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Newsletters



Tips for Using Newsletters to Communicate with Parents

Many schools publish newsletters (and/or e-newsletters) to establish school-home communication. A quality newsletter needs to be well planned and organized to reach parents effectively. Use this tip sheet as a tool for evaluating your newsletter or to help you develop a newsletter at your school.

What is the purpose of the newsletter?

- To inform parents about what is going on at the school
- To stimulate interest in school activities
- To communicate expectations
- To celebrate successes
- To share information from one parent to others
- To solicit feedback from parents

Questions to ask about your school's newsletter:

- Who is it for?
- What do we want to communicate?
- How do we present the information?
- Who is responsible for developing the newsletter?
- Who is responsible for designing, formatting, and copying the newsletter?
- How will it be distributed?
- Who needs to approve the newsletter before it is sent out?

Content of a quality newsletter:

- Feature specific items from the school community compact
- Feature specific items from the school's parent involvement policy
- Explain the school homework guidelines and parents' role with homework
- Suggest books for children to read, parents to read, and families to read together and discuss
- Share recent accomplishments of the students in all areas of activities
- Include upcoming changes in school policies or programs
- Announce service projects that the school is implementing
- Include a calendar of upcoming events: testing, workshops, conferences, etc.
- Include human interest items featuring students, class projects, volunteers, etc.
- Be sure that content is clear, simple, and direct
- Make sure the letter maintains a positive and upbeat tone
- Ask parents to write articles for the newsletter
- Ask parents for tips for helping kids with homework
- Ask parents to share ideas for family activities and outings
- If each class is highlighted, make sure to include special education classes also
- Feature community resources such as libraries, museums, zoos, and youth clubs
- Provide information for enrolling in youth organizations and activities such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys & Girls Clubs, and 4-H

Using Newsletters to Communicate with Parents

Information taken from: Colorado Parent Information & Resource Center

Newsletters are used by many schools as a major form of school-home communication. A quality newsletter may well be an effective way of reaching parents and informing them of the school's activities and expectations.

As their name implies, "newsletters" provide readers with news in an informal letter style. Their function is to inform, announce, teach, stimulate interest, and in other ways communicate. Newsletters are useful when careful thought is given to: "Why have a newsletter?" "Who is it for?" "What do we want to communicate?" "How should we present the information?"

Content

The content of a newsletter should be informative, relevant, timely, brief, and to the point. Newsletters often include:

- Recent accomplishments of students in academic, athletic, artistic, and citizenship areas.
- Changes in school appearance or organization.
- Recently initiated services of the school.
- Upcoming school events, schedule changes, conference times, testing dates, etc.
- Human interest items featuring students, parent volunteers, or staff.
- Program articles on the strengths and emphasis of the curriculum.
- Scholarship application information.
- Activities scheduled for parents, students, and community members.
- Transportation arrangements.
- After-school childcare opportunities.

Style

Newsletters should be written in a style that is clear, simple, and direct. Humor is appropriate, as long as it is reviewed in advance to ensure that it would not be offensive to any readers. As newsletter editors work to inform and communicate, they should attempt to be objective and stimulating while maintaining a positive and upbeat tone.

Format and Design

To attract the attention of parents, newsletters should be attractive and well organized. The following ingredients contribute to appealing newsletters:

- **Simplicity:** Present your message in an uncluttered format. Reducing the number of lines, drawings, and different typefaces can make the newsletter look "cleaner" and easier to read.
- **Proportion:** Design pages in a manner that balances articles and illustrations. Also, consider dividing pages into thirds or fifths in order to increase the visual appeal of each page.
- **Contrast:** Use simple techniques, such as boxes and graphics, to call attention to special items. Limit the use of these techniques on each page, however, so that they will have the desired impact.

- **Harmony:** Develop a visual “theme” for each newsletter so that the layout and graphics are complementary. Use shapes and images that go well with each other and are pleasing to look at.
- **White Space:** White space is the area on a page in which there is no writing or illustration. This space is very effective in improving the readability of the newsletter.

Additional Ideas on Producing Effective and Attractive Newsletters

- Present the main ideas of an article in the first few paragraphs. Who, What, When, Where, and Why should be answered at the top of every article.
- Solicit articles from teachers, administrators, parents, and students.
- Invite readers to write to the newsletter to share ideas about the school.
- Use headings within articles to highlight the points that are being made.
- Select a tone that is informal, personal, and friendly.
- Use language that is familiar and direct.
- Liven text with simple graphics that capture attention, summarize ideas, provide reminders, convey attitudes, etc.
- Use one typeface on a page. *Italics*, **boldface**, or ALL CAPITALS can be used for emphasis in headings. On occasion, names of people or programs can be printed in a contrasting type to catch the reader’s eye.
- Print or photocopy the newsletter in dark ink on white or pastel paper for clean, clear, and readable copies.

Remember the first principle of newsletters: If the information is important enough to be sent to families, it is important enough to be sent in the most attractive and readable form.

Information taken from: Colorado Parent Information & Resource Center



Resources for School Newsletters

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 96).

Think about how newsletter articles could give parents better information about what students are learning, how well they are doing, and what parents can do to help them. Here are some examples of newsletter entries from our files, and how they could be rewritten to focus more on learning.

Standard newsletter article	Linked to learning
Next Thursday, a noted naturalist photographer and lecturer will make a presentation, "Primate Safari," at the library.	Add: Students are learning that plants and animals have features that help them live in different settings. Ask your children what they noticed about the animals. How do tusks, claws, body shape, and color help animals hide, find food, and protect themselves?
The Gift of Reading program helps to build our school's library collection. Please visit the Bookstore, where books can be "adopted." Your name and a message will be inscribed on the bookplate, and your child will have the first check-out privilege.	Add: This year we are working hard to raise students' reading skills. As our school report card shows, only one in five sixth graders is proficient in reading. To become a good reader, every student should read at least 25 books a year. You will be getting a collection of tips on helping your child read. We welcome your ideas!
Students in the Nutrition and Wellness Class created displays called Wellness Corners. Each student focused on some aspects of teen wellness (physical, mental, emotional, and social health).	Add: To create the displays, students applied current research on health to develop a personal fitness plan. Ask your student to explain his or her personal standards for healthy behavior, including nutrition, rest, and physical activity, and how these standards fit into the plan.

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

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