2023
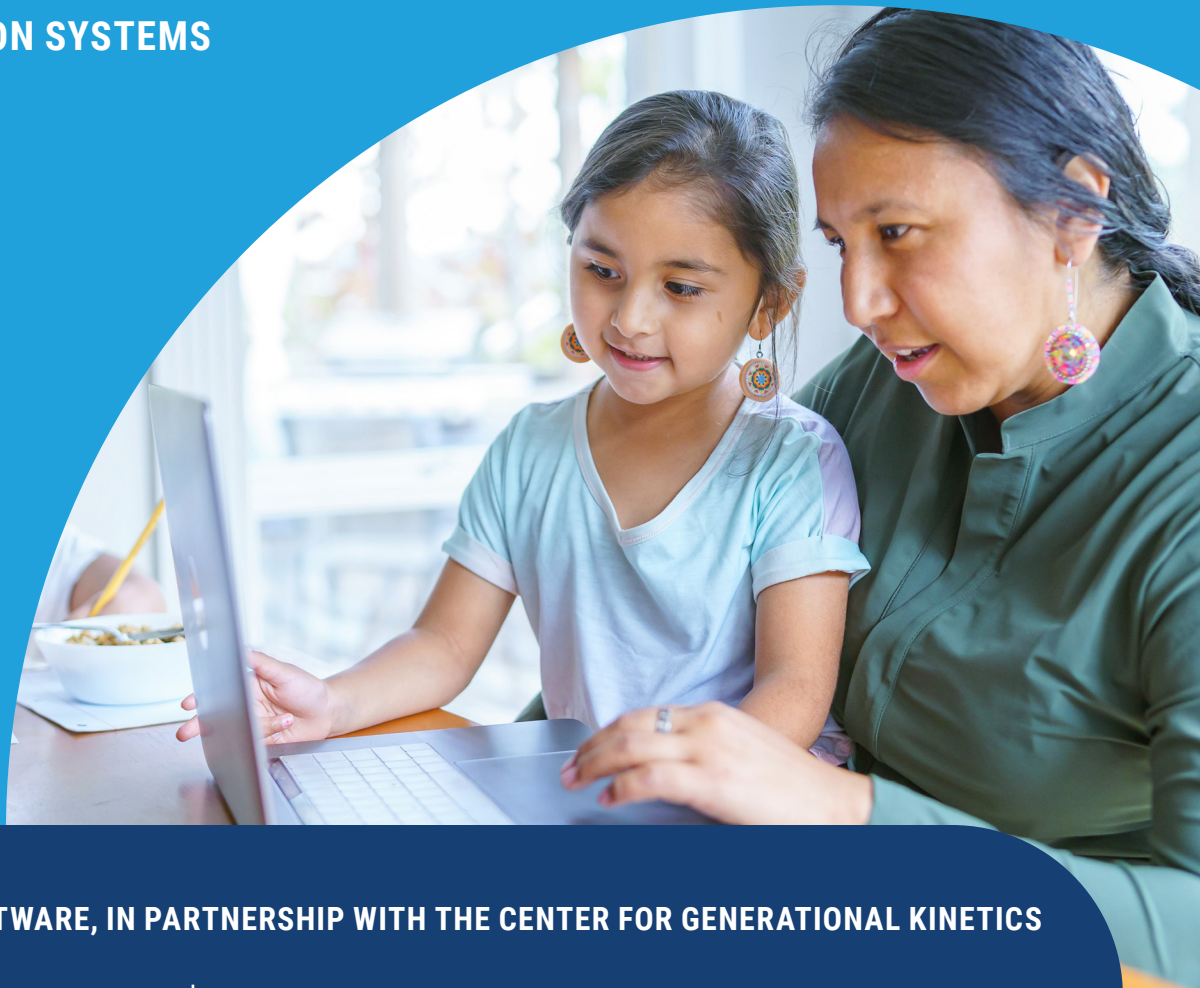
COMMUNICATIONS WITH EDUCATION SYSTEMS STUDY

MISMATCHED EXPECTATIONS: HOW STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND ALUMNI EXPECT TO INTERACT WITH EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Serving students, families, and alumni in a technology-driven, rapidly evolving world is a challenge. This is the case whether you're enrolling students, managing the lottery for a choice program, or managing and processing records.

Furthermore, the way communities interact with schools has changed significantly, especially over the last few years. School districts and charter schools throughout the U.S. are adjusting to the change at different rates, and in different ways.

Scribbles interacts with a variety of school districts and charter schools. Some report transitioning to cloud-based solutions nearly a decade ago. Others weren't sure they needed to make a change, but after using a product like ScribOrder saw drastic increases in records requests due to the convenience of digitalizing. There are also districts who operate by the *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it"* adage, or hesitate to make major changes out of concern for staff.

Over time, we've come to know our customers well, but there's one essential group of people left unexplored when it comes to school processes: students, families, and alumni. What kind of service do they want and expect from schools, staff, and the districts?

Do they have printers? How about checkbooks? How do they feel about paper-based school processes? Scribbles asked these questions and more to people across the country.

The survey results within this report detail the insights of students, alumni, and families from a diverse range of communities across America. We focused on collecting information around how people feel about obligations like visiting offices and mailing documents, access to technology, trust in district operations, changing communications expectations, and more.

It is our wish for our readers that the data and feedback in this report will bring new perspective to your district or charter school, ultimately helping your teams make better decisions on how to serve your community.

Objectives

1 Explore current behaviors, trends, expectations, and challenges that exist among constituents of American educational systems regarding accessibility and usage of:

- Paper
- Printing technology
- Faxing
- Mailing
- Computers
- Mobile devices

2 Understand the processes and pain points of navigating information exchange, communication methods, and payment options with schools.

3 Uncover the evolving expectations and preferences that exist in America today when it comes to exchanging resources, using technology, providing information, communicating, and making payments with school or education systems.

Methodology

This study was conducted in partnership with the Center for Generational Kinetics.

The survey was conducted online from October 3, 2022, to October 17, 2022.

Figures included are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error is +/-3.1 percentage points.

In instances wherein a chart total for a question does not add to 100%, please note that this is due to the minimal effect of rounding.

Data is weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity.
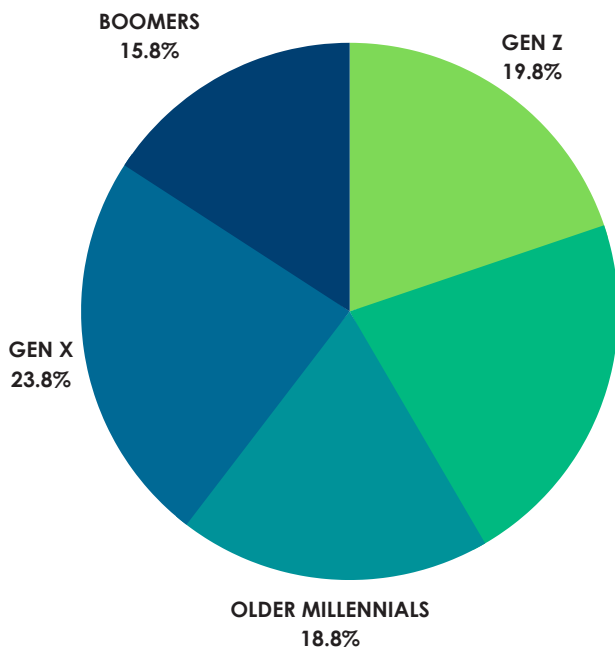
Demographics

1,000
participants ages 18-65

49%
male

50%
female

1%
non-binary/prefer not to answer

Age

BOOMERS 15.8%

GEN Z 19.8%

GEN X 23.8%

YOUNG MILLENNIALS 21.8%

OLDER MILLENNIALS 18.8%

GEN Z (AGES 18-26)

YOUNGER MILLENNIALS (AGES 27-35)

OLDER MILLENNIALS (36-45)

GEN X (AGES 46-57)

BOOMERS (AGES 58-65)

Region

WEST
24%

MIDWEST
21%

NORTHEAST
17%

SOUTH
39%

RURAL
25.9%

URBAN
34.7%

SUBURBAN
39.4%
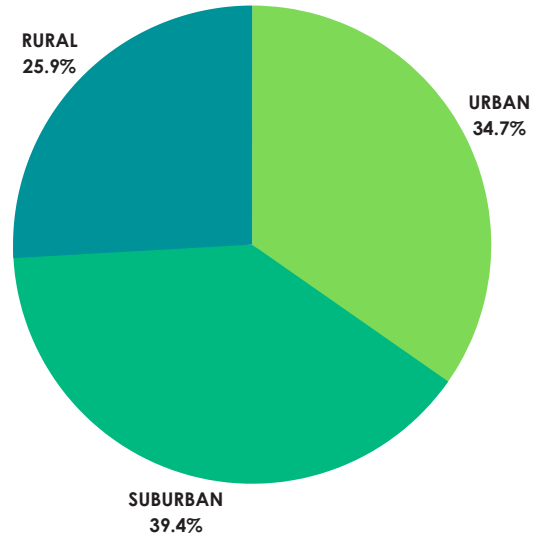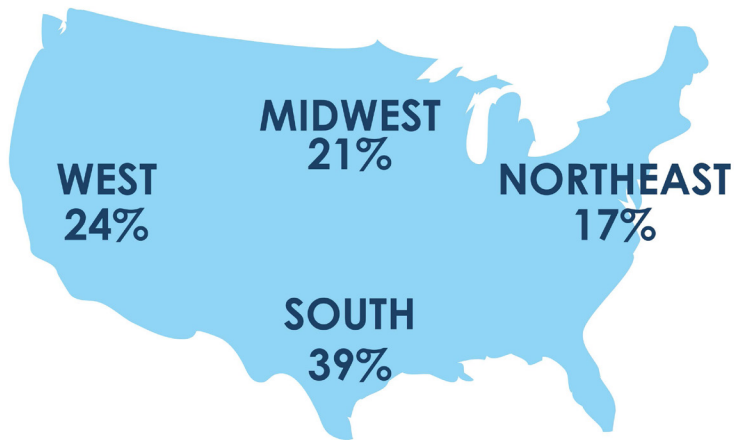
Employment and Household Income

FULL TIME

PART TIME

SELF EMPLOYED

STUDENT

UNEMPLOYED

OTHER

0   100   200   300   400   500

$150K-199K
2.5%

$100K-149K
7.4%

$75K-99K
9.7%

$50K-74K
17.6%

<$20K
23.4%

$20K-34K
21.4%
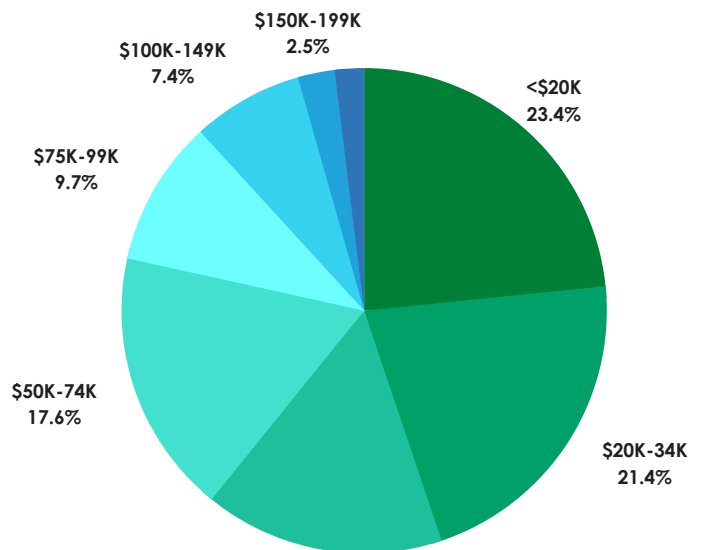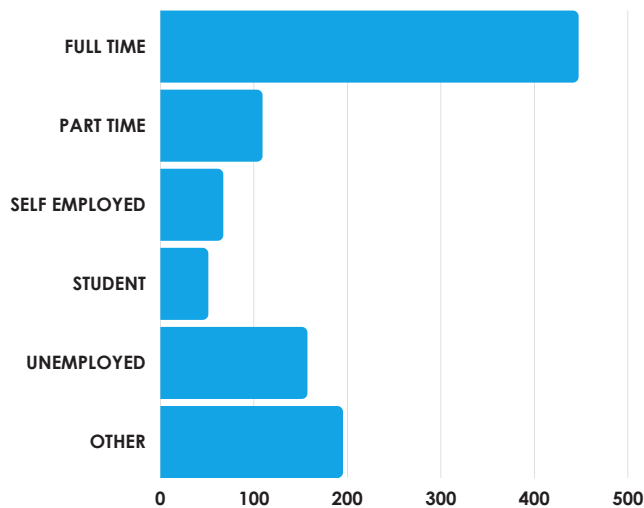
Study Findings

Key Findings

Through our research, we uncovered a significant amount of data, ultimately identifying 6 key findings. Each finding summarizes essential data points, followed by a recommendation for school districts and charter schools to consider as they evaluate their operations and processes.

Key findings include:

- Overall, school district members have more access to digital and less access to paper-based technology.

- Paper-based processes impact perceptions of education institutions.

- There is a mismatch between payment expectations and reality.

- Less income means less access to paper-based products or technologies.

- English or English and Spanish speaking families have more access to resources than families who do not speak English or English and Spanish.

- Older generations have more access to all types of technology than younger adult generations.

Key finding: Overall, school community members have more access to digital and less access to paper-based technology.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PRODUCTS/TECHNOLOGY DO YOU CURRENTLY OWN OR HAVE ACCESS TO AT YOUR HOME? (%)
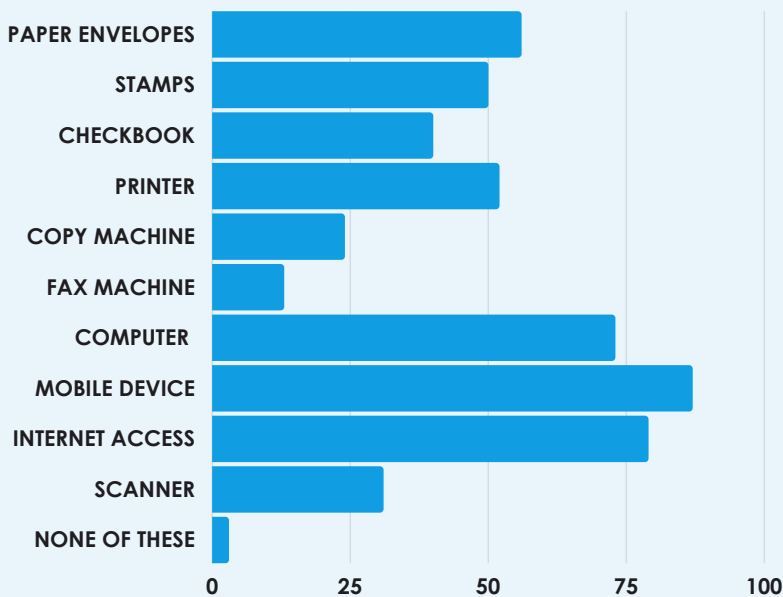
Mobile devices, internet access, and desktop or laptop computers are the technology and products that Americans currently own or have access to the most in their homes

Over the past decade, overall access to and reliance on digital technology has increased.[1] But what about paper-based technologies?

According to our study, more Americans have access to mobile technology, computers, and internet access than to paper-based products or technologies that support paper-based interactions like printers, copy machines, fax machines, and scanners. This difference in access spans across home and the workplace.

Recommendations

- When building district processes that engage the community, consider what technologies families have access to in their homes.

- Remember that communication is a two-way street. Your district or school is not only sending information to families, you are also requesting information from them. Consider the easiest way for them to both receive and provide information.

- Ensure district resources and communication channels are online and mobile friendly.

Key finding: Less income means less access to paper-based products or technologies.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PRODUCTS/TECHNOLOGY DO YOU CURRENTLY OWN OR HAVE ACCESS TO AT YOUR HOME? (%)

Legend:
- <$20K
- $20-34K
- $35-49K
- $50-74K
- $75-99K
- $100-149K
- $150-199K
- $200K

Categories (y-axis):
- PAPER ENVELOPES
- STAMPS
- CHECKBOOK
- PRINTER
- COPY MACHINE
- FAX MACHINE
- COMPUTER
- MOBILE DEVICE
- INTERNET ACCESS
- SCANNER
- NONE OF THESE

X-axis: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100
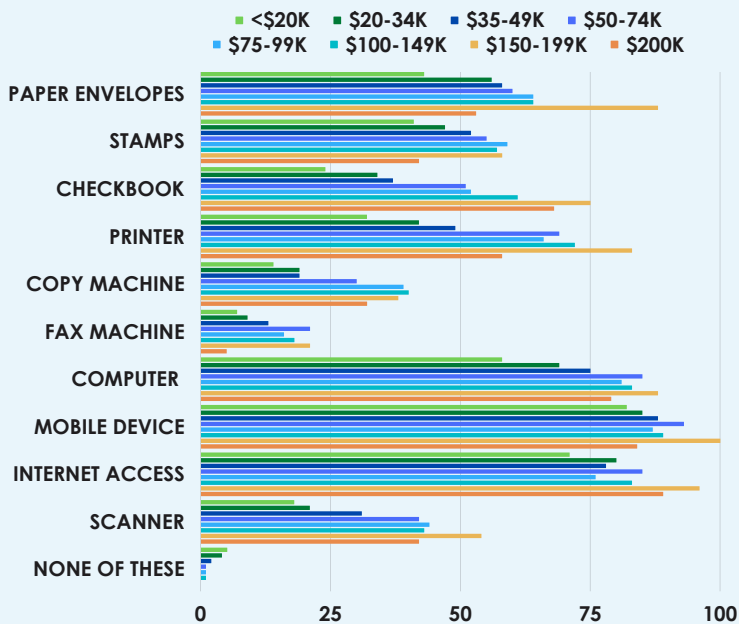
People with a lower HH income have less access to paper envelopes, stamps, checkbooks, printers, scanners, copiers, and fax machines.
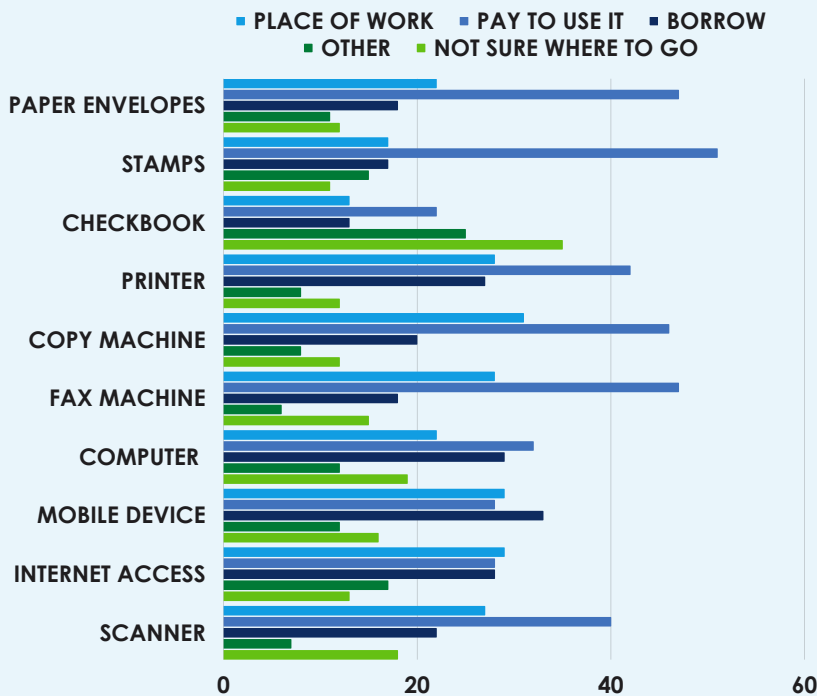
What do they have? Mobile devices.

Research shows that people with a lower income are increasingly reliant on mobile technology. People with a lower household income have less access at home to paper-based products or tools than those with a higher household income. Less than half of households making $34K a year or less have home access to stamps, a checkbook, or a printer. Less than 25% of households making $34K a year or less have access to a copy machine, fax machine, or a scanner.

Significantly more than men, women currently own and have access to paper envelopes and stamps for mailing letters.

Americans *without children* are significantly more likely than those *with children* to have internet access, paper envelopes, and stamps for mailing letters.

FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PRODUCTS/TECHNOLOGY THAT YOU DON'T CURRENTLY OWN OR HAVE ACCESS TO AT HOME, WHERE WOULD YOU GO TO USE THEM? (%)

Legend: ■ PLACE OF WORK ■ PAY TO USE IT ■ BORROW ■ OTHER ■ NOT SURE WHERE TO GO

Categories (top to bottom): PAPER ENVELOPES, STAMPS, CHECKBOOK, PRINTER, COPY MACHINE, FAX MACHINE, COMPUTER, MOBILE DEVICE, INTERNET ACCESS, SCANNER

X-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60

> **For Americans who don't currently own or have access to each type of product or technology, 7 out of 10 will pay to use it at a store or institution (FedEx, CVS, Public Library, Colleges, etc.)**

When families don't have access to these technologies at home, they're more likely to face the need to pay for use at a store or institution. This can be difficult for families already at an economic disadvantage. Printing a form or making a copy of a document for an application or record request, for example, is often significantly disruptive. An extra trip to a store where a copy can be scanned and/or printed could be necessary; that trip might require bus fare, gas money or taking time off work (perhaps at an hourly rate). Just one piece of paper may be practically free for a family making over six figures but could easily cost tens of dollars for a lower income family.

Recommendations

- If you represent a Title I school, serve a lower income community, or have lower income families attending your district, consider the costs associated with paper-based processes and how these processes could be made more financially accessible to everyone.

- With the majority of Americans having access to smartphones or the internet, putting processes like records requests or registration online, especially in a mobile-friendly environment, can make a huge difference on the time and money needed for families to support themselves and their children.

59% of Americans would like to never have to send something in the mail again.
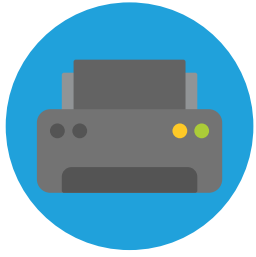
Key finding: Older generations have more access to all types of technology than younger adult generations.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PRODUCTS/TECHNOLOGY DO YOU CURRENTLY OWN OR HAVE ACCESS TO AT YOUR HOME? (%)
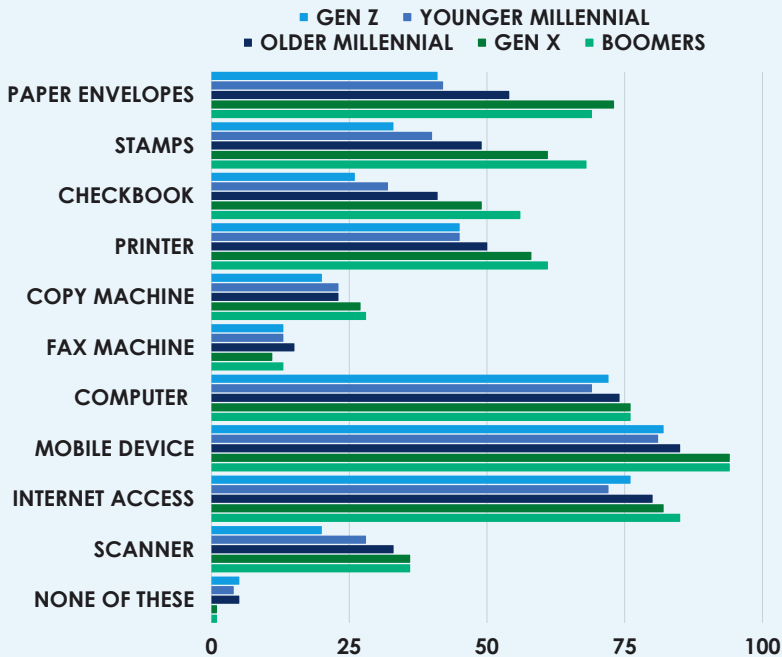
Older generations own or have more access to almost all products and technologies compared to younger generations

GEN Z (AGES 18-26)
YOUNGER MILLENNIALS (AGES 27-35)
OLDER MILLENNIALS (36-45)
GEN X (AGES 46-57)
BOOMERS (AGES 58-65)

Generationally, older generations have more access to almost all products and technologies than younger generations, both at home and work. Keep in mind that younger generations represented in this study could be current students ready to graduate, recent alumni, or parents of young children.

Recommendations

- Consider the age range of the people you are serving and who needs access to the services your district provides.
- Even if the generations currently being served have access to the technology needed to participate in district processes, consider what will be needed for the next generation.

- If your school or district has already taken some strides to go digital, you may have access to data regarding the generations you are serving and how much you are serving them. For example, are most records requests for transcripts of recent graduates, or do you have a high volume from folks who graduated decades ago? When you consider your registration or program application processes, what generation(s) do most of your parents belong to?

73% of Americans think emerging generations will demand all their interactions with the government or educational institutions be through mobile devices.

Key finding: Paper-based processes impact perceptions of education institutions.

WHAT CHALLENGES, OBSTACLES, OR ISSUES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN CONDUCTING BUSINESS AT A SCHOOL OR EDUCATION SYSTEM?

WASTED TIME	
CONFUSION	
TRANSPORTATION COSTS	
HAVING TO MISS WORK	
DIFFICULT PAYMENT OPTIONS	
NON-MOBILE FRIENDLY WEBSITE	
FRUSTRATION	
NOT ABLE TO FIND PARKING	
NO ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY	
HAVING TO FIND CHILDCARE	

0   10   20   30
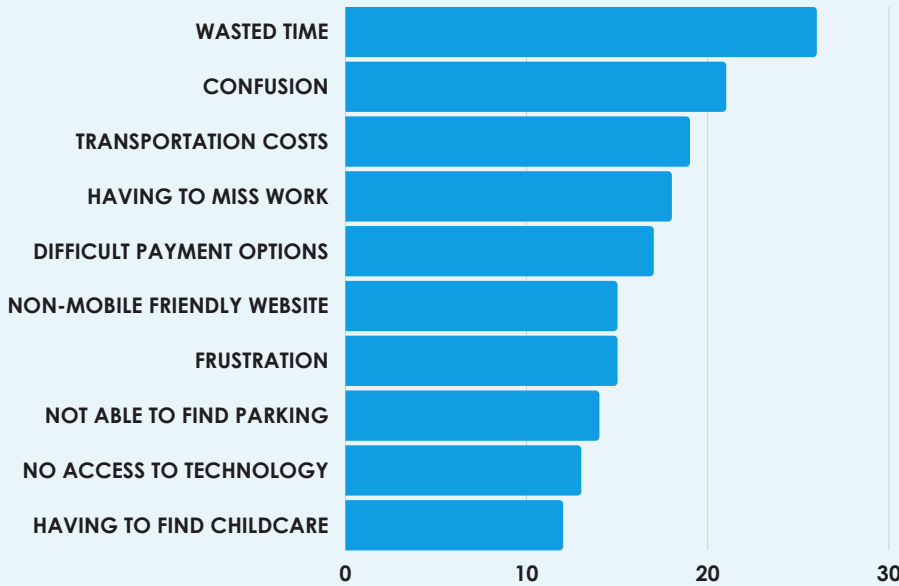
More than anything else, Americans report that wasted time is the biggest issue they have faced when conducting business at a school or education system
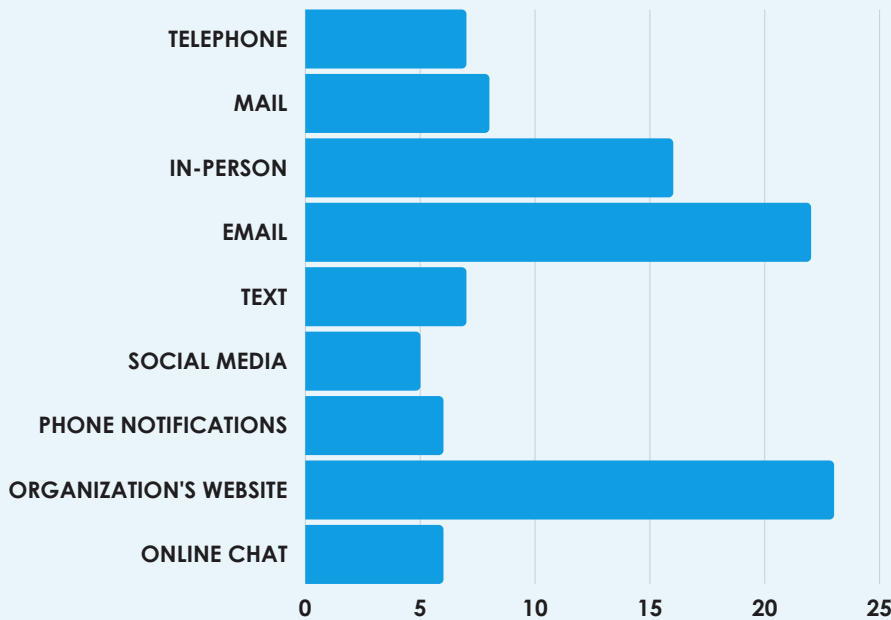
76%

of Americans expect more efficient access, service, and communication from school administrative systems than they currently get.

46%

of Americans are not confident in government or school administrative systems because they still use so many paper-based processes.

Overall, Americans' experiences conducting business with educational institutions could be improved. Wasted time and confusion are two of the biggest challenges reported when it comes to working with schools or districts. Over 50% of survey respondents report being frustrated or annoyed when educational institutions require them to adhere to paper-based processes like printing materials, paying by check, or faxing documents. Conversely, when asked how they would feel if educational institutions provided easier ways to complete transactions, the majority reported they would feel relief or that such an option is what they would expect. Overall, 58% of respondents say relying on paper-based transactions is a thing of the past.

HOW WOULD YOU PREFER TO EXCHANGE DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION WITH A SCHOOL OR EDUCATION SYSTEM (REQUESTING TRANSCRIPTS, ENROLLING A STUDENT, MANAGING FORMS, ETC.) OVER THE NEXT 2-3 YEARS?

Chart (horizontal bar chart, approximate values):

Category	Value
TELEPHONE	7
MAIL	8
IN-PERSON	16
EMAIL	22
TEXT	7
SOCIAL MEDIA	5
PHONE NOTIFICATIONS	6
ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE	23
ONLINE CHAT	6

X-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25

Over the next 2-3 years, Americans overall prefer digital solutions like email and an organization's website over in-person exchanges or mailing documents.

45% of school district members prefer to exchange information over an online system such as email or an institution's website over the next 2-3 years. Over 70% reported that a variety of digital customer services would be valuable in interacting with educational institutions, including:

- Online payment systems
- Online dashboard access
- Automated messaging (emails, voice messages, and texts)
- Mobile-friendly access
- A record of their interactions

Additionally, over 70% of respondents consider friendly technical support to be important.

65% of Americans think the paper use required to interact with government agencies is bad for the environment.

Recommendations

- Districts that have yet to make the switch to online processes should consider evaluating the needs of their communities currently, in addition to the likely direction for the future. Paper-based processes may be serving families now, but the shift to digital is already underway for most Americans.

- Change often takes time, so planning now for future shifts over the next 2-3 years can help simplify the process. Change will also come with challenges, so a pilot or a slow rollout across different sites or systems can help streamline a larger technology change across an entire school or district.

- For schools ready to transition to managing documents or processes online, consider technology partners that offer the features that matter to community members. Also consider features or capabilities that may not be top of mind for community constituents, such as FERPA compliance and student privacy.
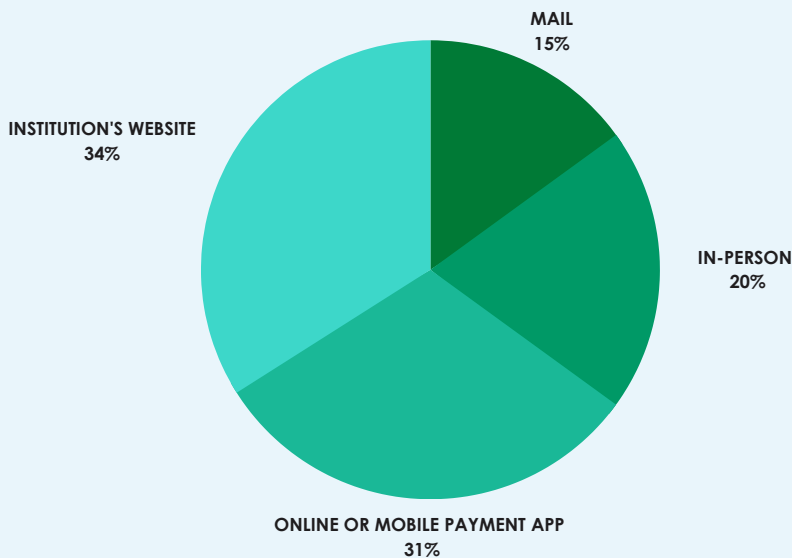
Key finding: There is a mismatch between payment expectations and reality.

HOW WOULD YOU PREFER TO MAKE A PAYMENT (REQUESTING TRANSCRIPTS, ENROLLING A STUDENT, MANAGING FORMS, ETC.) OVER THE NEXT 2-3 YEARS?

- MAIL 15%
- IN-PERSON 20%
- ONLINE OR MOBILE PAYMENT APP 31%
- INSTITUTION'S WEBSITE 34%

Over the next 2-3 years, most Americans would prefer to make a payment online.

Mobile payments use has become commonplace: 46% of U.S. consumers report having made a mobile payment, which is approximately 114 million adults.[2] According to our research, over 56% of district members say relying on paper-based transactions is a thing of the past, and over the next 2-3 years, 65% would prefer to make payments to an educational institution via an online method like an institution's website or a mobile application.

44% of Gen Z are not positive they could write a check to someone correctly, the highest of any generation.

46% of Americans believe they will not have to use cash within five years.

Recommendations

- Consider moving to a digital payment system for both on and off-site payments, which can streamline operations for families and staff.

- An online system provides families who prefer digital payments platform access 24/7, which can be especially helpful for families with parents or guardians who have trouble finding or affording childcare, have transportation challenges, work multiple jobs, or have schedules that conflict with business hours.

- For families who prefer paying in person, a digital solution allows school staff to record the transaction and provides an audit trail for tracking order status. Not to mention, all transactions are recorded in one system.

- When considering moving to a digital payment system, security is of the utmost importance. Ensure your vendor is PCI compliant and follows industry best practices.

Key finding: English or English and Spanish speaking families have more access to resources than families who do not speak English or English and Spanish.

English speakers are more likely to:

- Have paper envelopes or stamps for mailing letters at home AND access to paper envelopes, printers, copy machines, and fax machines at work
- Have internet access at home

English/Spanish speakers are more likely to:

- Use a checkbook, printer, or copy machine a few times weekly

People who speak a language other than English or Spanish are more likely to:

- Not be able to remember the last time they used a fax machine
- Pay to use internet access or borrow a friend's scanner if they don't have access at home
- Miss work to conduct business with a school/education system
- Have the need to pay for transportation and rely on payment options that are difficult for them
- Find using paper envelopes and stamps for mailing letters frustrating or annoying

Recommendations

- If you serve a community with a high population of non-English speakers, use tools that make it easier for families and staff to communicate. Digital technologies are increasingly adept at offering translation services for both virtual and in-person assistance. Even if in-person assistance is currently the best way to support your non-English speaking families, digital tools can provide immediate translation vs. having to pay for a translator and printing materials in advance.
- Since families who do not speak English are more likely to miss work or pay for transportation to conduct business with schools, consider partnering with other departments in your district to deliver services like school registration, transcript requests, or anything in between. Welcome centers or agencies for education and outreach are good places to start.
- Also evaluate alternatives to using printers, copy machines, scanners, and fax machines to serve these families. In addition to access challenges, using these technologies can introduce difficulties due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with the device itself.

Key finding: Different types of communities have different communications expectations.

Throughout the course of collecting data, we also investigated the expectations and preferences among students, families, and alumni specific to community type, including urban, suburban, and rural. We delved into things like which kind of technologies people have access to at home, and how they view education and government institutions.

63% of Americans believe they will not have to use a checkbook within five years.

URBAN

vs. suburban

More likely to:

- Question the security of a scanner
- Find paper envelopes, stamps, and checkbooks frustrating or annoying

Less likely to:

- Have paper envelopes, stamps, checkbooks, and printer access at home than their suburban counterparts
- Have a checkbook

vs. rural

More likely to:

- Use paper envelopes, stamps, printer, fax machine, computer, scanner at their place of work if they don't have access at home
- Pay to use a printer, computer, or fax machine
- Feel more confident in the security of their mobile device
- View education and government institutions that require certain transactions to be printed, faxed, mailed, or requiring a check as unwilling to invest in stakeholders
- Feel happy and relieved if education and government institutions allowed digital completion of transactions without having to print documents, mail a check, or meet in person

vs. suburban & rural

More likely to:

- Feel confident in the security of their computer and internet access
- Use computer, printer, fax machine, copy machine, scanner daily or a few times a week
- View education and government institutions that require certain transactions to be printed, faxed, mailed, or requiring a check to be stuck in the past and afraid of change
- Feel greater respect toward leadership if interactions could be completed without paper
- Be positive they could write a check or address an envelope correctly
- Report that relying on paper-based transactions is a thing of the past, and lack confidence in of education and government institutions because paper-based processes continue to be used

SUBURBAN	**vs. urban**	**More likely to:** • Be unhappy with how tax dollars are spent when an institution requires you to print materials in advance, bring a check, or fax documents to them • Expect more efficient access, service, and communication from government institutions than is currently received **Less likely to:** • Know where to go if they lack internet access
	vs. rural	**More likely to:** • Use computer daily • Feel more confident in the security of their mobile device • View education and government institutions that require certain transactions to be printed, faxed, mailed, or requiring a check as unwilling to invest in stakeholders • Feel happy and relieved if education and government institutions allowed digital completion of transactions without having to print documents, mail a check, or meet in person
	vs. urban & rural	**More likely to:** • Have access to all technologies at home • Be somewhat unhappy with customer service offered by an institution that requires you to print materials in advance, bring a check, or fax documents to them • Feel annoyed when an institution requires you to print materials in advance, bring a check, or fax documents to them • Feel like their time is respected if they can receive automated alerts, updates, reminders, etc. • Have completed an associates or bachelors degree **Less likely to:** • Want to use a fax machine again

RURAL

vs. suburban

More likely to:

- Have paper envelopes, stamps, personal checkbook, a printer, or a desktop/laptop computer at home
- Question the security of paper envelopes
- Find checkbooks, printers frustrating or annoying

Less likely to:

- Have used a printer, fax machine, computer, scanner
- Have a checkbook

vs. urban

More likely to:

- Use a mobile device daily
- Be unhappy with how tax dollars are spent when an institution that requires you to print materials in advance, bring a check, or fax documents to them
- Expect more efficient access, service, and communication from education or government institutions than is currently received

Less likely to:

- Know where to go if they don't have access to paper envelopes
- Know where to go if they lack internet access
- Remember the last time they used a checkbook or a printer or a copy machine, computer

vs. suburban & urban

More likely to:

- Have less education
- Have attended trade school
- Feel surprised if education and government institutions allowed digital completion of transactions without having to print documents, mail a check, or meet in person
- Borrow a friend's computer if don't have access at home

Less likely to:

- Want to have to use a checkbook again

Recommendations:

- Explore the perspectives, preferences, and tendencies of your respective community members – and even those of other communities – to get a better understanding of how people you serve want to interact with your institution.
- Ask the families, students and alumni from your school district about their thoughts and feelings on these issues. You may learn something unexpected that will help your administration better communicate with those you serve.

Conclusion

Final Thoughts

So, what have we learned? In summary:

- Many school district members would prefer to make payments and exchange information *online* over the next 2-3 years.

- Online, automated features for information exchange are perceived to be *valuable* to most people.

- People feel like their *time is respected* and *more included* in an organization when they have access to the features online solutions provide.

As the data indicates, online communications and payments are strongly preferred by students, families, and alumni of educational institutions and school districts.

It's important to recognize that the community members who need the most support — people with lower income or those who don't speak English — are likely struggling the most with paper-based processes. On the contrary, community members who can tolerate paper-based process are typically people with easy access to resources to begin with.

Furthermore, education systems should consider their missions, which often revolve around adequately preparing students for the future. It's worth asking: *Is our school district preparing all students equally? Is it possible that our processes favor some students over others?*

Finally, community members are not the only ones who stand to benefit from leaving paper-based processes behind. By digitalizing administrative processes like managing student records and processing enrollment applications, school staff and administrators can focus instead on efficiently serving the community.

Resources

1. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/#panel-cf1ede57-7a4b-489e-8bcb-de1f4a6e643c

2. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2019/10/are-americans-embracing-mobile-payments

3. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/23/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/

scribbles
S O F T W A R E

About Scribbles

Scribbles Software has helped over 10,000 K-12 schools and districts serve students and families faster. Our online student records management, enrollment systems, choice programs, lottery management, and reporting help our district partners to provide equitable, open access to school district resources to students, families, and community organizations– beginning with PreK enrollment and continuing with digital transcript orders post-graduation.

scribsoft.com

CGK | THE CENTER FOR GenerationalKinetics®

About the Center for Generational Kinetics

CGK is the leader in generational research, speaking, and solutions, with special emphasis on Millennials (aka Gen Y) and Gen Z (aka iGen). Our Ph.D.-led team leads primary research to determine the hidden drivers that leaders need to understand and improve to drive measurable results. Using our frontline approach, we combine quantitative and qualitative research with our deep generational expertise to uncover new insights, emerging trends, and specific actions that solve urgent challenges for clients.

genhq.com