also making our messaging for after-school a little bit clearer and a little bit earlier for parents so that they weren't left wondering about that for too long."

– Ashleigh Columbolo, Extoile Academy Charter School

- Give your teachers time and suggested structure. If teachers are responsible for monthly phone calls with parents or weekly newsletters, ensure they have time during the workday to write and create plans will help them deliver timely messages. Even though some teachers might want to create their own newsletters, providing a framework for what information you expect them to share with parents and how often can lead to a consistent experience throughout the year or as children move up in grades.

4. Start Now

If you haven't initiated a conversation with your families yet, it's not too late! Tailor this script to text, email, phone, or robo call your families today:

Greetings, [School Name] families! This is [Title], [Name].

We're so excited to see your child/student on the first day of school, [date].

Be on the lookout for information about our Back to School night.
Until then, enjoy the rest of your summer break!

Top Trend #2 Car Lines / Transportation



Get in Front of Parent Concerns: Car Lines / Transportation

After communication with and from school, logistics such as carline procedures and transportation details are the second top concern parents voice at the beginning of the year. This trend is particularly prevalent for elementary schools as children are not yet old enough to drive themselves and often cannot access public transportation. We've also seen this trend highest in the midwest and southwest. While parents continue to provide feedback throughout the year, our data shows that at the beginning of the year, parents provide three times more comments about car lines and logistics than they do during the rest of the year.

Thinking from a parent's perspective, we can appreciate and imagine the fear or frustration they might experience during drop off and dismissal. For a parent sitting in a long carline, they see other cars turning the wrong way as everyone learns the new procedures or they just stare at the bumper in front of them as time seems to slow to a halt. They can't completely zone out or read work emails in depth as they wait because they have to pay attention close enough to keep from delaying the line themselves and also not run into the car in front of them! For parents waiting at a stop or waiting to hear their child made it home safely from the bus, delays can be scary - especially if they are wondering if their child made it onto the right bus!

Top Trend #2 Car Lines / Transportation

Strategies for Improving Car Lines and Transportation

As you work through the snaggles that inevitably surface in those first few days, know that drop off and dismissal times are opportunities for your staff to greet students and parents with infectious enthusiasm. Possip has several articles outlining effective ways to set up carline processes, such as this [Car Line Number System](#) or a collection of [Car Line and Transportation Solutions](#).

Remember to keep your staff members in mind as you think through your drop off and dismissal processes. In this first week your teachers and staff help children navigate major emotions that come with the first days of school - as well as their own! In addition to clear signage, emails outlining the process including maps, and providing pictorial directions at back to school nights, one major element to help keep car lines efficient (and parents still happy when they aren't) is to prepare and pump up your staff for these crucial exchanges. Let your staff members know how important they are in both keeping children safe but also how their enthusiasm is paramount to keeping spirits high in your community as everyone gets used to the new procedures.

1. Ideas for Staff:



- Send an encouraging Slack message to your teachers before your dismissal procedure begins.
- Post a thank you note in the teacher lounge or a sticky note on classroom doors for teachers to find after all the children are safely in school or have safely left school.
- Be part of the procedure as the year begins as well, so you can model the attitude you wish for your staff to convey as well as give yourself the opportunity to witness what is working and what is not.

2. Idea for Families:

Consider a 'Car Line FAQ' page on your website addressing the following common questions:

- Where is the entrance that I will use for car line?
- Onto what street will the car line exit?
- What if I want to park and walk into the school?
- What if I forgot my dashboard sign?
- What if I'm picking up a student I don't usually pick up?



Top Trend #3 School Safety



Get in Front of Parent Concerns: School Safety

At the beginning of the year, school safety and campus security is the third greatest source of concern for parents. Possip comments reflect the real-world experience, so comments, questions, and suggestions tend to be influenced by current and ongoing threats to safety in schools. Within this trend parents share a combination of concerns, questions and suggestions.

Suggestions are usually focused on ways the parents feel the school can improve safety such as more controls around who accesses the building, more security guards or police, or comments about security cameras and how external and internal doors lock.

In a similar vein, parents have questions about what actions schools are taking and what policies or procedures are in place. Questions surface such as, "What are the drills that are in place?" and "Has the school implemented any new safety measures?"

Top Trend #3 School Safety



Strategies for Improving Communication About School Safety

1. Messaging

At Back to School Nights, make sure to say out loud that the safety of each child at your school is your top priority. Parents need to hear this, especially when news of deadly events around the nation are prevalent. Clearly communicate the drills and procedures that you are required to have and let parents know how often their children will practice these procedures. Let parents know what safety precautions and measures you have in place and anything you or your district has done or is planning to do to protect the children in your care. Make sure to tailor your remarks if students are also attending this session!

2. Invite Parent Insights

Do not be afraid to ask your parents to let your team know if they see a potential safety hazard. For example, your staff may not realize that the back door to the cafeteria is often propped open by children as they come in from the playground after school to get a drink of water. Devise ways for parents to report what they see such as through a regular invitation to share feedback and ideas and then communicate what changes you make based on that information. When parents know they are being heard, they will continue to share valuable insights that you might not get from anywhere else.

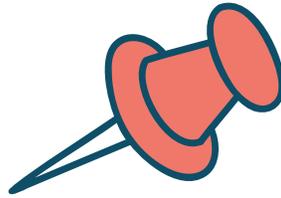
3. Spanish

When parents use Possip they can choose the language they would like to use and then our reports provide English translations. Based on this, we know that Spanish-speaking respondents place a high value on school safety and security. Make sure that any flyers going home are provided in Spanish and, if possible, provide translators at parent events like Back to School Nights so that the information you share will be understood.

Other Notable Concerns to Address Now

After communication, car lines and operations, and school safety concerns, parental feedback splits into themes that we hear throughout the year. Those themes include:

- Teacher Feedback*
- Curriculum Feedback
- Academic Support
- Student Discipline/Bullying*
- Extracurricular Activities
- Facilities and Cleanliness
- Cafeteria Feedback
- Administrative Feedback



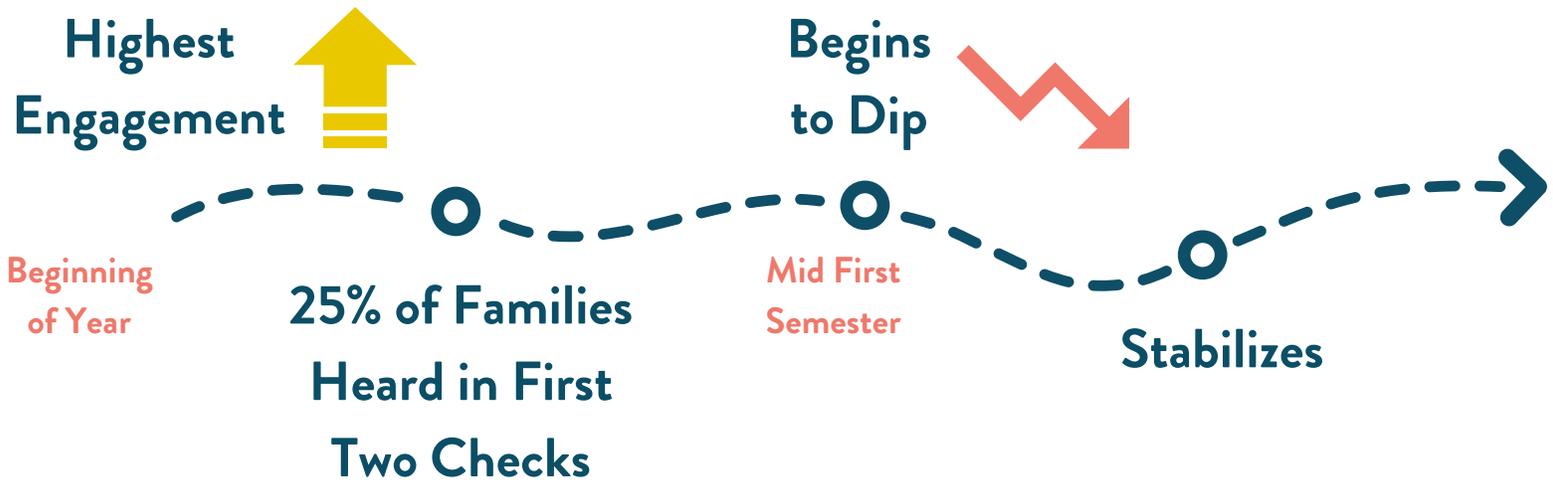
Since you have the attention of parents at the beginning of the year, think through in advance how you would like to hear those concerns. Do you have a clear invitation for parents to call or email you if they are wondering about after school activities? How will you know if parents are talking about an issue in the cafeteria?

*Two concerns asterisked in the list above are notable for another reason: teacher feedback and student discipline and bullying both tend to rise as the year progresses, effectively doubling throughout the rest of the year. This makes sense as relationships are forged throughout the year and parents get to know their child's teacher and see progress reflected in grades while students make more and more choices throughout the year that may or may not follow your school's rules.

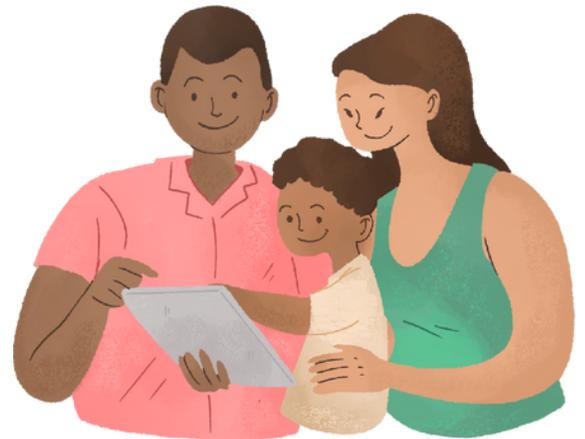
In terms of discipline, there is a dichotomy in feedback from parents that think discipline policies are too strict and those who think that are not strict enough. The beginning of the year provides an opportunity to communicate policies and consequences.

What expectations can you clearly lay out at the beginning of the year? What focus can you give your community to help create the best year yet? Spell out all of your expectations so they are very clear - from behavior to how students, parents, and teachers communicate about what is and is not working.

The Typical Timeline & Tips for Partners



- Poll your families or send your first Pulse Check early in the first month or quarter to get a good gauge of your families' initial enthusiasm and questions going into the school year.
- You can start the year with baseline data about the general excitement and concerns your families share.
- Inviting families to voice any praise or questions they have, and maintaining that consistent, open line of communication serves to strengthen your reliability in your parents' eyes.



Want More?

Curious to know more back to school trends?

Check out these summaries of school staff feedback trends from last year and the 2021-22 school year.

If you are a current Possip Partner, a few words final words of advice:



Your first Pulse Check will most likely be one with the greatest response rate since it will capitalize on that beginning of the year excitement. Use that as an opportunity to really listen to what parents are excited about and what they are confused about. Resist the temptation to sway their perceptions with a Bonus Question in this first survey - or, use it to specifically ask about an upcoming beginning of year event, like their availability or preferred days and times. Don't ask about car lines. Parents will let you know if they had issues with your car line procedure without you needing to ask!

Not a Possip Partner? [Click here](#) to contact us!