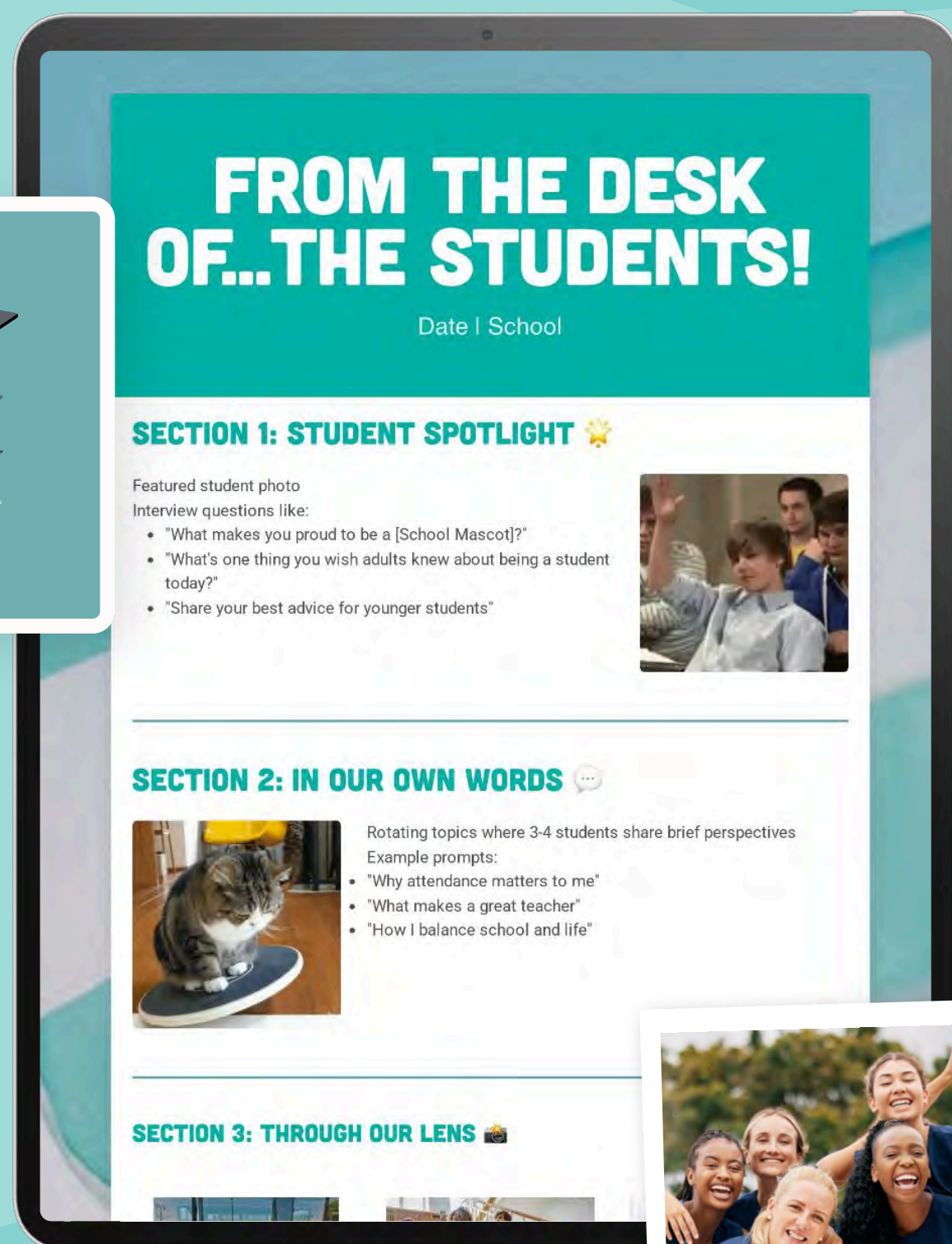🔥 **smore**

A SchoolStatus Company

Why Student Voices Should Drive School Communications

A practical guide for building stronger connections with middle & high school students through inclusive communication

FROM THE DESK OF...THE STUDENTS!

Date | School

SECTION 1: STUDENT SPOTLIGHT 🌟

Featured student photo
Interview questions like:
- "What makes you proud to be a [School Mascot]?"
- "What's one thing you wish adults knew about being a student today?"
- "Share your best advice for younger students"

SECTION 2: IN OUR OWN WORDS 💬

Rotating topics where 3-4 students share brief perspectives
Example prompts:
- "Why attendance matters to me"
- "What makes a great teacher"
- "How I balance school and life"

SECTION 3: THROUGH OUR LENS 📸

The newsletter that changed everything

Imagine this: A high school creates two versions of their weekly newsletter. One for families, and for the first time, one designed specifically for students. The student version includes the same important announcements plus student-submitted photos from last week's football game, a "Student Spotlight" feature written by peers, and quick polls about upcoming spirit week themes.

The result? More students decide to join the group creating the newsletters, giving them a reason to come to school and improving ADA; more students feel welcome at events, increasing event participation, and something unexpected: Parents report feeling more informed because their teenagers are actually talking about what's happening at school.

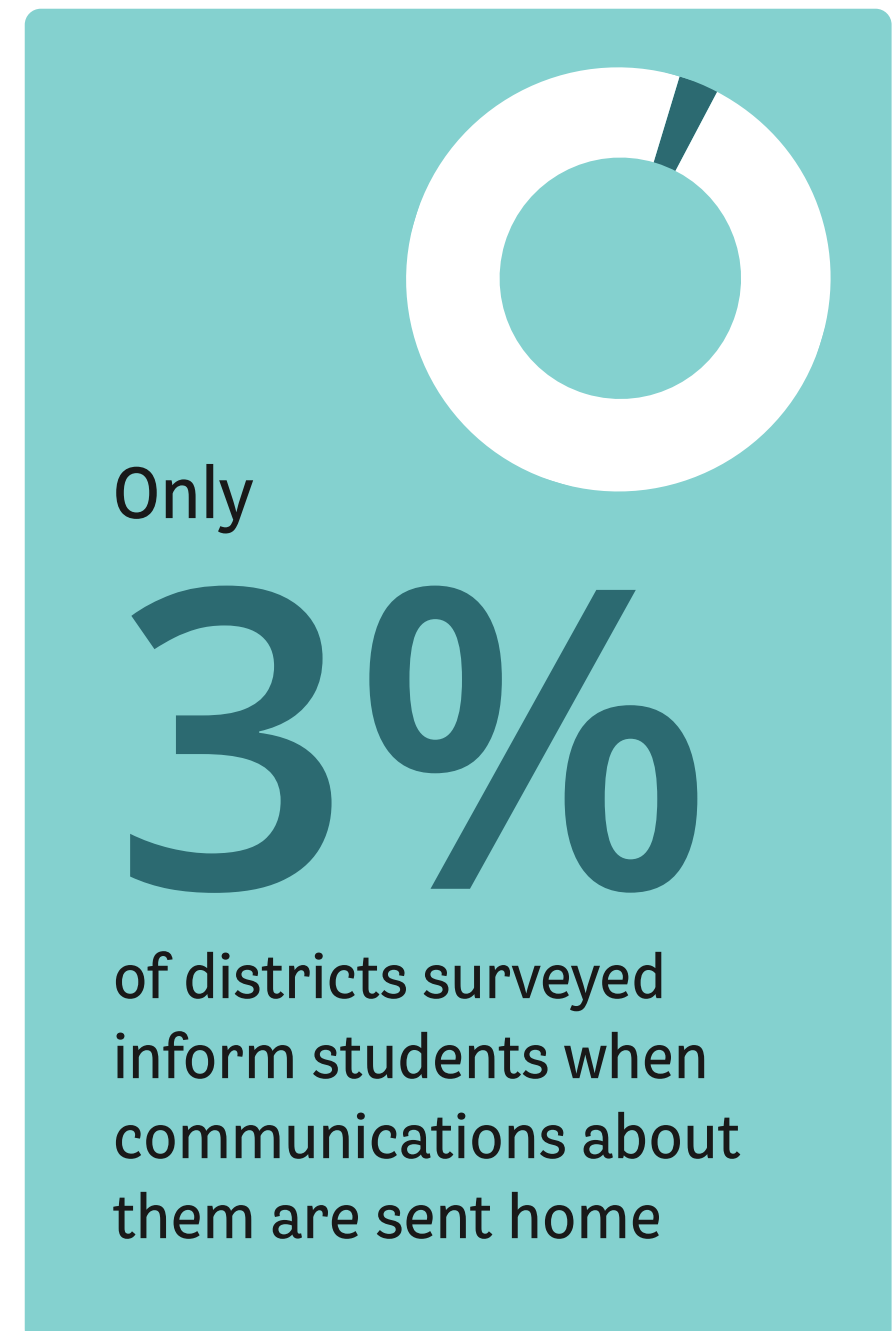This is what happens when districts start communicating with students directly

# New research reveals a critical communication gap

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) recently released new data on K-12 communication practices, revealing a striking disconnect: while 97% of survey respondents regularly communicate with families about student progress, attendance, and behavior, only 3% of respondents say they always inform students when communications go home about them.

This gap becomes even more pronounced when we look at district-wide communications. Newsletters about school policies, announcements about new programs, and messages about community events typically reach families but bypass the students who are most affected by these decisions.

Only
3%
of districts surveyed inform students when communications about them are sent home

Only
42%
of students feel like part of their school community

Just
22%
report that their teachers understand their lives outside of school

Research from YouthTruth reinforces how critical this disconnect has become. Their data shows that only 42% of students feel like part of their school community, and just 22% report that their teachers understand their lives outside of school. These numbers represent a concerning decline from pre-pandemic levels and highlight the urgent need for more direct, meaningful connections between schools and students.

When we exclude students from our communication strategy, we're essentially telling them they're subjects to be discussed rather than community members to be engaged.

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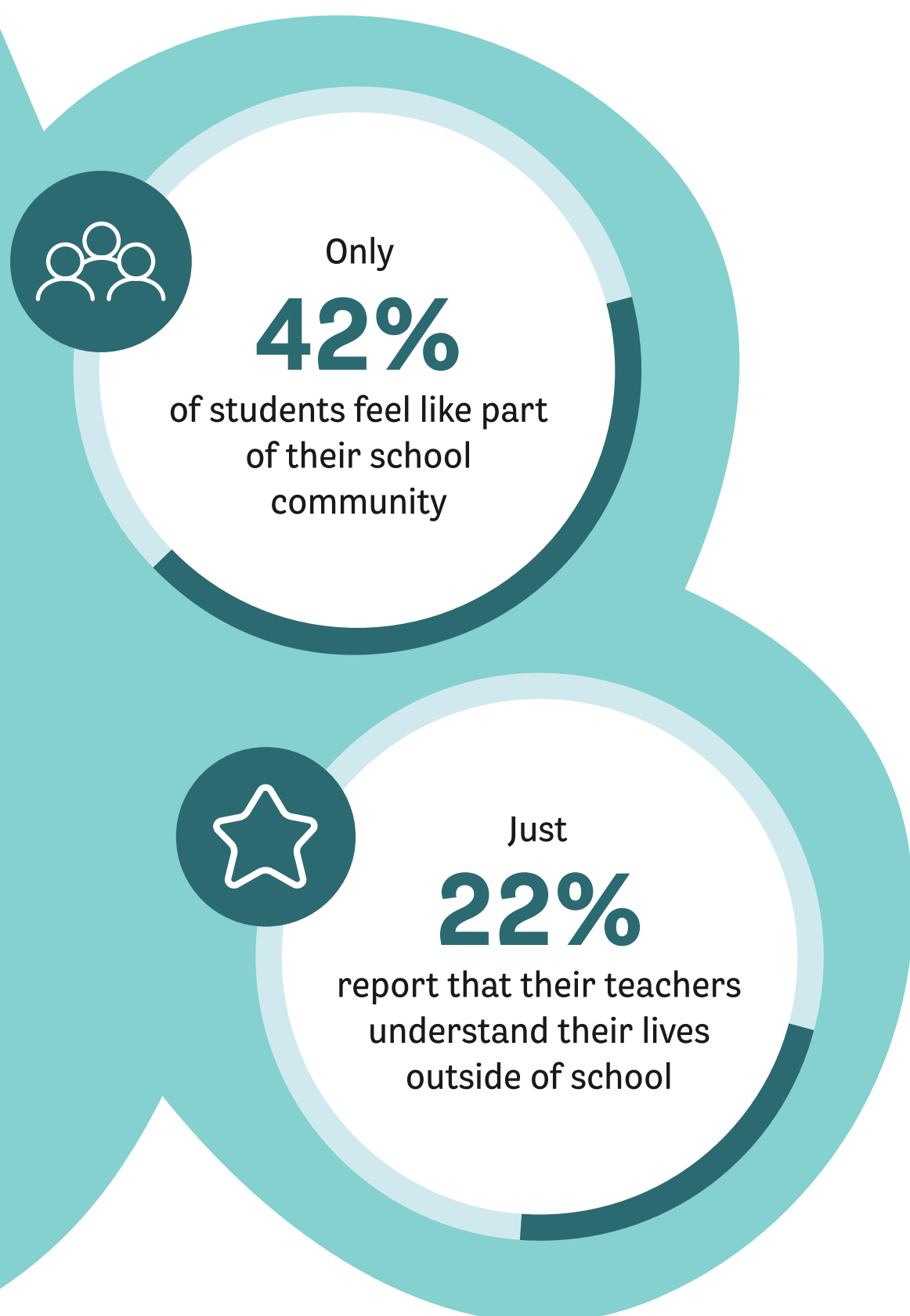
What happens when students become storytellers

When students contribute to school communications, they naturally create content that resonates with their peers. The result is authentic, relevant, and visual storytelling that connects in ways adult-created content rarely achieves. **This peer-to-peer connection is far more powerful than adults trying to guess what students want to see.**

Students who participate in creating school communications consistently produce content that reflects their lived experiences. They showcase real moments from their school day, use language that feels genuine to their peers, and highlight the events and achievements that actually matter to the student body. This authentic approach transforms standard school updates into compelling narratives that students actually read and share.

The evidence for student-centered communication

The NSPRA data provides compelling evidence for including students in communication strategies:

Building Belonging: 59% of communication professionals surveyed believe first-person student storytelling increases students' sense of belonging. When students see their peers' voices and experiences reflected in official communications, they understand that their own perspectives matter.

Improving Attendance: 56% of respondents report that student involvement in communications improves attendance rates. This connection makes intuitive sense: students who feel connected to their school community through inclusive communication are more likely to show up.

Strengthening Family Engagement: 45% of communication professionals see improved family engagement when students are involved in district communications. When students feel connected to their school community, they're more likely to share positive information with their families and advocate for school involvement.
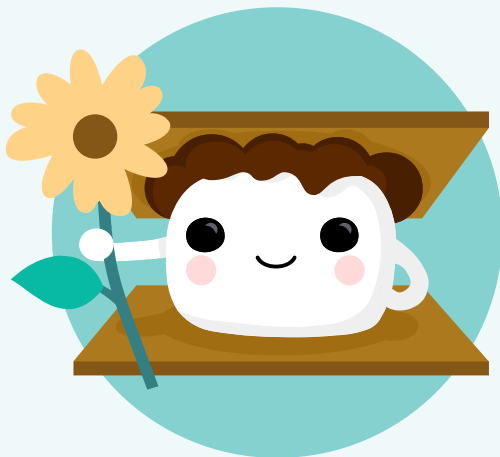
The Missed Opportunity: Despite these benefits, only 8% of districts surveyed ask students about their communication preferences. This represents a massive gap in understanding how to effectively reach and engage student audiences.

The academic research supporting student voice

Beyond the NSPRA findings, educational research consistently demonstrates the power of student voice:

YouthTruth's multi-year studies show that students who feel heard by their schools report higher engagement in learning and more positive school experiences. The organization's data reveals that student voice correlates strongly with academic motivation and school connectedness.

Research from Penn State examining student voice initiatives found that when students have meaningful opportunities to contribute to school decisions and communications, academic engagement improves significantly. The key finding: responsiveness matters most. When students see that their input leads to action, their investment in school increases measurably.

The connection between student voice and attendance is particularly notable. When schools communicate directly with students about attendance, treating them as partners in their education rather than subjects of adult concern, students are more likely to understand and take ownership of their attendance patterns.

Transform your communications:
practical strategies that work

Ready to make your school communications more student-centered? Here are strategies you can implement immediately:

1. Create student-specific content sections in your newsletters

Design sections specifically for student readers:

- **Student Spotlight:** Feature a different student's story each week

- **Peer Advice Column:** Let students share study tips and life hacks

- **"Did You Know?"**: Student-friendly explanations of school policies

- **Upcoming Opportunities:** Internships, clubs, and events formatted for students

Transform standard announcements into content students actually want to read!

Start using our free "From the desks of the students!" newsletter template >

2. Invite students as co-creators

Transform students from readers to contributors:

- Create a "Communications Team" as a leadership opportunity

- Establish "Student Influencers" who manage school social media accounts, bringing authentic student perspective to Instagram and TikTok

- Invite different clubs to guest-edit monthly editions of school or district newsletters

- Establish student journalism programs that contribute to official communications

- Feature student photography and artwork throughout

Students who contribute to school communications become natural ambassadors for your messages. The "student influencer" model particularly resonates with today's students, who understand social media dynamics better than most adults and can create content that genuinely connects with their peers.

3. Leverage student perspectives

Let students tell the stories that matter:

- Include student voices in attendance campaigns

- Feature student testimonials about academic programs

- Share student perspectives on school initiatives

- Highlight peer-to-peer recognition and achievements

Authentic student voices carry more weight with their peers than any adult message could.
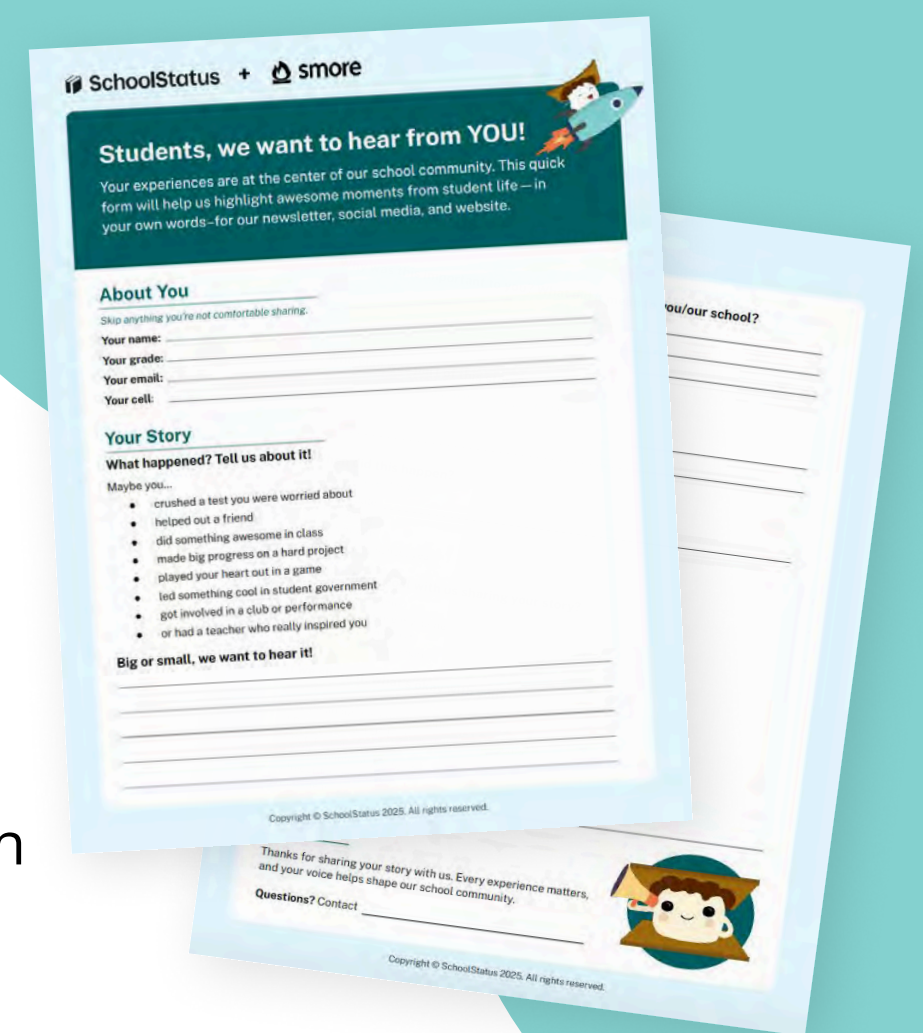
Get started with our free downloadable Student Story Share Form >

4. Meet students where they are

Make information easily accessible:

- Share communications via channels students actually use

- Create QR codes to display in physical spaces around school

- Optimize all content for mobile viewing

- Ensure students receive the same important updates as their parents

The easier you make it for students to access information, the more likely they are to engage with it.

Making the shift: your 30-day quick start plan

Week 1: Audit and prepare

- Review your current communications through a student lens
- Survey students about their communication preferences (remember, only 8% of districts currently do this)
- Identify 3-5 students interested in contributing
- Create a simple newsletter template with student sections

Download our free Student Voices Newsletter template

Week 2: Launch your pilot

- Send your first student-inclusive communication
- Include at least one student-written piece
- Share the communication with students directly
- Add a feedback mechanism for students

Week 3: Expand and iterate

- Track engagement metrics
- Add more student contributors
- Test different content formats based on student feedback
- Create a student communications team

Week 4: Systematize success

- Establish a regular student contribution process
- Create templates for common student sections
- Document what works for future consistency
- Share results with staff and celebrate early wins
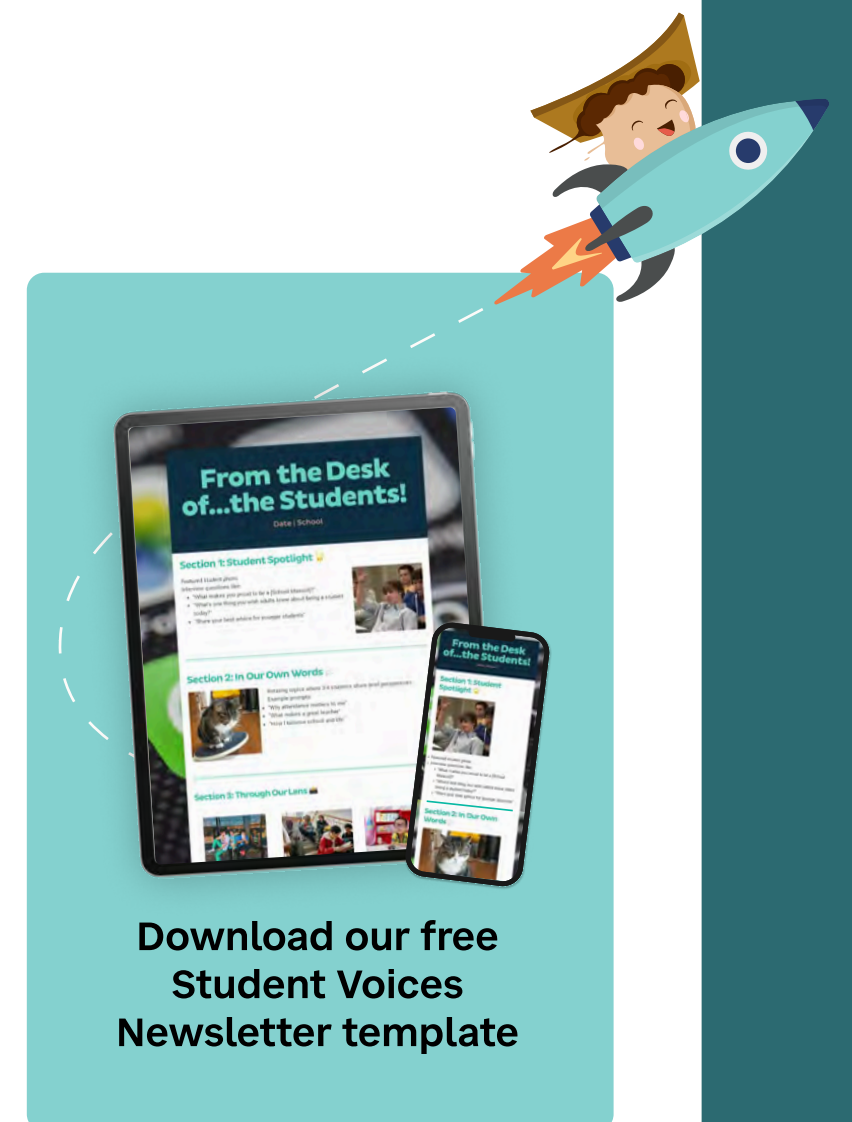
Addressing common concerns

"We have limited time for creating student content."

Start by ensuring students receive your existing communications, then gradually add student elements. Even one student quote or photo per newsletter makes a difference. Many schools find that students eagerly volunteer to create content once given the opportunity.

"How do we maintain appropriate oversight?"

Create clear guidelines and approval processes that empower students while ensuring appropriate content. Student journalism programs have successfully navigated this balance for decades. Apply those same principles to your broader communications.

"Our students seem disengaged."

Students engage when communications include content they care about: themselves and their peers. Start with student-generated content about topics that matter to them. Engagement naturally follows when students see themselves reflected in school communications

"We're worried about equity and access."

Focus on mobile-optimized formats that work on any device. Provide multiple ways to access content, including QR codes in physical spaces. Ensure all content is available in languages your students speak at home.

Building a culture of student voice

Creating student-centered communications is about more than adding student quotes to newsletters. It represents a fundamental shift in how we view students: as partners in their educational journey rather than passive recipients of adult decisions.

This shift requires:

- **Consistent commitment** to include student perspectives
- **Multiple channels** for student input and contribution
- **Genuine responsiveness** to student feedback
- **Celebration** of student contributions and achievements
- **Trust** in students' ability to contribute meaningfully

This approach creates the conditions for stronger relationships between students and staff, improved school climate, and better academic outcomes.

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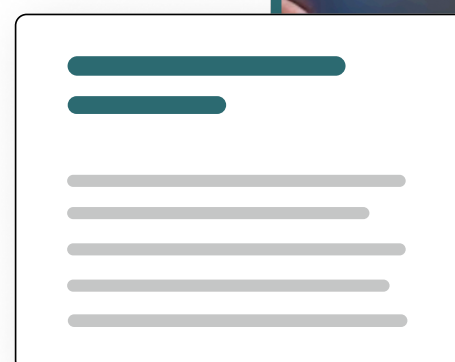
Ready to build stronger student connections?

Every communication you send is an opportunity to show students their voices are heard. When we highlight their perspectives, celebrate their achievements, and speak directly to their experiences, we're sending a powerful message: "Your story matters. Your voice shapes this school."

By centering student perspectives in our communications, we're not just improving engagement and reach—we're helping build a generation of citizens who know their voices have power.

Your students are waiting to be part of the conversation, and there are tools and strategies that make student-centered communication easier than ever before. Let's start telling their stories together.

Smore Newsletters for Teams

At Smore, we help schools and districts create engaging, on-brand newsletters that bring communities together. Our platform makes it simple to include student voices, track engagement across different audiences, and create the kind of authentic communications that students actually want to read and share.
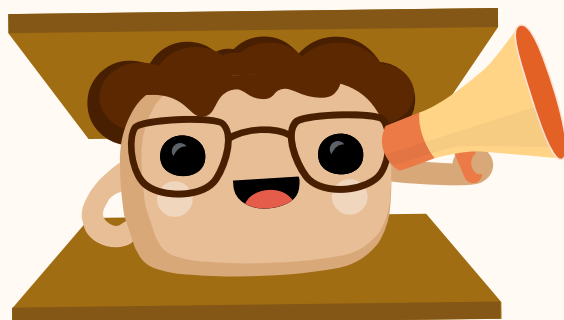
Learn more about Smore for Teams >

SchoolStatus Connect
(with Smore integration)

Smore integrates seamlessly with SchoolStatus Connect, creating a comprehensive communication ecosystem. This powerful combination allows you to:

- Send targeted texts about attendance directly to students
- Follow up with rich, visual newsletters featuring student stories
- Track engagement across all channels from a single dashboard
- Coordinate multi-channel campaigns that reinforce your message

Learn more about SchoolStatus Connect >