



SchoolMessenger®

TCPA Features Guide


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Introduction

We know you understand the value and importance of organization communications. Whether those communications are via text, phone call, email or social media, they are powerful tools for ensuring a strong community, involving employers in their employee's training, alerting users of changes in policies, or notifying recipients when there are critical incidents at the office, such as weather-related closings, evacuations or lockdowns.

This document provides an overview of the features provided by SchoolMessenger which relate to helping organizations improve their TCPA compliance.

 **Important:** *This document is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice. Users are urged to consult their legal counsel to best understand their organization's risks and options under the law.*

The Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)

The TCPA was created in 1991 and is administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Updated in 2015, the rules, among other things, prohibit calls made using automatic telephone dialing equipment or a prerecorded message to any telephone number assigned to a cell phone or any service for which the called party is charged for the call without prior express consent, unless the call is for "emergency purposes" as defined by the TCPA.

In the quarter century since the TCPA was enacted, the variety of communications options available to both organizations and users has multiplied. Today, nearly two-thirds (77 percent) of U.S. adults own a smartphone, up from 35 percent in 2011, according to a [2015 study by the Pew Research Center](#). The same study reported that text messaging is the most widely and frequently used smartphone feature or app.

 **Note:** *The FCC considers a text message to be a call.*

2015 Update

Over the summer of 2015, the FCC issued a Declaratory Ruling and Order (Ruling) related to the TCPA. In the Ruling, the FCC:

- Reiterated that consent is required from the "called party," who is designated as the consumer assigned to the number dialed and billed for the call or the non-subscriber customary user of a number in a family or business calling plan.
- Reaffirmed that called parties must be able to revoke consent at any time and in any reasonable manner, and that the sender of the message (e.g., site or department) bears the burden of the proof of the consent.
- Repeated that consent is not required for calls for "emergency purposes," defined as a call "made necessary in any situation affecting the health and safety of consumers."

For organizations using automated notification systems, this means ensuring processes for obtaining consent, managing opt outs, carefully considering what is and is not an emergency under the law, and integrating up-to-date records of consent information with their notification systems.

SchoolMessenger and Consent Management

To help you and your organization improve compliance with the FCC's latest TCPA clarifications, SchoolMessenger has implemented several simple and friendly features across its products which provide you, and the recipients of your telephone and SMS text messages, options to capture consent and customize the way individuals receive communications. Deciding on your organization's policies, procedures and strategy for improving your TCPA compliance, setting a plan and ensuring the responsible parties in your organization understand the importance of their role in that plan is paramount.

Multi-Level Tools

SchoolMessenger provides a multi-point strategy to help manage TCPA compliance at a level configurable to align with your organization's policies and processes.

- **Consent Capture:** Integrated campaign tools encourage and collect consent through multiple channels.
- **Interactive Preferences:** Every message is an opportunity for recipients to further refine how, where and if they are contacted.
- **Carrier Data Integration:** The system proactively monitors for high-risk phone numbers and progressively applies adjustments or blocking.



Compliance Mode


Organizations looking for a stricter level of compliance have the option to ask to have **Compliance Mode** enabled. With this feature enabled on your SchoolMessenger account, numbers still **pending** consent, will not receive messages, unless the Broadcast Type is set to **Emergency**.

Automated Blocking and Preference Settings

Your SchoolMessenger account can be optionally configured so requests initiated by recipients of voice broadcasts, to either unsubscribe from certain types of calls, or be blocked entirely, will automatically be processed and updated by the system. Numbers which have been blocked or unsubscribed can easily be unblocked or resubscribed by contacts or by users (in the event of an unsubscribe error or request) at any time. This is an optional feature; a more hands-on, manual approach may be more suited to your organization.

Reporting

Keeping abreast of the consent, preferences and changes of your contacts plays a big role in efforts to improve compliance with TCPA. In the Reports section of SchoolMessenger, users can easily run a variety of reports which display where consent is still pending, approved or denied for voice or SMS, along with dates, times and results. For organizations not wishing to employ Compliance Mode and/or Automated Blocking and Preferences on their accounts, these reports provide the information needed to make manual adjustments to contact information.

 **Important:** *Not all users will have access to all features. Please contact your system administrator for access to additional features. You can find more information about the SchoolMessenger tools available to support each of these levels in this guide, supporting PDFs and in your account's online Help.*

Consent Capture

The **consent** of message recipients is the crux of the TCPA. Therefore, capturing consent before delivering voice or text messages is at the heart of SchoolMessenger's TCPA compliance features. And there are many easy and effective ways to obtain and record this required consent.

What is consent under the TCPA?

The TCPA requires that organizations sending prerecorded voice messages via telephone or SMS text messages require the advance, express permission of the recipients. Permission should be captured and stored, ideally in writing, before any voice or text message broadcasts are sent.

Here are some clarifying points to help you better understand how the TCPA views consent:

- Consent is required from the "called party."
- "Called party" is the consumer assigned to the number dialed and billed for the call, or the nonsubscriber customary user of a number included in a family or business calling plan.
- Called party must be able to revoke consent.
- The caller bears the burden of proof of consent.
- Consent must be in writing (and signed) if calls include telemarketing.

Obtaining Consent

There are abundant opportunities to obtain and capture the permission needed to send voice and text notifications through SchoolMessenger. You may even already employ many of the easiest and most recommended methods of obtaining consent for other administrative functions, and they can be easily adapted to help with obtaining and storing a record of consent for both voice calls and SMS text messages.

Here are some suggestions on methods for obtaining consent records for use in SchoolMessenger:

Consent for Voice Calls

Staff Onboarding

When your organization is onboarding new employees, provide them with a checkbox alongside the fields for **Phone** and **Mobile** numbers which states something to the effect of “I give permission to be contacted using our organization’s automated notification systems.” This information can then be easily used to apply contact elections to your SchoolMessenger account, especially if the forms are electronic.

Email

Email provides you with a great avenue for pursuing consent. Using the built-in email feature in SchoolMessenger, you can send an email asking for recipients to give permission for phone messages. You could ask them to click a link to your organization’s portal or permission form on your website. You could also send an attached form to be completed and returned via email or printed and returned by a staff member.

Consent for SMS Text Messaging

SMS (Text Message) Opt-In Campaign

Before any SchoolMessenger account can send an SMS text message broadcast, it must first complete its “Opt-In Campaign”. This is a process that can be easily coordinated with SchoolMessenger support. For more information on SMS Text Opt-In Campaign, please contact SchoolMessenger support and/or read the comprehensive PDF guide: *Launching an Effective SMS Text Opt-In Campaign*.

This same guide, along with further instructions, can also be found in the online Help section of your SchoolMessenger account.

SMS Opt-Out

Any mobile phone can opt out of SMS messages at any time by sending **STOP** to the SchoolMessenger short-code. Phones which have previously opted out can opt in again at any time by sending **Y** or **YES**.

Interactive Preferences

The most abundant and flexible tools for maintaining your plan for TCPA compliance fall under the “Interactive Preferences” category. As peoples’ day-to-day lives change, so do the frequency and methods with which they wish to be contacted. Whereas they may have initially been happy to get a recorded phone message at any time of day, they may now be unable to accept calls and prefer they instead get a text message, email or push notification. Their interest in the types of messages sent may also change.

To make sure you can provide the recipients of your messages with the means to inform you of these preferences, SchoolMessenger has a number of always-available options for you and your contacts:

Telephone Voice Opt-Out

At any time, while listening to a phone message broadcast through SchoolMessenger, recipients can press **5** on their phone to initiate the opt-out process. After pressing **5**, they will be given three choices:

- To unsubscribe from messages like these, please press 1.
- To unsubscribe from all Non-Emergency messages, press 2.
- To opt-out of all phone notifications, please press 3.


Following a recipient’s completion of this process, a report of their election is sent to your SchoolMessenger account. There are two ways which your account can be configured to handle requests:

- Account administrator views the report and makes manual adjustments to individual contacts.
- System automatically adjusts preferences and/or blocks phone numbers.

Detailed information and instructions about opting out from voice messages, as well as instructions on configuring your account to take full advantage of these options, please review the comprehensive PDF guide, *Voice Call Opt-Out Guide*. This same guide, as well as further instructions, can be found in the online Help section of your SchoolMessenger account.

SMS Opt-Out/Opt-In

From a mobile phone, a contact wishing to opt out of further text messages can send **STOP** to your organization’s SchoolMessenger SMS short-code. Immediately following that, they will receive a message confirming their election and will no longer receive any of your broadcast text messages. If a contact later wishes to change that preference, they need only to send **Y** or **YES** to subscribe again.

 **Important:** *Opting-Out, for both Voice and SMS Text, is done on a phone-by-phone basis and will only initiate a request for the phone number upon which the recipient is currently receiving a message. They must complete the process from every phone for which they wish to change preferences or opt-out.*

Manually Update Contact Info in SchoolMessenger

No matter which way administrators are informed of a contact's preferences, there is always the option for an authorized user to log in to SchoolMessenger and adjust those preferences manually. The Contact Details for each person can be found in your **System** tab under **Contacts**, and every phone has a series of checkboxes indicating their **Consent Status** and settings for upon which Broadcast Types that phone will be called.



More information and instructions on manually updating contact information can be found in the online Help for your SchoolMessenger account.

FAQs

Important: The content below is for information purposes only and is not intended to be legal advice.

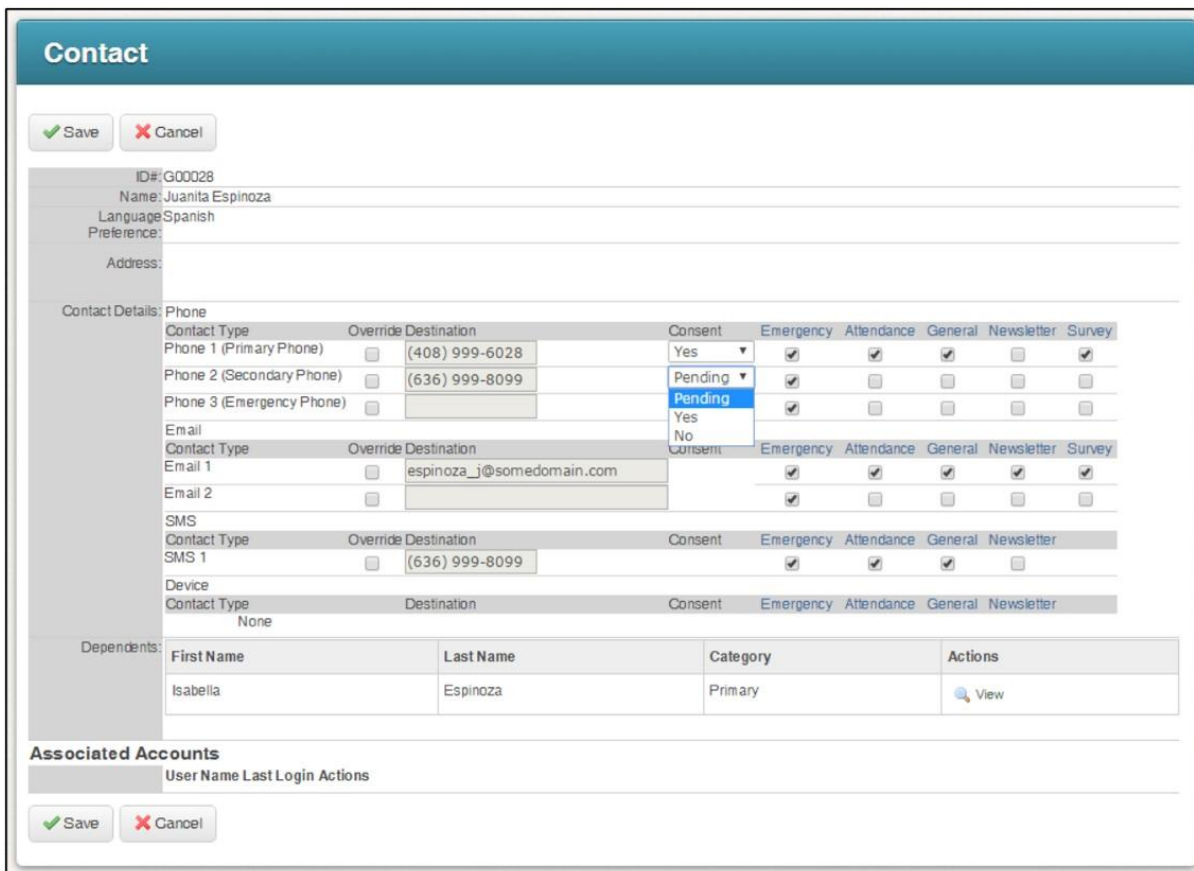
Why is recipient consent for organizations more important now?

While it's always been a good idea to get recipient okay for the preferred method of reaching them with communications, recent clarifications by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) have re-emphasized there are legal reasons, too.

Specifically, for telephone calls and SMS text messages, prior express consent is required from the called party if the organization's call is made using automated dialing systems to any telephone number assigned to a mobile

phone. The only general exemption is when calls are made for “emergency purposes” – that is, a call or text made in a situation affecting the health and safety of consumers.

Keep in mind TCPA only covers automated telephone calls and SMS text messages. Laws or regulations regarding email or other communications have not changed as a result of the TCPA ruling.



Contact

Save Cancel

ID#: G00028
 Name: Juanita Espinoza
 Language: Spanish
 Preference:
 Address:

Contact Details:

Contact Type	Override	Destination	Consent	Emergency	Attendance	General	Newsletter	Survey
Phone 1 (Primary Phone)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(408) 999-6028	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Phone 2 (Secondary Phone)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(636) 999-8099	Pending	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phone 3 (Emergency Phone)	<input type="checkbox"/>		Pending	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Email

Contact Type	Override	Destination	Consent	Emergency	Attendance	General	Newsletter	Survey
Email 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	espinoza_j@somedomain.com	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Email 2	<input type="checkbox"/>		No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SMS

Contact Type	Override	Destination	Consent	Emergency	Attendance	General	Newsletter
SMS 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	(636) 999-8099	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Device

Contact Type	Destination	Consent	Emergency	Attendance	General	Newsletter
None						

Dependents:

First Name	Last Name	Category	Actions
Isabella	Espinoza	Primary	View

Associated Accounts

User Name	Last Login	Actions

Save Cancel

What are the requirements for telephone or SMS text message consent?

Consent – ideally in writing, whether it’s on paper or provided digitally – is tied to an individual phone number a person uses. So, for SMS text messages, for example, requiring someone to opt in by texting “YES” may be considered express consent. For automated voice calls, express consent for specific phone numbers could be granted on a paper form, through an emailed form with a digital signature, or in some other manner.

Recipients also have to be able to revoke consent, or opt out, at any time from SMS text messages or automated phone calls, and those numbers must be blocked by the organization.

What tools are available to capture consent?

It depends on whether the consent is for SMS text messaging or voice calls. SchoolMessenger has long had automated SMS text message opt in capability. For voice calls, there are email templates organizations can use to inform recipients about consent tools and areas within the SchoolMessenger interface for organizations to record consent (such as in the Contact Info tab).

What if a user changes his or her mind, or contact information?

Different interactive preference tools support both SMS text messages and voice calls. For SMS text messages, there is a text-message based opt out. For voice calls, there is fine-grained touch-tone opt out – even for specific categories of messages – that is signalled by users pressing certain phone keypad numbers during a received call, captured in a block report. Overall, recipients have greater control over if, why, and where they're contacted.

How can we know if a phone number has issues, or has been reassigned to someone else?

SchoolMessenger does pro-active, behind-the-scenes monitoring and automatically revokes consent for numbers at a higher risk of having been re-assigned or ported to a new owner (such as those with frequent disconnects) for which consent may no longer be valid. This new carrier data integration feature, using innovative Consent Lapse Intelligence (CLI), provides an additional layer of protection.

How does SchoolMessenger combine all of these approaches to help improve TCPA compliance?

While each set of tools can be used individually, SchoolMessenger includes a unique Compliance Mode that intelligently combines and leverages various consent inputs for voice calls. Compliance Mode can be toggled on or off. When toggled on, Compliance Mode only initiates phone broadcasts to numbers for which consent is on file if the notification is not flagged as an Emergency Broadcast Type. One approach may be for an organization to undertake a campaign to build a good base of consent records, then contact us to activate Compliance Mode to have peace of mind that it is no longer calling users for whom it cannot verify consent.

Can Compliance Mode be turned off?

Yes. An organization may have reasons to not use Compliance Mode based on their other record keeping procedures, policies, or processes. Organizations can continue using SchoolMessenger as they do now.

Do the tools in SchoolMessenger products ensure TCPA compliance?

No. Compliance is as much about organization practices – how an organization uses the tool – as it is the tool itself. However, our tools are designed to streamline coming into, and maintaining, compliance.

Additional Documentation and Resources

More information and detail about the main features your organization can use to improve TCPA compliance is available. SchoolMessenger suggests that all staff in your organizations who will be using SchoolMessenger to send notifications familiarize themselves with this document as well as these others:

Voice Call Opt-Out Guide

Complete instructional and decision-making guide for managing voice call opt-out requests.

Found in your SchoolMessenger account's online Help: **Phone Opt-Out Guide**

Launching an Effective SMS Text Opt-In Campaign

Comprehensive guide for completing the campaign required before sending SMS messages through SchoolMessenger. • Found in your SchoolMessenger account's online Help: **SMS Text Opt-In Guide**

Summary of TCPA Rules

An overview of TCPA rules written and provided by the FCC. Your legal team can review this robust summary document to learn the basics about this regulation: [TCPA Summary.pdf](#)

Training

We strongly encourage our customers to schedule trainings with all staff and faculty who will be using the SchoolMessenger system. Once your organization has decided on how you will approach TCPA compliance, schedule a training session with SchoolMessenger support.