

Encouraging Families to Visit a Literacy Website: A Randomized Study of the Impact of Email and Text Message Communications

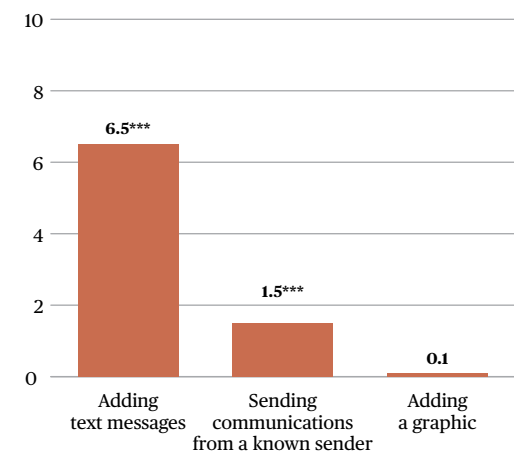
The Arkansas Department of Education partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest to study the feasibility and effectiveness of using brief email and text message communications to increase the number of parent and guardian visits to the Reading Initiative for Student Excellence (R.I.S.E.) state literacy website. In November 2021 the department sent test messages to determine the percentage of households with children in kindergarten–grade 6 in Arkansas public schools that had a working email address or cell phone number and whether the percentage differed by school locale or demographic composition. Subsequently, the study team randomly assigned 700 Arkansas public elementary schools to one of eight conditions, which varied the mode of communication (email only or email and text message), the presentation of information (no graphic or with a graphic), and the type of sender (generic sender or known sender). In January 2022 households with children in these schools were sent three rounds of communications with information about literacy and a link to the R.I.S.E. website. The study examined the impact of these communications on whether parents and guardians clicked the link to visit the website. The Arkansas Department of Education, districts, and schools can use the findings from this study to inform decisions about how best to communicate with families about literacy and other evidence-based resources.

Key findings

- **Nearly all households had a working email address or cell phone number.** About 97.8 percent of households had a working email address or cell phone number. About 89.9 percent had a working cell phone number, and 73.1 percent had a working email address, indicating that households may be more likely to receive communications through text messages than through emails.
- **Households with children in rural schools or schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students were less likely than other households to have a working email address.** About 69.2 percent of households with children in rural schools and 60.7 percent of households with children in schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students had a working email address.
- **The click rate to the R.I.S.E. website was highest for households assigned to receive both emails and text messages, with a graphic, and from a known sender.** Households assigned to receive both emails and text messages with a graphic from a known sender (their school principal) were the most likely to click on the link, with a click rate of 9.2 percent compared with 1.0 percent for households assigned to receive the most basic communication. After school locale and demographic composition were adjusted for, adding text messages to the email-only condition increased the click rate by 6.5 percentage points, sending communications from a known sender increased the click rate by 1.5 percentage points, and adding a graphic did not have an impact.

Adding text messages and sending communications from a known sender had a positive impact on click rates relative to sending only an email, but adding a graphic did not have an impact, January 2022

Adjusted percentage point increase in click rate above sending only an email



*** Significantly different from sending only an email at $p < .001$.

Note: The sample included 165,933 households with children in kindergarten–grade 6 in 681 Arkansas public schools in January 2022.

Source: Authors' analysis of data provided by the Arkansas Department of Education, the email and text message vendor, and website analytics.