



Date: August 3, 2023
To: All Principals
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Recipients: All Principals
Subject: TalkingPoints – New Two-Way Family Communication Platform

What's Changing?

To provide consistency and opportunities for engagement for all families, the district has adopted a new platform, for all non-charter schools, called "TalkingPoints" after piloting it last year. TalkingPoints is a two-way multilingual family engagement platform that allows school administrators, instructional staff and other key staff to send messages to parents/guardians who receive them in their home languages as text messages or through the parent mobile application. Parents/guardians can reply to the message they receive in their home languages, because TalkingPoints will translate it into English for staff. TalkingPoints supports over 145 languages, including the primary languages in OCPS. Please view the [introductory video](#), [infographic](#), and [one-pager](#) for more information. **Please share the change with teachers during pre-planning week. Schools should plan for teachers to send an introductory message to families and communicate back-to-school information for their class. After the first week of school, it is a best practice for teachers and other school staff to continue to send a balance of general announcements, reminders and individual messages.**

Background

Family engagement is more than twice as predictive of students' success as socioeconomic status. Current research and best practices for family engagement indicate the need for districts to establish effective two-way communication with parents/guardians of students using a variety of media, including SMS text messaging. To be considered two-way, communication must have an opportunity to be continuous. The spring 2023 OCPS Communications Survey indicates that parents/guardians who responded prefer receiving classroom communication via text message over phone, email, or planner.

Current adopted district communication platforms either do not allow for two-way communication (i.e. School Messenger, Skyward Family Access) and/or do not support SMS text messaging (i.e. Canvas Parent InBox), and/or do not support multilingual translation (i.e. Canvas Parent InBox). As a result, school leaders and individual teachers have used a variety of free or freemium model (i.e. Remind, Class Dojo, Bloomz, etc.) to fill the gap of a district-adopted two-way communication system in past school years. This led to inconsistency among schools and confusion for families. There are also significant risks to using free or freemium platforms that have not been approved through the OCPS software request process, which requires a data sharing agreement be in place. Risks to using free or freemium software include, but are not limited to, the district's inability to archive/view past messages and respond to public records requests, the vendor's ability to share/sell student information without consent, and the use of targeted



ads. Schools should avoid using free/freemium platforms (i.e. Remind, Class Dojo, etc.) moving forward because they will no longer be accessible on the OCPS network AFTER this school year.

TalkingPoints Access

TalkingPoints is rostered and accessible to school administrators and instructional staff through Launchpad, or using the optional mobile application, TalkingPoints for Teachers. Select classified staff will also be able to access TalkingPoints directly on the platform homepage, <https://talkingpts.org/>. All parents/guardians listed as contact 1 or 2 in Skyward are automatically opted-in to TalkingPoints and will be able to receive SMS text messages without the need to sign-up. Staff office hours have been set automatically, to prevent notifications from being received from 4 P.M. to 8 A.M. Staff can adjust the set office hours to reflect their unique start and end time and set up auto-reply, as desired.

TalkingPoints Training Resources

School Administrators: Many school administrators will be able to use TalkingPoints out-of-the-box with no training. However, additional support will be available through [live, daily pre-planning support sessions](#)- Click on **Family Engagement tab**. Additional on-demand resources can be found below.

- [Pre-Recorded Training for School Admin](#)
- [School Admin Analytics Dashboard](#)

Instructional Staff: Many instructional staff will also be able to use TalkingPoints out-of-the-box with no training. However, additional support will be available through [live, daily pre-planning support sessions](#)- **Family Engagement tab**. Additional on-demand resources can be found below.

- [Pre-Recorded Training for School Teachers](#)

TalkingPoints Informational Resources

- [TalkingPoints & SchoolMessenger](#) | [TalkingPoints & Class Dojo Comparison](#)
- [TalkingPoints Supported Languages](#)

TalkingPoints Communication Timeline

- A Connect Orange voicemail and email was sent to all OCPS parents/guardians at non-charter schools about the new TalkingPoints platform on **Tuesday, August 1, 2023**.
- An Instructional-ALL email about the use of TalkingPoints will be sent on **Friday, August 4, 2023**.
- An introductory SMS text message to all parents/guardians at non-charter schools from TalkingPoints will be sent on **Saturday, August 5, 2023**.
- School administrators can schedule an introductory announcement to families about Back to School events on **Sunday, August 6, 2023**.
- Elementary grade level classroom teachers should send an introductory message to families on **Monday, August 7, 2023**. School administrators should work with staff to stagger introductory text messages from elementary elective teachers and key support staff on **August 8 and 9, 2023**. Introductory message templates are available in TalkingPoints.
- K-8, middle and high school principals should work with core teachers to stagger introductory messages from **Thursday, August 10 through Friday, August 18, 2023**. Introductory message templates are available in TalkingPoints.

Contact Mariel Milano, Director Family Engagement and Digital Outreach at mariel.milano@ocps.net with additional questions.



TALKING POINTS

1. **Question: Is the district requiring teachers to use Talking Points?**

Response: No. OCPS instructional staff can continue to converse and collaborate with our families using phone calls, emails, MS Teams meetings, and Canvas InBox messages if they do not want to exchange two-way text-based messages with parents and guardians.

If a staff member is not using TalkingPoints and an OCPS parent or guardian initiates a message with them, they will be alerted to a new message in the TalkingPoints daily summary that is delivered to their OCPS email address. This is similar to the Canvas notifications email that staff are already familiar with. The daily summary includes a link to the message in the TalkingPoints platform for the staff member to review. If the staff member does not want to respond to the message in TalkingPoints, they can use the parent phone number provided next to the message or email to respond to the parent, being mindful of the need for translation, if the parent's home language is not their own.

2. **Question: Can teachers use ClassDojo?**

Response: Put simply, ClassDojo is not blocked on the OCPS wireless network this school year to ease the transition and adoption of a new platform. That said teachers should only use software that has been approved through the OCPS software request process to ensure the protection of student data and personally identifiable information. **This is no data sharing agreement in place between Class Dojo and OCPS.** To mitigate these risks, Schools and teachers should avoid using free/freemium two-way communication platforms, like Class Dojo, moving forward because they will no longer be accessible on the OCPS network AFTER this school year.

Additional Background for OCPS Management: Class Dojo has never been an approved software in OCPS and management direction has been for schools and teachers to use only approved software. Class Dojo is not supported by the district. However, school leaders and individual teachers have used a variety of free or freemium model platforms, like Class Dojo, to fill the gap of a district-adopted two-way text messaging platform between staff and families in past school years. This led to inconsistency among schools, confusion for families, and security risks.

In some cases, the OCPS software request process can be viewed as more of a procedural hurdle for schools than anything else. That is not the case here, there are significant risks to using free or freemium two-way communication platforms that have not been approved through the OCPS software request process, which requires a student data sharing agreement be in place. Risks to using free or freemium software include, but are not limited to, staff sharing student directory information and student personally identifiable information, staff sharing photos and videos of students, the district's inability to archive/view past messages between staff and families to respond to public records requests, the vendor's ability to share/sell student information without

consent, the use of targeted ads, and the district's inability to delete student data. These were all considerations when deciding to establish a contact with TalkingPoints.

*Class Dojo specifically asks teachers and/or school leaders to share **student's first and last name, grade, and in some cases date of birth**. Student first and last name is considered directory information which families need to provide consent to share in an annual form for the district . Date of birth is personally identifiable information which staff is prohibited for sharing with an outside vendor that we do not have a data sharing agreement with.*

*Once a ClassDojo account is created, staff can post photos and videos of students to a class or school story. Class Story is a feature that teachers can use to **share photos, videos, with all of the parents connected to that class**. School Story allows photos, videos to be shared of students to be shared with all of the parents connected to the school. The sharing of photos and videos with other parents happens without the consent provided by families in the annual Model Release Form. Additionally, to invite parents, teachers and schools have the option to provide the company with all parent's email addresses without parent consent. Once provided Class Dojo, archives the information and does not delete any information, even after a teacher deletes their account without a school district expressly requesting it. This includes any content uploaded, including student photos and videos, on the Class Story or School Story or in messaging with parents.*

An additional risk is that staff can invite additional family members not listed as parents or guardians in Skyward to Class Dojo who may or may not have a legal right to get information about the child.

*These risks stand in direct contrast to the use of **TalkingPoints** which includes an executed contract with signed data sharing agreement in place that provides districts ownership of the data and automatic deletion of student data and accounts based on withdrawal date. Staff can only message with the legal guardians of students listed in Skyward which are updated nightly through the Classlink One Roster sync. Additionally, TalkingPoints intentionally has no class wall, school wall, or group messaging feature or the ability to share student photos and videos with anyone other than the child's assigned guardians in Skyward.*

7. Question: Can the principal choose between ClassDojo or TalkingPoints?

***Response:** Management direction has been for schools and teachers to use only approved software. ClassDojo is not an OCPS approved software and does not have a data sharing agreement in place. While I understand that some school leaders have signed up to be a ClassDojo School in the past, school leaders have never been permitted to upload student rosters to an external vendor, especially those without a signed data sharing agreement in place. I would not advise a school principal to choose to use ClassDojo even if TalkingPoints had never been procured.*

8. Question: Do all instructional staff have the app on their LaunchPad?

Response: The TalkingPoints icon was deployed to all Instructional Staff on their LaunchPad and is listed in the "OCPS Apps" folder. However, there are a few groups of instructional staff such as Social Workers which we are manually adding accounts for because they do not typically get included in rostering for other instructional platforms. This will be complete by Thursday. Additionally, staff can access the platform directly at <https://talkingpts.org> where they can use the login with Google function and their OCPS email address to sync with the OCPS account.

9. **Question: Can the app be used with Clubs?**

Response: Yes, school admin has the ability to create custom school groups for clubs and other needs which can be assigned to one or more staff members enabling them to message the parents or guardians of students in the custom group. Teachers can also create custom groups of students who are in their courses. For example, an elementary music teacher can create a custom group on their own of students who are in the classes but are also in an afterschool chorus club. Additionally, school administrators can add the "Non-Rostered Staff" role to any teacher which would give them the ability to message families of students in a grade level, such as a class sponsor, or upload a CSV file of students or search the school directory to create a custom group of students in a club.

10. **Question: Is there a document with instructions?**

Response: I am interpreting this question to mean a document with instructions on how to use the platform. Yes, there is. Please click [here](#) to access the help guides for Teachers and Staff. These will be able be accessible under "Digital Support for Teachers" on Launchpad. Help guides and were also provided for teachers in Pre-Planning Support Sessions. Please click [here](#) to access.