

# FLYER CONNECT

## SAN JUAN BOCES

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LEANLAB EDUCATION



Research

# San Juan BOCES + Flyer Connect

## Short Inquiry Cycles Report

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## INTRODUCTION

In Fall of 2019, San Juan BOCES partnered with LEANLAB Education, Flyer Connect, and Colorado Education Initiative in order to pilot the Flyer Connect app as a communication tool in Early Childhood Education. The effort included roll out of the app at several preschools in the SJ BOCES, research into family engagement outcomes during the pilot, and the use of the app as a tool for communication between families and BOCES-level service providers (e.g., case managers of students identified for individual education plans).

In order to better understand the implementation and use of the app with SJ BOCES service providers, we undertook a series of short inquiry cycles. These short inquiry cycles were designed to engage service providers in small research efforts that tested out aspects of the app implementation.

This report captures the work and findings from January to March 2020. In March 2020, the work was put on hold to focus on the changes required to cope with the covid 2019 pandemic. When work like this is able to continue, we hope this document will inform the next iteration of technology pilots and short inquiry cycles.

## Short Inquiry Cycle Pilot

Short inquiry cycles are a strategy developed in continuous improvement efforts for practitioners to quickly test out strategies, gather data, reflect, refine, and repeat. Within this project, we wanted to use short cycles to gather data on the conditions under which use of the app in a different setting (e.g., at a BOCES level rather than a school level) and to test out strategies for using the app to increase communication with parents.

## Goal of Short Inquiry Cycle Work

We had two primary goals for engaging in short inquiry cycles within this partnership:

- Testing out strategies with the app for increasing parent communication
- Testing out a new context Flyer Connect implementation

First, family and parent engagement is a key outcome of interest for both Flyer Connect and San Juan BOCES. For BOCES service providers, increasing communication with parents is a key

driver of engagement. The first goal was to test out strategies using the app for increasing communication with parents.

Flyer Connect was designed to be a school level communication tool, however, SJ BOCES operates as an organization that serves eight school districts in order to support the educational services of children and youth with disabilities. Within the short inquiry cycles, we wanted to learn how the implementation of an app in a different type of organization would function and what technical, social, and structural supports are needed to ensure successful implementation.

## Structures and Tools

We used several tools to support these short inquiry cycles. We share them here to document the process and to inform future efforts to implement similar processes in the BOCES or in other LEANLAB efforts.

Tool	Description
<b><u>Short Cycles Planning Guide</u></b>	A CEI developed tool designed to support practitioners for documenting their study plans for each cycle.
<b><u>Short Cycles Kickoff Meeting Agenda</u></b>	A three hour agenda for the Short Cycles Kickoff Meeting. The agenda was developed collaboratively between Paul Beck, Katie Van Horne, and Steve Otter.
<b><u>Short Cycles Data Collection Planner</u></b>	A sheet designed to inspire quick, detailed, and frequent data collection. Designed as an example to help people stay on track with the data collection.
<b><u>Cycle One Review, Cycle Two Planning Meeting Agenda</u></b>	A two hour meeting agenda for the end of cycle one and beginning of cycle two.

These tools were developed to be used, changed, and made to work for the local context of the implementation. There are a couple of ways in which the planning and actual events deviated:

- First, the service providers chose to pursue different inquiry projects related to parent communication because they have different roles and/or different approaches to the work.
  - While this changed the approach for supporting the short cycles, it did allow SJ BOCES to see and discuss the inconsistencies in the ways in which people in a similar roles approach their work, it allowed us to see the ways in which different contexts within the BOCES required different approaches to parent

communication, and it allowed people to share their learnings from different types of projects with their colleagues.

- When possible, we recommend having a more common approach to the short cycles or to have small groups working together to support collaboration during the short cycles.
- Next, in order to provide better support with many different projects going at once, Paul and Katie held meetings with individuals/pairs to check in on the progress of the short cycles and to document their progress, concerns, and learnings.
  - Individual meetings with BOCES staff led to many productive conversations and supported a greater understanding of the implementation successes and struggles.
  - Individual meetings also provided opportunities to understand the individual context of each test providing deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities being uncovered by the teams.

## Implementation of Short Inquiry Cycles

The SJ BOCES service providers worked through two inquiry cycles each one month in duration from January 2020 to March 2020. Each cycle started with a whole group meeting, included individual meetings with Katie and Paul halfway through and ended with a full group meeting. The final meeting was canceled due to the covid 19 pandemic school and office closures. Katie and Paul collected data on the implementation and findings from the short cycles and Steve collected information about the app implementation challenges and successes.

### Short Cycle Project Examples

Within the Short Cycles, the SJ BOCES service providers undertook three types of projects. Here we give a summary of each project.

#### Project 1: Weekly Parent Communication via Flyer Connect

In this project, the service providers sent weekly summaries of what they did with the students that week, an idea for an activity to support additional learning, and an ask for an update about how it is going at home.

#### Project 2: Providing Activities to Support School Learning

The goal of this project was to use Flyer Connect to provide direct communication with parents on their child's progress on milestones and how the parents can provide supports at home to support their child's development. Communication was planned to go out daily to parents. This project took place primarily at the preschool and with families on the Ute Mountain Ute reservation.

#### Project 3: Increasing Parent Connection with School Psychologists

In this project, the school psychologists decided to collect data from parents after each initial eligibility meeting through a phone survey and/or a google form. The goal of this work was to

build relationships with parents and knowledge of the school psych role. Next, the school psychologists wanted to think about how to build ongoing relationships and check ins with parents as a precursor to supporting the transition from pre-K to Kindergarten. This project did not use Flyer Connect because they only had one opportunity to interview parents after the initial eligibility meeting and setting up parents on Flyer Connect just for that would have hampered the ability to collect data in this pilot phase.

## Challenges

There were several challenges with the short inquiry cycles worth mentioning. First, the onboarding on the app took quite a bit of time for service providers and as they were developing their communication content, each person ran into struggles with the app. Some of this was due to the preschool roll out of Flyer Connect and situating the service providers within preschools. While this roll out structure worked for getting a larger number of parents on the app, the service providers did not have a way to directly connect with parents on the app unless they went through the school.

When parents did not access the app through the preschools, they needed to download and verify the app on their own. Most service providers did not have time to walk parents through these steps one on one so they only had about half of their families on the app and fewer verified.

Finally, some families were excited about the potential of the app and download the app but did not have access to data or the internet to receive messages. In one case, families wanted to use the app but they preferred communication that included both the service provider and the speech therapist at the school. It also added an extra step for the service provider to keep the speech therapist up to data with each conversation that happened on the app.

## Successes

One service provider found that through participation in the short inquiry cycles she increased her communication with parents and found that the app made it possible to communicate more frequently with parents in a way she had not been able to do before. At least once, these communications from her resulted in a parent responding about a different issue that they could resolve over the app.

For the school psychologists, the short cycles started a practice of collecting data about parent engagement and agency in the identification process and began to lead to more data collection and sharing of the practice across the team of school psychologists.

For the service provider teams, the short cycles process has illuminated opportunities for developing a communication structure and resources that can be used across service providers. It has also led to more concentrated areas of work at preschools where parents are on the app and it is being used frequently (e.g., Teddy Bear Preschool).

The short inquiry cycles gave the service providers time to devote to a focus on parent communication and it allowed some of them to experience the benefits of an app designed to streamline communication.

## Overall Short Inquiry Cycles Takeaways and Recommendations

From these challenges and successes and from additional observational data collected along the way, we have synthesized the takeaways from the two short inquiry cycles. In addition to these takeaways, we suggest recommendations to consider for future efforts.

### Takeaway and Recommendation 1: Structure of the App

Given the way the app is set up, the preschool centers (e.g., Teddy Bear) that are using the app more robustly and are expanding the use of the app, are places where case workers and other service providers are able to have more seamless communication with their parents. With this infrastructure in place, there is more space to test out the other more minute functionality that supports the case managers to communicate with their parents. We've learned that in order for the service provider to have an effective and open communication channel, the preschool center needs to be set up and communicating with parents already. This common access point makes it easier for parents to log in and for case managers to connect to those parents.

However, when this structure isn't up and running well at the preschools, service providers cannot connect with parents directly because they need to be verified through the school and the schools are not likely to devote time to this process.

This pilot would have been easier to get off the ground with SJ BOCES set up as its own school and with robust testing of that structure before the implementation kicked off. When using an app for a different purpose than it was originally designed, devote time at the beginning of the project to map out and stress test use cases for implementation.

### Takeaway and Recommendation 2: Piloting and Communication

We found that service providers were hesitant at times about how to communicate with parents about the pilot because they didn't want parents to put a lot of energy into this new app or to start expecting communication from this app going forward when they knew it was in the pilot phase.

When piloting new technology, users of the tech like the service providers in SJ BOCES need communication strategies in place up front for how to talk with parents about the status of the pilot and whether or not it will continue in the future.



### Takeaway and Recommendation 3: Context Matters

The use of the app varied across the service providers, the preschools, and the areas in which families lived. For example, at the Ute Mountain Ute preschool, younger parents are more likely to use the app whereas grandparent caregivers are resistant and would rather communicate face-to-face, on the phone, or by text. Across this area, there is limited access to cell phone data and space on the phone for the app which makes the use of the app impractical for some people. These are helpful insights as the Flyer Connec team aims to expand to serve more vulnerable and marginalized communities.

When people are already experiencing stress and trauma the use of another app or device may seem like an unnecessary burden. In these cases, the roll out of the app needs to be well designed and tested so it can be as flawless as possible to provide a value add to vulnerable populations.

### Takeaway and Recommendation 4: Implementation Planning is key

One major challenge of the short inquiry cycles was the functionality and implementation of Flyer Connect at the SJ BOCES service provider level. This and other challenges could stem from an underdeveloped implementation plan at the start of the project.

We've learned from this work that a careful and well laid out and communicated implementation plan for any new innovation pilot is an important first step to set the groundwork for research of any variety. We suggest a few key takeaways for designing implementation plans:

- Be clear and lay out in advance what the parameters, limitations, and structures are for a pilot versus a research project for all partners including founders and schools
- Before the roll out, ensure everyone is on the same page of what the implementation looks like and what the goals of the implementation are. Make sure the implementation is designed to solve for the specific things you are trying to learn about rather than big universal challenges.
- In planning, name the elements of the app that we are trying to learn about (e.g., messaging with parents) instead of rolling out all the elements of the app at once
- Don't get distracted by the sample size numbers in pilots because larger sample size can slow roll out so much that it makes it difficult to learn anything
- Early and often consider the balance between measuring outcomes and understanding the context and process that supports or hinders an implementation of a new technology
- Building buy in and understanding for the change you are making prior to launching into the implementation and research cycles (parents, practitioners, directors, SJ BOCES staff). This is especially important when, like in this case, the use case doesn't match the

original design of the app and you need multiple layers of people using the app all in different ways.

- For mid-level users of the app, like service providers, this is especially important. They need to know why they are doing the work, what the larger organization is learning and what the aspirations are for the project and the long term benefits for the organization. This will help build resilience when the pilot issues arise.

## Next Steps for SJ BOCES work

From these short cycles, the SJ BOCES team has identified next steps in continuing this work around parent engagement and communication. These next steps include:

- Create a team to build a communication structure and the development of resources specifically for the Ute Mountain Ute families
- Engage with preschools who have successfully implemented Flyer Connect (e.g., Teddy Bear) and work to get service providers connected to each parent or family members of students IEPs
- Encourage continued data collection and sharing within school psych group and consider supporting summer planning time to collaborate and get data collection structures in place
- Consider creating BOCES as a school in the app and having a BOCES internal administrator who can set up the families and service providers for easier verification pathways