

ELT Resources Review

TalkingPoints: A powerful tool for communicating with multilingual families

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Summary: This article highlights TalkingPoints, a multilingual messaging app that can improve school-home communication between educators and multilingual families. With its user-friendly interface, real-time translation capabilities, and support for multiple languages, TalkingPoints is a valuable tool for professionals who work with multilingual families looking to increase parental engagement and develop family partnerships.

Keywords: multilingual messaging app, school-home communication, multilingual families, parental engagement, family partnerships

Introduction

In contemporary classrooms, educators face various challenges in effectively communicating with multilingual families. Parental involvement and communication are key factors in student success. However, language barriers may pose a significant barrier in educators' engagement with multilingual families. An effective solution for overcoming these challenges is the app [TalkingPoints](#), a free, multilingual application, which allows educators and parents to communicate in their preferred language with ease (see Figure 1). TalkingPoints provides a user-friendly interface where educators can type messages in English which are sent to parents in their preferred language, and

parents can respond in their preferred language as well. TalkingPoints minimizes language barriers and allows parents to meaningfully engage with their student's teachers. TalkingPoints provides two distinct experiences: one for educators, and one for families.

Teacher experience

The TalkingPoints teacher application is accessible via computer and mobile devices. Educators can create up to five classes for free. Once your classes are set up, the application allows for the creation of individual messages and whole class announcements. The platform allows users to attach photos, website links, and documents. Messages can be scheduled in advance. In my classroom, this has proved helpful when sharing information regarding exam schedules, deadlines for the grading period, and general information distributed by the school that may require further explanation. While the software may have translation errors, it aims to prevent miscommunications by evaluating the readability of the message. When a message exceeds a third-grade reading level, a flag appears suggesting the user revise their message (see Figure 2) and provides access to advice for improving communication (see Figure 3). The most frequent feedback I have received from the readability flag feature focused on simplifying the complexity of my



Figure 1: TalkingPoints translates between families and educators (Copyright 2023 by TalkingPoints. Used with permission.)

sentences or the use of acronyms. Examples shown on the TalkingPoints website include suggestions for alternative phrasing for ASAP and reducing a complex sentence into several simple sentences. These features reduce the ambiguity in conversations and allow for more clear communication.

TalkingPoints allows educators to monitor family engagement by indicating whether a parent is receiving messages by text or through the application. If parents use the application, TalkingPoints provides read receipts to educators indicating that the family has opened the message. Additionally, TalkingPoints offers an extensive library of resources on its website to improve engagement. The resource hub includes helpful information for developing family engagement plans, translated handouts for introducing TalkingPoints to families, and a professional development guide for aiding in school or district-wide implementation.

Family experience

In addition to the translation features, TalkingPoints provides specific features to aid in communication on the Family TalkingPoints application. The app provides in-application definitions of technical terms, which become highlighted in text. To access the meaning of terms (e.g., *IEP* or *individualized education plan, assessment*, or other technical terms), the parent only needs to click the highlighted term (see Figure 4). TalkingPoints also offers additional features to enhance accessibility and clarity in communication. These features include text-to-speech, which enables the application to read aloud messages to families, speech-to-text, which transcribes parents' messages, and a "Help me, I don't understand" option, which allows families to request human translation support to clarify any misunderstandings. These features highlight TalkingPoints' commitment to providing comprehensive and accessible communication solutions for multilingual families and educators.

Recommendations

TalkingPoints is a valuable resource that enables both educators and families to overcome language barriers and improve engagement. When implementing TalkingPoints in your classroom, it is advisable to use the TalkingPoints resource hub to find handouts to share with families. At the beginning of the year, I uploaded my families' contact information from a spreadsheet and sent home a translated flyer—provided in the resource hub—which explained the app and how to use it to the families. In

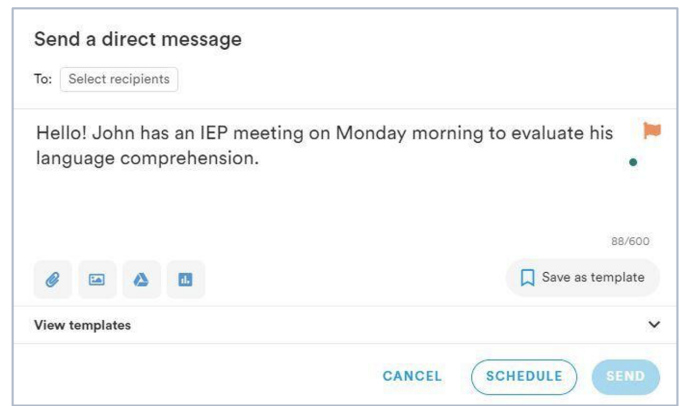


Figure 2: TalkingPoints prompts users to revise with a flag



Figure 3: TalkingPoints readability evaluator with links to advice

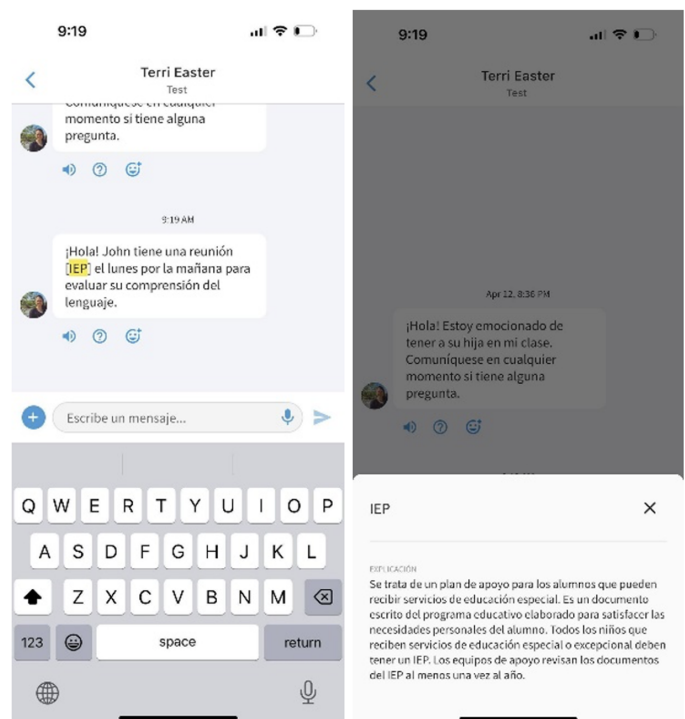


Figure 4: TalkingPoints provides explanations for some technical terms

addition to using these resources, modeling the use of TalkingPoints and aiding families in accessing the application and features ensures that parents are comfortable with the platform. During our open house event at the beginning of the year, I included TalkingPoints as a topic of conversation. For families who needed further explanation, this was an ideal time to model the use of the application to increase its ease of use. For those who couldn't attend, there are videos available on [TalkingPoints' YouTube channel](#). At the beginning of the year, I used TalkingPoints to intentionally build a positive relationship with my students and their families by sending quick compliments about my students using the individual messaging feature. As the year progressed, I used it for consistent communication with families regarding up-coming events, grades, student progress, and concerns.

In my experience as a high school English second language teacher, this consistent communication strengthened the relationship between our families and me. Families felt

more comfortable in communicating to set up appointments, checking their students' grades, or expressing their concerns. Students knew their parents and I communicated frequently, which resulted in fewer missing assignments and misbehaviors, as well as stronger relationships between the students and me. My experience with TalkingPoints is supported by research conducted regarding the effectiveness of the technology. For example, Park et al. (2022) conducted a comparative study including schools that utilized TalkingPoints and schools that did not adopt the technology; schools that implemented TalkingPoints had reduced absenteeism and statistically significant increases in both English language arts and mathematics. Overall, TalkingPoints is a resource that can foster more equitable communication between teachers and multilingual families. Its user-friendly interface, real-time translation, and support for multiple languages make it a valuable resource for educators. I highly recommend TalkingPoints to other professionals in the field who would like to increase multilingual family engagement.

References

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Cite this article:

Easter, T. (2023). TalkingPoints: A powerful tool for communicating with multilingual families. *WAESOL Educator*, 48(2), pp. __-__.



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