



## CASE STUDY



# Leander Independent School District

K12 INSIGHT HELPS LEANDER ISD ENGAGE ITS COMMUNITY AROUND IMPORTANT ISSUES

School calendar is always a source of controversy. At Leander ISD and other districts in Texas, an unusually late start time to the school year created a competitive disadvantage for K-12 public schools. To regain its competitive edge and keep families happy, administrators at Leander ISD turned to Let's Talk!, from K12 *Insight*. The 24/7 community listening platform made it possible to engage parents about school year start dates and informed the process for how to change them. Here's how they did it.

## THE CHALLENGE

Nestled in west Austin, Leander ISD serves around 39,000 students in 42 schools spread out across almost 200 square miles. The district includes families who work at the nearby Dell headquarters, a huge Google office, the second largest Apple office, and a large Samsung plant — making for a thriving city and tech-savvy community. Each school year, Leander ISD welcomes an estimated 1,000 new students into their schools, making it one of the fastest growing districts in the state.

But like many school districts in Texas and across the nation, Leander ISD has limited resources based on a state funding structure that relies heavily on (cont'd)



39K

Number of students



42

Number of schools



1,175

Calendar & District of Innovation dialogues

Source: Leander Independent School District



## THE CHALLENGE (CONT'D FROM PG 1)

sustained student enrollment to maintain funding.

“One of the biggest complaints traditional public schools have about charter schools is that we don’t compete on the same playing field,” says Corey Ryan, Leander ISD’s chief communications officer.

In Leander ISD, that disparity was made plain during a recent debate over the district’s school calendar.

“We had a notably late start to the school year,” explains Ryan. “The state of Texas requires that public schools start after the fourth Monday of August, which meant we started almost a week later this year than previous years. That throws everything off when you’re trying to keep the same basic components.”

Through a statewide program called District of Innovation (DOI), public districts such as Leander can apply for certain exemptions to Texas Education Code. But that program had met with skepticism among parents. That meant that, before the district applied, it had to clearly explain its intentions.

“Through District of Innovation, some school districts are doing things that are controversial, especially for teacher groups, because you can exempt from things such as class-size ratio and you can also do things like not have certified teachers in classrooms,” explains Ryan. “These are things charter schools do all the time, but do not align with our community’s values for our schools.”

To drive that message home, Leander ISD sought an easy and authentic way to engage families about the district’s school calendar, while correcting any misconceptions regarding the district’s DOI status.

“

Let’s Talk! made it easy to quantify the volume and type of inquiries so we could confidently say, ‘Here’s what people are talking about. And here are the numbers behind that.’”



**COREY RYAN**  
CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER  
LEANDER ISD, TEXAS





## THE SOLUTION

So, administrators turned to Let's Talk!, from K12 *Insight*. The cloud-based community listening and customer service platform was created to help school districts invite community feedback on critical school system issues and address questions and concerns in a timely manner. A backend data dashboard helps district leaders measure the quality of their responses and understand community perceptions.

In total, the district received 1,175 community dialogues during the school calendar process. The district used tags to categorize dialogues, drill down on the data, and run detailed reports.

“With Let's Talk!, we were able to tag comments and questions to not only determine the preference of the calendar, but also determine why and what the issues were and the sentiment behind them,” explains Ryan. “That helped us determine if people were against District of Innovation all together, or just the parts we weren't doing. That was huge for us.”

The ability to collaborate across teams and create and customize templated outbound messages in Let's Talk! helped to ensure timely responses that were complete, accurate, and courteous — enabling district leaders to work smarter, not harder when communicating with parents and other community members.

“We had a high volume of dialogues during this process due to the nature of the conversation,” explains Ryan. “By creating personalized message templates, we could ensure accurate and complete responses that were the consistent. That meant we were able to close those dialogues in a timely way.”

### We Want to Engage our Leander ISD Community!



Thank you for your interest in Leander ISD! We want to engage our students, parents, staff, and community members with information through a transparent process. Let's Talk! is a support tool that connects stakeholders with questions with the LISD expert best equipped with answering that question.

Please review the topics below to get you started.

Let's talk about ...

Student Support

Student Health & Safety

Staff Support

District Communications

Operations & Facilities

Business/Financial Services

Something Else?

Timely Topics

Still Need Support?

Share a message with:

Select a Topic

I am a:  
☐ Student  
☐ Employee  
☐ Parent/ Guardian  
☐ Community Member

And I have a:



Question



Concern



Compliment

Subject

Message

Name

Email

Telephone

Send



## THE RESULTS

The district used the feedback and reports it received through Let's Talk! to support its DOI application and shared its findings with the school board and school calendar administrators.

"Let's Talk! made it easy to quantify the volume and type of inquiries so we could confidently say, 'Here's what people are talking about, and here are the numbers behind that,'" says Ryan. "That freed us up to handle the data in an objective way and make the right decision for our community."

Prior to the arrival of Let's Talk!, Ryan says the district would have likely relied on a survey or string of emails to engage its community. "We would have been at the mercy of a totally generic template email," he says. "And we wouldn't have been able to respond to everybody because of the sheer volume of inquiries."

The district plans to build on the success it realized during the school calendar process by using Let's Talk! for other sensitive campaigns, such as boundary planning.

"Let's Talk! gives us a familiar avenue to be able to collect data and input on a variety of topics," says Ryan. "This will help us close that feedback loop, engage people in a systematic way, and hopefully drive some of those negative or controversial conversations off of public media and into a customer service portal, so we can address them directly and efficiently."

Ready to engage your community in two-way conversations about school calendar or policy? Visit [www.K12insight.com](http://www.K12insight.com) or call 703-542-9600.