**BUENA VISTA/PARALLON HACK-A-THON PROJECT CHARTER**

**PROJECT TITLE AND DESCRIPTION:**

**BUENA VISTA FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TOOL BUILD**

Upon an internal assessment of our family engagement practices, Buena Vista staff discovered that our current communication tools with families are not sufficiently effective, and do not meet the unique needs of our families. When Parallon (Buena Vista’s largest school partner) shared that they would like to support Buena Vista via their Hack-A-Thon event, Buena Vista leadership proposed an idea for a new Family Engagement tool. This tool would allow Buena Vista teachers and administration to create ongoing dialogues with families via text messaging (based on the concept of the Remind app used by other MNPS schools). Additionally, this tool would protect teachers’ privacy by allowing teachers to do this WITHOUT the use (and provision) of their personal cell phone numbers.

Buena Vista and Parallon staff have been working collectively to develop this program so that it is customized to meet the needs of Buena Vista staff and the unique population of families it serves. Parallon staff have gathered all needed requirements and plan to execute the program build during HCA’s Hack-A-Thon event on April 12 and 13.

**PROJECT ROLES:**

**Buena Vista Elementary School Collaborators:**

* Megan McGuire, Community Achieves Site Manager (Lead)
* Myra Taylor, Principal

**Parallon Collaborators:**

* Damon Cerveny, Consulting Application Engineer (Lead)
* Scott Warren, VP IT Operations and Technical Services
* March Doran, Consulting Business Analyst
* Jay Thatcher, Consultant Graphic Designer

**PROJECT PURPOSE:**

This year, MNPS created a unique Key Performance Indicators (KPI) document for each school. One of the primary KPIs assigned to Buena Vista Elementary School is Family Engagement – specifically to increase the number of opportunities partners have to partner academically with the school. In order to make meaningful impact within this KPI, Buena Vista did an internal assessment of current communication practices.

Currently, Buena Vista relies on the use of paper flyers and the MNPS ParentLink callout system to communicate with families on a school-wide level. However, we know that both methods face challenges. The first relies on a young student to put the flyer in his/her backpack, take it home, and finally show his/her parent the information. It also assumes that the parent/guardian at home has the ability to read and understand the information presented, which may not be true for all of our families.

In assessing the call-out system, we know that 63 of the phone numbers we have for families are deactivated or no longer in use. Only 40 percent of our families are receiving the callout messages.

Currently, only 9 of our families are using the MNPS Family Portal. We’ve had two events explaining and promoting the Portal this year, but the feedback from our families is that it’s “hard to understand,” and that they do not have a computer OR internet at home to access the site.

**Currently, we are considered a “100 percent Economically Disadvantaged school”. Our families do not have consistent access to technology or the internet. Given this, it is CRITICAL that we change our family engagement practices to suit the needs of our unique families. Not the other way around.**

Accordingly, we have asked our families how they prefer the school to communicate with them. On a survey conducted in September 2017; **63.2 percent of 187 responders said that they prefer text messages as the PRIMARY mode of communication** **with the school.** Other responses were split between flyers/newsletter, callouts, emails, and in-person contact. However, text messaging was overwhelmingly chosen compared to all other methods.

Currently, nearly all of our staff members use their personal cell phone numbers to text with our families. Teachers concede that it is not ideal from a privacy/boundaries perspective, however, they know and believe that the needs of our families/students come first. While we applaud our teachers’ commitment to family engagement, we also know that there is a better way to facilitate this communication that also protects our teachers’ privacy/time.

Initially, Buena Vista looked at purchasing the Remind App for Schools. However, we found that it was expensive and that we were unclear if data exchanged between parties would be safe. The program that Parallon is building for Buena Vista is based upon the concept of the Remind App, but is created specific to Buena Vista with the safety and security of our families at the forefront.

**This program will allow administrators to send messages out via text to all of our families – doing so from a web-based service that does not require the use of a personal device. It allows teachers to send messages to whole-class or individual parents from a web-based service they can access from their laptops. These messages go directly into the messages log of our families’ cell phones, but does not have a specific phone number attached to it. Families can reply and dialogue can be created throughout the day.**

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES/BENEFITS**

Buena Vista staff firmly believes that this program will help our school increase the number of opportunities parents have to partner academically with the school, as tasked to us by MNPS as part of our KPI Document. Our current communication tools are not sufficiently meeting the needs of our families. In order to create strong partnerships with parents, we must first have strong communication. To have strong communication, we must do so in the manner that they have chosen, which is text messaging.

As a result of this program, we have set a goal to have 20 percent HIGHER attendance at school events created for Family Engagement. Additionally, we have set a goal to reach 60 percent of families with the addition of this tool. As mentioned earlier, we are currently only reaching 40 percent of families with the callout system.

Additionally, this tool will serve our teachers and staff. Teachers will no longer need to give out their personal cell phone numbers. They won’t have to have their cell phones out in class, but can use their MNPS provided laptop to check and respond to parent messages throughout the day as they see fit/have time. This tool has been introduced to teachers and received extremely positive feedback.

**TIMELINE:**

* The HCA Hack-A-Thon takes place on April 12th and 13th
* Buena Vista will rollout the product as a pilot program in May
* If successful, Buena Vista will do a full-scale rollout (with parent/staff training) for the 2018-2019 school year.