

Catlin Tucker

3 Tech Strategies to Keep Parents in Sync with School

Here are three easy ways to keep parents engaged and informed.

Each school year brings a tidal wave of changes for families: new teachers, new expectations, and new procedures. Teachers can leverage technology to help families—both students and their parents—transition more smoothly into the new school year. Here are three ways to do that.

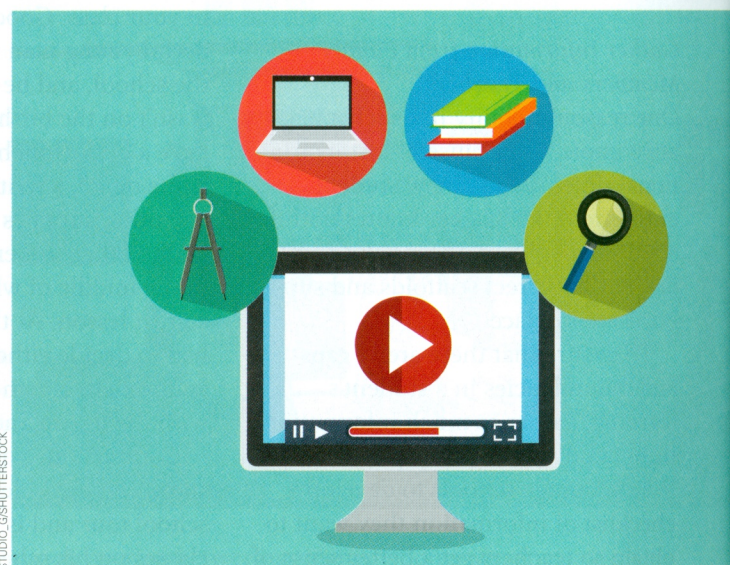
1. Flip Your Back-to-School Night

Most of my students' parents "meet" me for the first time online. I record a short video introduction so they can learn about my experience and teaching philosophy, then I record a screencast taking them on a virtual tour of our class website. I highlight the resources available on our website, such as the daily agenda, a list of frequently used online resources, and a link to my YouTube playlists, where all my vocabulary, writing, and grammar videos live.

At the end of the video, I share a shortened, customized bit.ly link that directs parents to a Google survey that asks them questions like, Which is your preferred mode of communication? Does your student have access to a computer and the internet at home? Is there anything I should know about your student to better support him or her?

Creating this flipped video is a relatively quick process. I record the introduction and screencast using QuickTime, a free program on my Mac. Then I pull those two recordings together in iMovie, another Mac program, and export the finished video to YouTube. Teachers using a PC can explore video recording tools like Screencast-O-matic or Camtasia. For those using Chromebooks, I'd suggest Screencastify, a Chrome extension.

I send my new parents an email one week before back-to-school night, reminding them of the date and time of the event, and share the link to the video. This is beneficial for a few reasons. One,



many of my students' parents cannot attend back-to-school night because of work or scheduling conflicts, so this gives them a chance to feel included. Two, back-to-school night is often a blur even for those who do attend, so having a video recording of the most salient points is a helpful resource for families who may need to revisit the information later. Third, it introduces my students' parents to a strategy I'll be using with their children.

Parents who watch my video experience the value of the flipped classroom model. They can control the time, place, and pace of their virtual back-to-school night experience. Parents who watch the video *and* attend the event come prepared with questions that make the evening more valuable.

2. Get Resourceful about Texting

I use Remind, a real-time messaging service for schools, to send class announcements, start group conversations, and plan field trips. Remind

provides an easy avenue for communication outside of class. I can text students with quick updates and reminders, and they can ask questions as they work at home.

I've found that Remind is also a great tool for communicating with parents, so I decided to create a parent group on Remind to make communicating with them easier, too. I send parents text messages to remind them of important due dates for large-scale assignments and projects, request chaperones for field trips, and alert them to important events like SAT testing dates. I prefer using this quick and convenient avenue to contact parents as opposed to crafting an email or calling home. Text messages are easier for me, and I find that my parents respond more readily via text, probably because it is more convenient for them too.

3. Host Student-Led Technology Nights for Parents

I've had several parents tell me how much they appreciate the technology we use in class. But many of them also feel powerless to support their children because they are not well versed in tools such as Google Docs, website creators, or video production tools.

In an effort to bridge the tech gap between parent and student, I began organizing student-led technology trainings for parents. Students work collaboratively—both in class and online outside of class—to create the topics and content for each training. The trainings are held two evenings each semester.

For the first training, called "Get to Know Google Drive & Docs," pairs of students with Chromebooks were stationed all over the room. As parents arrived, students would work with them to explain Google Drive and

create a Gmail account for them. They then introduced a Google Doc scavenger hunt that required parents to make a copy of the original document, then use the various tools inside the Google Doc to complete an activity. It was designed to be an engaging way to learn about Docs.

I loved seeing my students in the role of the teacher. They were patient and attentive as they worked with parents. I made the mistake of approaching a group to make a suggestion and was respectfully informed by a student, "It's OK. We've got this, Tucker."

After the event, I received text messages from parents thanking me for organizing the technology training. One parent said, "Tonight was great! So impressed by the students. Thrilled

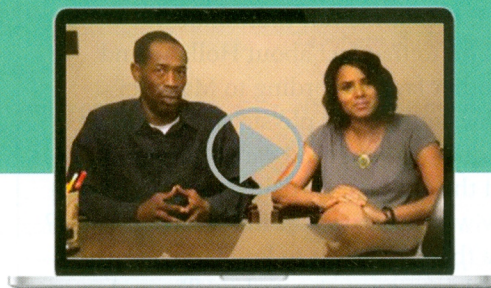
to finally understand how to use my Google Drive."

The more I use technology to communicate with and include parents, the more supportive they are of the work we are doing. Just as we teach our students, teachers also have to help parents see the value of using technology to learn. **EL**

Catlin Tucker is a teacher, international trainer, speaker, and bestselling author. Her most recent books are *Blended Learning in Action* (Corwin, 2016) and *Creatively Teach the Common Core Literacy Standards with Technology* (Corwin, 2015). She blogs at Catlintucker.com. Follow her on Twitter @Catlin_Tucker.



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