



Creating Effective and Efficient Weekly Newsletters

By Darren McLaurin, Central Regional Service Specialist



Often when we talk about education during the pandemic, we focus on the negative ramifications associated with schools being closed and students forced to learn online. A positive outcome of the global pandemic was the need for educators to rethink how we communicate with parents, guardians,

and the overall school community.

Keeping Stakeholders Informed in this new era of education is quite a challenge. Parent involvement in schools has been linked to academic and social-emotional development. Communication in the educational institution is the basis on which the educational practice is built. It is the process that leads to the achievement of its goals (Mercouri, 2009).

During the pandemic, parent communication shifted from a monthly task to a weekly and sometimes daily endeavor for school administrators. Administrators needed to move from static forms of communication to more dynamic models that allowed changes to be made even after the communication was sent. As principals and teachers moved to an online platform, software and digital apps made this job easier. Tools such as Zoom, Google Classroom, Seesaw, Remind, Survey Monkey, School Messenger, and Smores became the lifeline that allowed educators to reach their stakeholders.

Once parents became accustomed to these new “on demand” forms of virtual communication tools, there was no going back. Educators must continue to differentiate communication to reach their diverse audience within

their school community to provide a family-centered educational experience for all students.

All principals want to develop communication models that are effective in promoting engagement, but how do you balance that with the daily demands of running your school? The following are three priorities principals need to focus on to provide an efficient and meaningful weekly newsletter.

1. Create a Template
2. Delegate Responsibility
3. Leverage Social Media

When is Johnny’s field trip? Where can I download a physical form? What time is the early dismissal next week? Publishing your weekly newsletter on the same day each week is your first step in developing a consistent communication model. These weekly updates provide parents with an easy one-stop shop to find answers to everyday questions and it allows them to feel connected to their school. I am sure you are saying, “Weekly?” I will never have time for that!

During the pandemic, it seemed like no sooner did an update get posted and something needed to be changed. This fluid landscape principals faced forced most schools to shift from a static (.pdf) style newsletter to a dynamic (web based) newsletter. There are many web-based tools available to assist schools in creating dynamic newsletters; Smores, one of the easiest to use, allows users to create a dynamic, linked newsletter that allows modifications even after the communication has been sent to parents. Smores

also allows for embedded links and videos to create more of a multimedia approach compared to the antiquated hard copy newsletters. When selecting an app to create your newsletter, make sure it is easily accessible on mobile devices. Parents on-the-go are more likely to read your newsletter if it is easily viewable on their phone.

Creating a template will allow you to keep your primary content consistent. This allows parents to quickly find the information they need. The communication purpose is fulfilled when both the transmitter and the receiver understand each other (Saiti, 2012). The template format also expedites the creation of the newsletter. For example, the top of page 1 should always be your monthly calendar.

The number one question parents have is about dates and times. Each week, you can simply eliminate any dates that have passed and add any new events to your calendar. The bottom of the page should always provide contact information for your building. By following this template, the top and bottom of your weekly newsletter can be completed in minutes rather than hours.

In creating the body of your update, set aside certain spaces for a variety of groups throughout your school community. Guidance, Health Room, PTO, Athletics, Band, Clubs, etc., can all provide articles and snippets about important upcoming events they would like included in your newsletter. As your update gains popularity, you may need a waiting list due to the number of different departments waiting to have articles published in your weekly update. Acquiring photos for your newsletter is also easier than you may think. Make sure all photos have the appropriate releases on file and encourage your teachers to submit photos of exciting things happening in their classrooms.

Teachers are competitive and do not want to be left out of an opportunity to highlight their students/lessons in the weekly newsletter.

Gone are the days of copying your paper newsletter and stuffing it into your students' backpacks. Technology and social media have made the distribution of weekly newsletters effective and efficient. For example, a school could post updates every Friday morning on social media and/or through direct text and email as opposed to at dismissal time. This would allow for any corrections or additions to be done prior to leaving for the weekend.

Prior to COVID, most schools published a monthly update, but due to the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, it forced many of these same schools to turn to weekly updates which have continued even after the pandemic ended.

It may seem overwhelming, but if you create a template, delegate responsibility throughout your building and leverage social media to publish your updates, you will find that weekly newsletters are manageable. By engaging parents, you will help develop a strong culture that is the cornerstone of an effective school. ■

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