



Chula Vista Elementary School District

in California



thoughtexchange

Multi-lingual platform engages thousands in genuine, two-way dialogue

With nearly 30,000 students in 45 schools, Chula Vista Elementary School District is the largest K-6 district in the state of California. In 2014, the challenges of engaging a community of its size intensified with the introduction of the Local Control and Accountability Plan. The state-mandated funding plan, referred to as LCAP, requires meaningful input from all stakeholder groups.

“Looking back at our first LCAP year, we recognized that we were far from where we wanted to be. We needed more efficient and effective tools and we saw Thoughtexchange as an opportunity to use technology to really expand the conversation with our stakeholders in ways we hadn’t been able to yet,” says Superintendent Francisco Escobedo, Ed.D.

The District was also drawn to Thoughtexchange’s ability to include English and Spanish speakers in the same conversation. Since a large percentage of their community is Spanish speaking, this consideration was a “non-negotiable necessity” for Dr. Escobedo and his team.

“If we really want to engage our community, then we have to match people where they are and where their comfort levels are. Language capabilities are just the beginning. Ensuring that the *experience* for Spanish speakers and English speakers is equal, as it is with Thoughtexchange, ensures that parents feel like their voices carry the same weight regardless of the language they speak,” he explains.

1,875 participants

88,519 stars

3,414 thoughts

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Making participation, and administration, easier

In addition to creating a more inclusive, more accessible participant experience, Dr. Escobedo and his team believed their partnership with Thoughtexchange would allow them to be more efficient and effective in collecting the thoughts and ideas of the entire learning community.

“We needed to find a way to allow people to provide input in a format that was convenient to them, without interrupting their family time or their work day,” says Ernesto Villanueva, Chula Vista’s Executive Director of Research, Evaluation and Instruction.

Partnering with Thoughtexchange allowed the District to significantly increase its participation through a single online process, or dialogue, that allowed meaningful engagement by parents, staff, and community members.

“Thoughtexchange allowed people to see comments from others in ways that a conversation or a standard survey wouldn’t allow for. Even if you have a hundred people in the room, you’re not going to hear from everyone. Nor could you expand on some of those thoughts efficiently in that live-meeting format.”

ERNESTO VILLANUEVA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, EVALUATION & INSTRUCTION

By asking two to three simple open-ended questions, and allowing participants to respond over a 30-day period, the Thoughtexchange process yielded useful comments and concerns from every stakeholder group—providing feedback about existing priorities in Chula Vista’s LCAP as well generating ideas about other areas of need.

“It gave us an avenue that was structured, purposeful and ultimately not only measurable, but actionable,” says Dr. Escobedo.

Cross-platform accessibility increases reach

Because a large part of Chula Vista’s community uses mobile phones to connect online, the District needed Thoughtexchange to deliver a “mobile-rich experience that didn’t feel like an afterthought.”

“We saw, across platforms, that Thoughtexchange is a tool that people found comfortable and that they trusted. Regardless of what device you use, the process doesn’t get in the way of what’s most important, which is hearing what our stakeholders’ thoughts were in relation to what we were asking,” says Villanueva.

Hearing from the silent majority

About 1,875 people contributed 3,414 thoughts, and assigned 88,519 stars to the ones they valued most. Through this process, Chula Vista was able to collect rich input from a dramatically larger portion of its community than ever before.

Villanueva believes that the efficiency and simplicity of Thoughtexchange created an authentic dialogue that stakeholders could feel invested in. “Thoughtexchange allowed people to see comments from others in ways that a conversation or a standard survey wouldn’t allow for. Even if you have a hundred people in the room, you’re not going to hear from everyone. Nor could you expand on some of those thoughts efficiently in that live-meeting format,” he explains.



Students in the Chula Vista Elementary School District experience a rigorous 21st Century learning environment that is rooted in effective teaching practices and high-quality instruction. Our mission is to nurture every child’s imagination, intellect, and sense of inquiry. Working collaboratively, we tap a collective intelligence rich with the spirit and creativity necessary for students to become difference makers.

Located in southern San Diego County, the District’s 45 schools serve more than 29,300 students, primarily in grades K-6. Our schools serve a vibrant, diverse community that features a blend of residential areas, recreational facilities, open space, and light industry.

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Multi-language process meets a high standard for language equality

Chula Vista's past engagement efforts set a high bar for language equity. The District provided on-site interpreters at all of its meetings, and audio headsets for those in need of simultaneous interpretation, similar to a United Nations meeting.

Dr. Escobedo and his team felt it was paramount to uphold this same standard as they moved the LCAP conversation online. Thoughtexchange's ability to deliver fully integrated English-Spanish language experiences that were mirror images of each other was critical in building trust with families of English learners.

Looking to the future

"We've absolutely found the results valuable," says Dr. Escobedo. The District used the information and data gathered through Thoughtexchange to help inform its LCAP refinements, which were adopted by its Board of Education last summer.

"We're now trying to move to a level of nimbleness where we can capture information, make adjustments, and measure how we're doing," says Villanueva. The District plans to expand its use of Thoughtexchange throughout the school year. "There's a sweet spot we are looking for that doesn't exhaust the end user, but allows us to see how people are feeling at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year," Villanueva explains.

"As we continue to use Thoughtexchange in this way, we want to be able to match the input we received to the action that we took as a result, and ultimately the change in achievement and services that we are providing to our learning community."

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DR. ESCOBEDO, SUPERINTENDENT
CHULA VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT



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