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School district now using ParentSquare

This fall, Baker School District launched the use of ParentSquare, which replaces the previous communication platform called Blackboard.

“We're the first district in Oregon to launch ParentSquare,” said Jason Todd, digital communications and technology coordinator for the school district.

In the previous system, Blackboard was primarily used by principals and district administration.

“It was an outdated model of communication,” Todd said. “You didn't have teachers utilizing it.”

ParentSquare expands the possibilities with communication. Teachers can send messages to their class parents, principals can send information to their school population, and administration can put out a district-wide release. Some of these communications also allow parents to reply directly to the teacher, or comment on a post. ParentSquare can also cross post information to the district's various social media platforms.

ParentSquare allows a “smart alert” message for mass communication, such as in the event of a school cancellation for snow. Rather than sending an email, text and phone call, Todd said ParentSquare uses an alternate contact only if one fails.

“If a text goes through, it isn't going to call you, too,” he said.

ParentSquare will streamline getting information to parents, especially in the case of an emergency. As an example, Todd references the lock out emergency during the 2017-2018 school year. At that time, he was sending information through Blackboard as well as updating nine different Facebook pages. Blackboard could take up to an hour to process messages to the 2,700 users, and he was constantly getting updates about the situation. ParentSquare will enable him to send out information quicker and
update Facebook pages at the same time.

“The critical piece is we can communicate with everybody in two or three minutes,” said Mark Witty, district superintendent. “When you're trying to communicate, time is the main factor.”

Principals sent out an invitation to join ParentSquare earlier this month. Parents can also sign up through the website (www.parentsquare.com), or download the app. It is not mandatory to register – parents will receive information whether or not they are signed up with ParentSquare.

Those who have not received any updates from the school district are encouraged to contact the school secretary, or email Todd at jason.todd@bakersd.org. He has found a few instances where incorrect or incomplete information in the School Master system was transferred to ParentSquare, which can affect the communication.

“Please be patient with the roll out,” he said.

Users can specialize their ParentSquare settings to dictate how and when to receive communication. For instance, emails can be sent instantly when published, or as a digest at the end of the day. Todd can, however, override these preferences in the case of an emergency communication.

“Registering allows those custom settings and adds ease in communicating back to the district, especially with attendance-type communications and teacher communications,” Todd said.

About Baker School District 5J
Nationally recognized Baker School District 5J (BSD) in Baker City, OR, is the largest of three rural school districts in Baker County, serving 1,700 students and employing over 235 educators and staff. District elementary schools include Brooklyn Primary School, Haines Elementary, Keating Elementary School, and South Baker Intermediate. Baker Middle School and two high schools, Baker High School and Eagle Cap Innovative High School, are also part of BSD. Additionally, BSD sponsors two charter schools, Baker Web Academy and Baker Early College, each offering teacher-supported online education. BSD provides next generation education for the future of Eastern Oregonians and launched Baker Technical Institute (BTI), a career and technical program that partners with regional employers and industry experts to provide an innovative education in hands-on fields. BSD believes strong schools are the foundation of strong and vibrant communities and is committed to prepare students to become successful life-long learner.

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The Baker 5J schools exist to be the center of community vitality eliminating the barriers for gratifying individual educational experiences in order to have capable contributing citizens with character.