

## Facilitating School-Parents Communication through SMS Technology in Chile

*Samuel Berlinski, Matias Busso, Taryn Dinkelman, Claudia Martínez*

**Location:** Santiago, Chile

**Sample:** 1,447 parents of secondary school students

**Timeline:**  
2013 to 2017

**Partners:**  
Municipality of Peñalolén

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*Parents can have an important influence on their children's effort in school, but it can be difficult when they lack information on their children's attendance and academic performance. Researchers are testing the impact of increased teacher-parent communication via SMS messaging on parents' involvement and youths' education outcomes.*

**Policy Issue:** Parents can have an important influence on their children's effort in school. However, that influence can decrease as youth grow older. Maturing youth often gain more autonomy, develop their own preferences, and may be increasingly reluctant to disclose information to their parents. To help keep parents informed, schools typically communicate with them via report cards, parent-teacher meetings, and written notes sent home with students. However, since most messages are simple reports or reminders that happen infrequently, a low-cost communication form such as SMS messaging could be an easier and more effective way to keep parents up to date, in turn helping them to monitor and assist with student learning. Can introducing SMS messaging in parent-teacher communication increase parents' awareness of their children's performance at school and increase their

children's educational effort and outcomes?

**Context of the Evaluation:** Researchers partnered with public secondary schools in the Municipality of Peñalolén in Santiago, Chile. These schools were located in poor neighborhoods and researchers focused their study on students aged 10 to 14. Cell phone use is high in Chile, with approximately 130 cell phones per 100 adults, indicating that SMS messaging may be an effective way to reach parents.

**Details of the Intervention:** Researchers are testing the impact of parent-teacher communication via SMS on parents' involvement and youths' education outcomes. Researchers randomly selected 85 classes from 8 schools. Within these classes, 1,447 parents participated in the study. Randomization happened in two stages: each class was randomized into a "high" or "low" treatment arm. High treatment entailed treating 75 percent of consenters in the class with the information treatment; low treatment entailed treating 25 percent of consenters in the class with the information treatment. Within each class, researchers then randomly assigned each individual to one of two groups (in proportion to the high/low treatment assignment of the

class):

*SMS with attendance, behavior and grade information:* Parents received weekly or biweekly SMS messages (depending on the type of information sent) informing them about their child's attendance, their recent grades on math tests, and whether they had received notes for good or bad behavior in class. If children were missing class without their parents' knowledge, this could help parents avoid unjustified absences. If children were performing poorly in math tests, parents would know about this before the end of the year, giving them time to react and intervene with the child. And if the parents were unaware of problem behavior in school, they would be alerted to this through the SMS message.

*Comparison group:* Parents received communication from the school as usual. They also received a couple of neutral SMS messages from the schools, informing them about general school events.

At the end of the school year, researchers used school, parent and student surveys, and administrative records, to compile data on parental involvement, youths' attendance and grades, and educational expectations. They collected administrative data on students from the baseline in 2013 to add as controls in the analysis.

**Results and Policy Lessons:** Project intervention period complete; results are in process. Early evidence suggests that by the end of the first year of the treatment, the SMS treatment improved math grades, reduced incidence of extreme bad behavior (e.g. bullying), and improved grade progression among these grade 4-8 students.

**Related Papers Citations:** *Berlinski, Samuel, Matias Busso, Taryn Dinkelman and Claudia Martinez A. "Reducing parent-school information gaps and improving education outcomes: Evidence from high frequency text messaging in Chile." Working paper, December 2016.*

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