

# **Evaluating School Communications and Community Platforms: A Comprehensive Guide for Leadership Teams**



**Classlist**

# Evaluating School Communications and Community Platforms: A Comprehensive Guide for Leadership Teams

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## Introduction

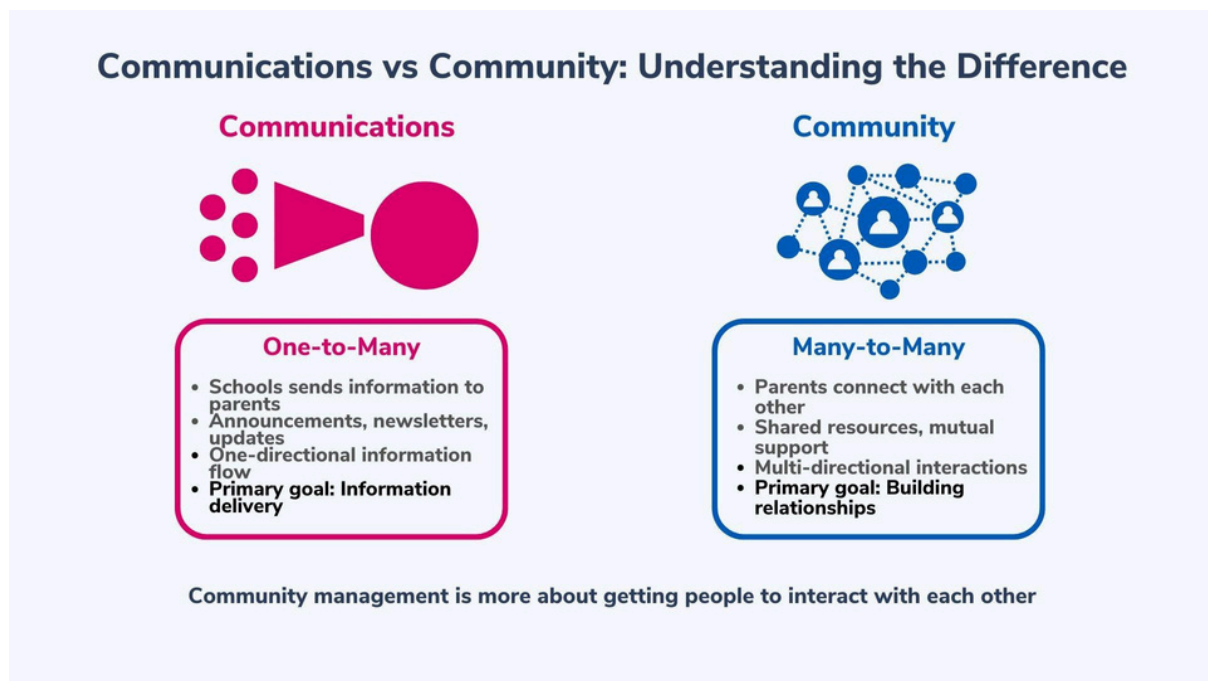
Making informed decisions about your school's digital platforms is critical to achieving your strategic goals. This guide provides a structured approach to evaluating both communication platforms and community platforms, recognising that these serve distinct purposes and require different features. Understanding this fundamental distinction is essential for selecting the right tools to meet your school's specific needs.

## Understanding the Fundamental Difference

Before evaluating any platform, it's essential to understand the key distinction:

**Communication Platforms** are primarily designed for one-directional or one-to-many information sharing. They help schools disseminate announcements, updates, and resources efficiently.

**Community Platforms** are designed to facilitate many-to-many interactions, enabling parents to connect with each other, volunteer, organize events, and build relationships.





## Part 1: Evaluating Communication Platforms

### Core Requirements Checklist

#### User Experience & Accessibility

- Intuitive interface for staff with minimal training required
- Mobile-friendly design
- Accessible to users with disabilities
- Available in multiple languages (if relevant to your school community)
- Single sign-on capabilities

#### Content Management

- Easy creation and scheduling of messages
- Support for multimedia content (images, videos, documents)
- Templates for consistent messaging
- Ability to target specific audience segments
- Content approval workflows

#### Distribution Capabilities

- Multi-channel distribution (email, SMS, app notifications)
- Emergency notification capabilities
- Scheduling options
- Message priority settings
- Delivery confirmation

#### Integration

- Integration with your Student Information System
- Integration with your school calendar
- Integration with your learning management system
- API availability for custom integrations

## **Analytics & Reporting**

- Message open and click-through rates
- User engagement metrics
- Custom reporting capabilities
- Data export options

## **Administration & Security**

- Role-based access controls
- GDPR compliance
- Data storage and retention policies
- Secure data transmission (encryption)
- Regular security updates

## **Key Questions to Ask Vendors**

1. How does your platform handle urgent communications?
2. What training and support do you provide during implementation?
3. How does your platform maintain data accuracy when syncing with our SIS?
4. What distinguishes your platform from competitors in the education communication space?
5. Can you provide case studies from similar schools using your platform?
6. What is your product roadmap for the next 12-24 months?
7. What is your pricing model, and are there any additional costs we should be aware of?



## Part 2: Evaluating Community Platforms

### Determining Your Community Model

Before selecting a community platform, identify which community model aligns with your school's goals:

#### Support Community

- Primary goal: Save staff time and extend support capacity
- Key metrics: Case deflection, reduced inquiries to office staff
- Ideal for: Schools with limited administrative resources and high parent inquiry volume.

#### Advocacy Community

- Primary goal: Enhance brand reputation and attract new families
- Key metrics: New parent inquiries, event attendance, parent recommendations
- Ideal for: Schools focused on enrollment growth or in competitive markets

#### Collaborative Community

- Primary goal: Build strong parent relationships and increase engagement
- Key metrics: Volunteer participation, fundraising success, parent satisfaction
- Ideal for: Schools with strong parent involvement or international schools

### Core Requirements Checklist

#### For All Community Models

- Secure, GDPR-compliant access for all parents
- Forum or feed format where parents can post and reply
- Mobile-friendly interface
- Searchable posts and announcements
- Effective moderation tools
- User management capabilities

### **Additional Requirements for Advocacy Communities**

- Interest group creation
- Event management tools Public-facing community
- showcase/website page
- Volunteer sign-up functionality
- Ambassador programme features
- Community analytics

### **Additional Requirements for Collaborative Communities**

- Direct messaging capabilities
- Profile settings showing members' skills/interests
- Resource sharing tools
- Marketplace for exchanging uniforms and equipment
- Calendar integration
- Advanced analytics to identify key contributors

### **Key Questions to Ask Vendors**

1. How does your platform facilitate parent-to-parent connections?
2. What moderation tools do you provide to ensure appropriate content?
3. How does your platform help identify and nurture parent advocates?
4. What features support volunteer management and recognition?
5. How does your platform measure and report on community engagement?
6. What security measures protect parent data?
7. How easily can we organise parent groups by interest, class, or location?
8. What support do you provide for community managers or administrators?

## Implementation



## Part 3: Implementation Considerations

### Change Management

- Develop a clear implementation timeline
- Create a communication plan for introducing new platforms
- Identify champions within your staff to support adoption
- Provide training for different user groups
- Consider phased rollout to minimise disruption

### Success Metrics

#### For Communication Platforms:

- Message delivery rates
- Open and engagement rates
- Staff time saved
- User satisfaction scores
- Reduction in communication errors

#### For Support Communities:

- Case deflection (questions answered by community)
- Reduced office inquiries
- Active user percentage
- Resolution time for parent questions

#### For Advocacy Communities:

- New parent inquiries attributed to word-of-mouth
- Event attendance
- Ambassador program participation
- Positive reviews or testimonials generated

### **For Collaborative Communities:**

- Volunteer participation rates
- Fundraising results
- Parent satisfaction scores
- Resource sharing activity
- Event organisation and attendance

### **Ongoing Evaluation**

Schedule regular reviews of your platforms:

- Quarterly: Usage statistics and staff feedback
- Annually: Comprehensive review against strategic goals
- Bi-annually: Vendor performance and market alternatives

## Evaluation



## Part 4: Platform Evaluation Worksheet

Use this worksheet to score potential platforms during your evaluation process.

### Communication Platform Evaluation

| Feature Category          | Weight (%) | Platform A | Platform B | Platform C |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| User Experience           | 20         |            |            |            |
| Content Management        | 20         |            |            |            |
| Distribution Capabilities | 20         |            |            |            |
| Integration               | 15         |            |            |            |
| Analytics                 | 15         |            |            |            |
| Security                  | 10         |            |            |            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>100</b> |            |            |            |

### Community Platform Evaluation

| Feature Category        | Weight (%) | Platform A | Platform B | Platform C |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Core Requirements       | 25         |            |            |            |
| Model-Specific Features | 25         |            |            |            |
| User Experience         | 15         |            |            |            |
| Moderation Tools        | 15         |            |            |            |
| Analytics               | 10         |            |            |            |
| Security & Privacy      | 10         |            |            |            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>100</b> |            |            |            |

## Conclusion

Selecting the right platforms for your school requires careful consideration of your specific needs and goals. By recognising the distinct purposes of communication and community platforms, you can choose specialised tools that excel at their intended functions rather than compromising with all-in-one solutions.

Remember that the most successful digital strategy will:

- Align with your school's overall strategic objectives
- Address the specific needs of your school community
- Balance functionality with ease of use
- Consider both immediate requirements and future scalability
- Provide measurable return on investment

By following this evaluation framework, your leadership team can make informed decisions that strengthen your school's communication capabilities while building a vibrant, engaged community.