

# Alisal Union School District

## Beyond Backpack Notes: AUSD's Communication Revolution

Technology Trainers Elena Clemente and Lisa Melashenko largely relied on catching parents in the school drop-off line or sending reminders home with students when sharing vital school-to-home communications. "We'd catch parents and have quick conversations with them anytime we had the chance," says Clemente.

Knowing just how ineffective this communication approach was, [Alisal Union School District](#) decided to implement ClassDojo, a communication and behavior management platform that connects teachers, parents and students. As former teachers, Clemente and Melashenko had both used the platform before and saw it as a good way to close improve family engagement and close any communications gaps that may have existed.

"We don't have to pin notes to the students' shirts anymore. ClassDojo solved a lot of our communication problems and the issue of flyers getting lost in the backpacks," says Clemente, who as a teacher used the platform to post stories, celebrate student successes and reinforce positive behaviors by awarding students "points" throughout the school day.

"ClassDojo became a part of my day. Once I learned about the platform, it really helped facilitate communication with parents," says Clemente, who signed up to be a ClassDojo mentor and began spreading the word about it at other school sites in the district. "I wanted to get as many parents and teachers as possible using it. It gave parents a little 'window' into our day."

## Very simple and user friendly

As technology trainers, Clemente and Melashenko support the district's teachers and administrators technology platform needs, training and support. They do in-class demos and share as much as they can with teachers, and they also send out a weekly newsletter. "We coordinate a lot of different training sessions across our many different platforms," Melashenkosays, "and support principals during staff meetings and on professional development days."

# \$120k

per year in savings

*"This gives us a window into what's going on across all 13 schools. We get to see everything that's happening at all of the other school sites, and that's awesome."*



**Lisa Melashenko**  
Technology Trainer



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Since 2015, Alisal USD has expanded its use of ClassDojo year over year. “We first started in a couple of classrooms and now all 13 schools in our districts are avid users,” said Melashenko. “Our implementation that started slowly with simple message distribution has since grown into a districtwide effort to get everyone on the same page, using the same platform and standardizing the school-to-home communication process.” Melashenko also shared that the platform helps reinforce good behaviors and share struggles with parents, who are kept in the know about their children’s successes and challenges.

“It’s been really awesome to see ClassDojo grow into what it’s become today, with all of its different social emotional learning attributes,” says Melashenko. “I’ve always valued communication with parents because that’s how you get the buy-in from families at home. When they understand what’s happening in the classroom, they know how to support their child.”

Melashenko also likes how ClassDojo helps establish easy connections with parents. For example, teachers can copy and paste their student lists into the platform and then use those lists to connect with their families. “All you have to do is enter their phone number or email address and ClassDojo sends the message,” she explains. “At the other end, parents get a link to join on their cell phone. It’s really that simple and user-friendly.”

## **“I know everything that’s happening”**

Alisal USD’s ClassDojo implementation may have been launched by a small group of teachers, but today the entire district is using the platform. In addition to teachers, administrators use it to share information about their monthly “coffee klatch” parent meetings. “Everyone’s using it, and the information is readily available,” says Melashenko. “As a parent of a student in the district, I feel like I have a lot more communication. I know everything that’s happening.”

This year, Alisal USD wants to increase its use of ClassDojo by comparing exactly how different teachers and administrators in the district are using it. For example, many teachers enjoy sharing their class stories on it, while administrators and support personnel use it to share information about open houses, back to school nights and holiday-related events along with any important information that needs to be shared in an instant.

Some schools use the platform more than others, according to Clemente, who says one in particular has awarded its students 40,000 points via the platform. “As we gather usage information like this,” she explains, “we can start doing some outreach to support some of the other schools that may want to increase their own usage.”



Earlier this year, Alisal USD developed a “train the trainers” program for ClassDojo with the goal of helping teachers, administrators and staff continue to explore and leverage the platform. “Our ETLs were trained so they could support each school site,” Clemente says. “Teachers also know that we’re here to answer questions and provide one-on-one support as needed.”

## Getting the message across

ClassDojo also offers translation capabilities in 130+ languages that help districts connect and engage with parents from diverse backgrounds, countries and ethnicities. For example, Clemente says her last school comprised a mix of English and Spanish speaking families, as well as some from Yemen. “They loved being able to translate our messages into their first language,” says Clemente, who was previously handling the translation herself, and for every single communication.

“ClassDojo’s translation option was a time saver for me because as long as I wrote it in my post, I knew that the parents could just click on the little ‘world’ icon and have the messaging translated for them,” says Clemente. “That really made the process efficient because even though I’m bilingual, our approach before ClassDojo took twice as much work to manage the translation.”

Parents were thrilled because this opened up an entirely new two-way communication tool for them. “They really liked being able to send me a message that I could easily read and respond to,” Clemente says. “It was just really simple, and a big shift from the days of having to send notes and talk on the phone, the latter of which is very difficult to manage when you’re in a classroom full of students.”

## A window into every school

From the technology trainer perspective, Melashenko says ClassDojo has been a welcome addition to Alisal USD’s technology stable particularly because it has replaced more analog—and much less efficient—ways of communicating with parents and reinforcing positive student behaviors both on and off campus.

“It’s a communications tool and behavior management platform all wrapped up in one easy-to-use app,” added Clemente. “This gives us a window into what’s going on across all 13 schools. We get to see everything that’s happening at all of the other school sites, and that’s awesome,” Melashenko says. “We can’t be in 13 schools at the same time, so just getting a little peek at what each school is doing has been very helpful.”

