

School Assistance Apps a Class Apart

Such apps gaining popularity as parents and schools turn to technology for enhancing safety of children and improving administration

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New Delhi: Rachna and Satish Jha can now track their 10-year-old daughter when she's on her way back from Greenwood International School in Bengaluru. The parents don't normally monitor the school bus bringing their daughter home, but the mobile application Northstar comes in handy in case the journey gets prolonged due to a traffic jam.

Such apps are gaining popularity as parents and schools turn to technology for enhancing safety of children and improving administration. Just as tutor apps have attracted the interest of venture capitalists, a number of startups has come up to offer services to schools, a not-for-profit sector in India.

These companies are coming up with apps around the school ecosystem and have managed to attract funding too, providing services ranging from calendar planning for students, taking attendance with a swipe on the phone and even building tools to help collect fees from parents online.

"The needs of today are so different from that even 10 years ago. Traffic on the roads is bad and the law and order situation has worsened. A number of third-party platforms are relevant for school students when it comes to safety as well as to organise school data and create institutional memory," said Sandeep Hooda, co-founder of Gurgaon-based Vega Schools.

SCHOOL BUS TRACKING APPS

AppAlert, Trackschoolbus and Northstar are some such apps which allow real-time tracking of school buses with roll-call capability.

AppAlert recently raised ₹6 crore from

angel investors based out of Delhi and competes with the other two apps to provide real-time tracking of school buses including what stop the bus is at when you check it.

Bobbie H Kalra and Shyam Ramamurthy of the company that launched Northstar recommend that schools reward bus drivers who are able to finish their trips on time so as to encourage healthy competition and safe driving.

According to Mumbai's EuroSchool, which uses bus safety technology, such apps have helped parents and the school administration ensure safe carriage of children. "The availability of a live feed of the bus commute also ensures safety of children inside the bus and helps us monitor and correct any shortcoming," said Vikas Phadnis, trustee at EuroSchool Education Trust.

PARENT-TEACHER ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS

A Bengaluru-based app company Educhat emulates the Whatsapp model for schools, allowing teachers, parents and students to stay connected and turn every classroom into a safe and secure online community. "Communication between parents and schools is a big problem and sometimes parents even have to wait an entire day to meet institution heads. With the app, parents have direct access to the principal as well as teachers," said Chander Prakash Garg, who has developed Educhat.

The free of cost model for both parents and teachers engages 4,200 schools using its mobile and web platforms. The company plans to scale up by selling students customised higher education solutions if they optionally want to take that up. The company received funding even before launching the venture but

Apps for School Children

- App makers coming up with offerings to assist schools and parents
- AppAlert, Trackschoolbus and Northstar allow real-time tracking of school buses with roll-call capability
- Educhat, MyLy help schools communicate better with parents
- Globally, education is the second-largest industry after healthcare
- Such apps gaining popularity as parents and schools turn to technology for enhancing safety of children and improving administration
- Some apps lighten burden of teachers, students by providing tablets with school books
- Education remains not-for-profit sector in India



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Trustee at EuroSchool Education Trust

Garg did not disclose the amount.

Earlier this year, Jaipur-based co-founders of MyLy app, Gaurav Mundra and Madhup Bansal, raised seed funding of \$100,000 (about ₹67 lakh). This app enables teachers to remind parents via Google calendars about the events taking place at school, upload videos and photographs from events that have gone by and even take attendance. MyLy will go live next month with a tool that allows parents to pay the fee to the school as well as facilitate schools in this process.

In Mumbai, Emissio's creators Kumail Amiruddin and Mazahir Mandasaurwala, who work with 180 schools across the world and 40 in India, were convinced that news was never reaching parents via the means of a circular.

"When we were young, we made paper planes out of school circulars and that was the end of the story," said Amiruddin. Today, the company is backed by

Cox & Kings to promote its app solution to schools where six core functions are taken care of including calendars, photographs, messages, PDFs and links that can be sent across. The school involved has to send simple messages through the app.

The business model is an average per student subscription fee of Rs 250 rupees per year that includes orientation to the app. Emissio engages 800 students on average per school.

But developers have their concerns about competition. "This is a copycat market since conceptually it is easy to build such apps. The real challenge is to execute the job well," said Amiruddin.

ENRICHING TEXTBOOKS

Ignitor, a learning platform, is literally reducing the "burden" of students. The app helps educational institutes procure quality tablets and a software plat-

form and relevant content bundle including digital textbooks, animations, etc.

Eduator charges the school, which may in turn charge parents as part of its fees. The company charges per student licence for the application software in a yearly subscription model priced at ₹2,000-6,000 depending on the content and syllabus.

It currently works with Modern School on Delhi's Barakhamba Road, Delhi Public School in Faridabad and Indus World School Gurgaon, among others, to get tablet brands such as Samsung and Lenovo or brands like Microsoft and has tied up with publishers such as McGraw Hill Education Pearson, Oxford University Press and S Chand and more. It has 80,000 subscribers from more than 110 campuses in India.

Last year, Hyderabad Angels, a network of angel investors focused on early-stage businesses, exited education startup Eduator Technologies with substantial returns.

At Mumbai's Oberoi International School, a similar international app by the name SeeSaw is used on tablets. With this, student work can be shared with classmates and parents or published to a class blog, giving students an audience for their work and offering parents a personalised window into their child's learning.

FEE COLLECTION THE NEXT BIG THING

NIIT has an app called Quick School, developed for schools to manage information spanning all functional requirements such as fee collection, report card generation, payroll, admissions, inventory management and transportation. It also has the unique feature of modules which facilitate the implementation of CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation) guidelines.