

## Schools Communicating with Four Generations of Caregivers

In this article in *Principal*, Dillon Kalkhurst (Center for Intergenerational Engagement) says that a century ago, when Americans had shorter lifespans and work lives, students' caregivers were mostly from a narrow age demographic. Nowadays, schools need to know how to communicate with as many as four generations of family members and colleagues, each with its own characteristics and preferences. "Communication starts on Day One by asking parents how they prefer to receive information," says Kalkhurst. "You'll be surprised by the variety of responses." Some notes:

- *Generation Z: iGen* (born 1997-2012) – A small but growing number of pre-K parents are entering the workforce. They are savvy consumers, believe in social responsibility, and have short attention spans. They prefer using Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, FaceTime, and texts, rather than phone calls; only about 14 percent use Facebook.

- *Generation Y: Millennials* (born 1981-1996) – These make up the majority of K-8 parents. Many were over-parented and believe they can change the world. They're the heaviest users of texts and Facebook and require constant feedback and evaluation, so providing "sharable" moments helps promote family engagement and a positive culture.

- *Generation X: Forgotten Generation* (born 1965-1980) – They are most often the parents of high-school and college students. Many were latchkey kids, don't respond well to micromanagement, and focus on results, not policies. Their preference tends to be e-mail, then texting and visiting school websites.

- *Baby Boomer grandparents* (born 1946-1964) – Due to life circumstances, they may be primary caretakers. They want respect from younger generations. Their preference is often phone calls and face-to-face conversations.

The Boomer generation is more likely to believe teachers and principals are always right. Most of today's parents "will question everything and have hundreds of parenting and education 'experts' available at the swipe of a finger," says Kalkhurst. "If you don't answer their questions, they will find the answer somewhere else... Don't expect new parents to come to school ready to jump on a train that's already moving. They want you to stop the train and ask them if they'd like to add a new car... Engage them early and often." PTA membership has declined, especially dues-paying memberships; parents believe they can get the same benefits online.

"Engagement Across the Generations" by Dillon Kalkhurst in *Principal*, November/December 2019 (Vol. 99, #2, pp. 26-27), <https://bit.ly/35dZleO>