

## When it comes to technology-supported family engagement, what do families actually prefer?



**MORE (Model of Reading Engagement) is THE elementary science and social studies program that builds schemas and improves academic achievement – including literacy and math.**

Families and schools are both critical components of a child's educational success. A lasting legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic was the investment in technology that many schools made, which could help facilitate family-school engagement.

However, engaging families has historically been a challenge for schools. While the best approaches are hotly debated, the challenges have been consistent. But what approaches do parents actually prefer? Unlocking family's preferences could help schools engage more effectively.



### How do families' engage with digital activities and two-way text messaging over the summer?

Our study analyzes differences in how families engage with two forms of technology-supported engagement: a free educational app and two-way texting (i.e. text messages they can respond to). We look at engagement data from over 3,500 families during the summers of 2019 and 2020.

In order to sort families into groups, we looked at four different aspects of engagement: (1) the number of interactions, (2) the duration between the first and last interaction, (3) when the interaction occurred (e.g., during business hours or non-business hours), and (4) whether the family chose to opt out of receiving texts.

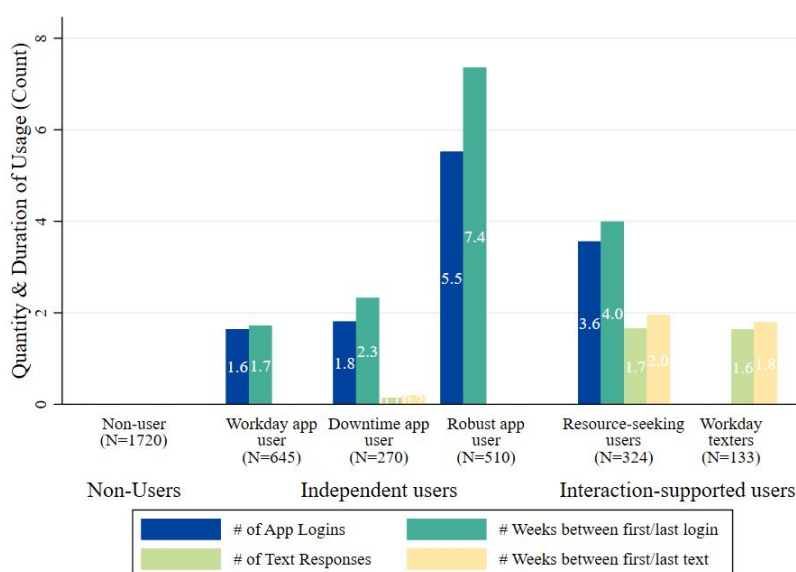
We use a statistical method called **Latent Profile Analysis** that allows us to identify distinct family groups based on their patterns of technology engagement. These methods provide an alternative to using groups such as race or socioeconomic status.



## Different families have different preferences: families tended to favor one of the two technology resources, but rarely both.

Our analysis found that families tended to respond to *either* texting or the app, but often not both. Similarly, most families either engaged exclusively during business hours or exclusively outside of business hours.

Digging into the data, we identified six “types” of families. Of the families that only used the digital app, 14% were “**robust app users**” who engaged often and over a longer period of time. “**Workday app users**” engaged less frequently and exclusively during business hours (18%), while “**downtime app users**” engaged periodically and during non-business hours (7%). Families who engaged with text messages only tended to do so during business hours, thus making up the “**workday texters**” (4%).



The two groups that break the “either/or” categorization were the “**non-users**” who never engaged with either technology (48%), and the “**resource-seeking users**” (9%), families who used both text messaging and the app.



**Technology-based engagement strategies need to adapt to families’ diverse preferences in order to reach more families**

Technology could provide a way to meet families’ diverse needs and narrow the gap between home and school, but it all depends on *how* the technology is used. Our work shows a diversity of family preference: some respond to an opt-in resource such as an app, while others prefer to be engaged in two-way texts to access resources. Importantly, many families exclusively responded to one of our resources but not the other, which implies that schools should use a varied approach to reach more families.

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