School Newsletters Available Online

We did a quick Internet search and found bunches of school newsletters available online. These newsletters might be a quick source of ideas for...
Principal Deepi Kang-Weisz echoed Potter's sentiments: Gather sample newsletters from others and use them as models from which to borrow, she said. Kang-Weisz also recommended keeping articles short and trying different layouts. She uses a Microsoft Publisher template, which she has adapted to suit her needs, to create The Edenrose Editor, the parent newsletter at Edenrose Public School in Mississauga, Ontario (Canada).

**NEWSLETTERS BENEFIT FROM PRE-PLANNING**

When we asked Tim Messick for his advice on newsletters, he didn't need to think for long. "Think ahead of a plan for your newsletter. How often do you want to communicate? What will draw parents to read your newsletter? Then set aside time each week to dedicate to the constructing it."

Messick, principal at Providence Day School in Charlotte, North Carolina, also advised doing a parent survey to see if the work that you will need to commit to this endeavor is needed or wanted. "Then take a look at the other communication that is going out of your school to see if there is a way to consolidate all that goes home and to maximize readership," he said.

"Get others involved," added Messick "Make communication a shared responsibility."

Karen Mink, principal at O.C. Allen School in Aurora, Illinois, also advised planning ahead. Creating a year-long map of content to be included in newsletters can help a great deal when a principal is crunched for time and up against a deadline. "With a plan in place, you won't end up kicking yourself for forgetting something important," said Mink.

"A newsletter is a huge undertaking," added Brenda Hedden, principal at the Park City (Utah) Learning Center. "It is easy to let the newsletter fall by the wayside when we are buried in other duties. Planning ahead to know how articles will be collected, who will put together the newsletter, and the timelines, will be a big help."

"Be sure to share your newsletter with the district office personnel and Board members so they are kept up to date about the exciting things happening in your school," added Hedden.

Addie Gaines, principal at Kirbyville (Missouri) Elementary School, is another planner. "Thinking through the purpose of a newsletter is essential," she said. "Is it for the purpose of providing parenting info? Is it for PR? Is it to promote school activities? To increase parent involvement? Maybe it is for all of those purposes. Then gear your content toward your goals."

**BE YOURSELF!**

Principal Ken Rogers agreed: "Figure out what you want a newsletter to do for you. If you need to start a newsletter, think about what you would like to learn from this newsletter. Then think about who will receive the newsletter. Are you providing a newsletter for parents? Are you trying to improve your school's image? Are you trying to reach other schools?"

If students are old enough, have them write some of the articles in your newsletter, added Potter. "They can write features about teachers, sports articles, and much more."

Principal Deepi Kang-Weisz agreed: "Figure out what your goals are."
If you publish a 'Message from the Principal' in your newsletter, simply view your message as an opportunity to teach a specific lesson to a large class of diverse learners with multiple comprehension levels. Keep your message concise. Keep it relevant. Keep it entertaining. Keep it informative. Keep it real.

-- Dr. Layne Hunt
Monroe High School
Monroe, Michigan

CREATE A SCHEDULE -- AND STICK TO IT

Publishing on a schedule is important to Marguerite McNeely, principal at Hayden R. Lawrence Middle School, a grade 4-5 school in Deville, Louisiana. "If you are going to commit to a weekly newsletter like I did, it is important to do it every week," McNeely said. "A newsletter is a wonderful means of communication with parents. I have gotten many positive comments this year at my newly assigned school."

Sending the school newsletter home regularly is important, Addie Gaines agreed. "Our school has a system of 'Friday Folders.' All school correspondence goes home in those folders. Parents know that the newsletter will be in there every week."

Gaines also recommended saving all newsletters in files by school year. That way, you can access back issues at any time. Back issues can be very helpful when you're planning ahead next year, when you're stuck for content this year, or if you worry that you're leaving out something. A review of the newsletters from the same month the year before might reveal just the omission that's nagging at you.

CHOOSING SOFTWARE ISN'T HARD

The software used to produce your newsletter can be another key element of its success, said Debi Veranth, principal at Bryant Elementary School in Tampa, Florida. "Be sure to coordinate your software," she advised. "If everybody is using the same software and submitting newsletter content in the same format, that will cut down the work for the person responsible for putting it all together."

And be sure to turn on your spell-checker, added Veranth.

Or, as principal Ken Rogers, put it in his written response to our "Principal Files" conversation: Have good proofreaders.

Addie Gaines echoed Veranth and Rogers. "Design a template so that you don't have to reinvent the wheel each time," she said. "And be sure to have someone that you trust proofread, proofread, proofread. Remember, that newsletter is your ambassador for the school, so you want it to be a good representative. It can be positive, powerful PR!"

Gaines also recommended using an easy-to-read font like Century Gothic, Arial, or Comic Sans. "I like Century Gothic and Comic Sans because those
fonts form all of the letters ‘correctly’ -- just the way we teach our elementary pupils to write them. That aids readability, especially if you have parents who may not be advanced readers.”

Finally, Gaines suggested purposely keeping the readability level of your newsletter down about 5th-grade level. "That way, you will reach most of your parents," she said, adding, "Use 'educanese' sparingly, and define words you use in 'regular English' if you are trying to explain a concept to parents. I have had some parents tell me that they like my newsletter better than those they had received at other schools because it isn't written with words they don't understand."

Dr. Layne Hunt, principal at Monroe (Michigan) High School, agreed that it is essential that "your newsletter's message speaks to the reader rather than at the reader."

"Far too often educators forget that they have the responsibility to communicate effectively to their audience," said Hunt. "Parents are already aware that we have been to college and we are educated. It doesn't impress them if they need a dictionary and thesaurus to understand what we have written. Quite frankly, writing in that way is insulting, condescending, and disrespectful."

THE WEB EXTENDS YOUR NEWSLETTER'S REACH

If you print your newsletter, print it on colored paper, suggested principal Andrew Torris. "Always print your newsletter on the same color paper. That way, parents will spot it in a backpack," he said.

Torris sends home one copy of his school's newsletter with the youngest child in each family. "We have found that to be the most effective way to get the message home," said Torris, whose school, Yanbu International School in Saudi Arabia, is a K-12 school. "Those middle school and high school kids seem to 'forget' about handing almost anything to mom and dad. Distributing the newsletter to one sibling saves us about $400 dollars a year on paper."

Torris has also begun to publish his school's newsletter on the Web and send it via email. "I've established an email list and I convert each newsletter issue to PDF format and email it to families and community leaders in full living color," he said. "In many cases, the newsletter lands in parents' work email boxes. I know that many of those get printed and posted on work bulletin boards.

"My newsletters go to parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles all over the world. People move away and still want the newsletter, so now they can get it online. I get emails from past students and parents all the time as a result of the newsletter being online."

Phil Shaman, principal at Neepawa Collegiate Institute, a grade 7-12 school in Neepawa, Manitoba (Canada), also recommended posting newsletters online. "Make the newsletter as appealing as possible, then post it online and invite community members and alumni to sign up to receive it electronically."

Brian Hazletine posts online too. "Make your best articles permanently available on your Web site, and post your newsletter as often as it comes out," he said.

Are you not publishing a newsletter because of the costs of printing it or mailing it? Emailing and posting your newsletter online can be a great way to save money, added principal Les Potter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Did you see the other article we posted today? Don't miss...
Is Your Parent Newsletter the Best It Can Be?

Education World's "Principal Files" principals agree that parent newsletters should be an essential part of every school leader's communication plan. They offer encouragement, ideas, and advice for those who want to start a newsletter or improve their current one.

Thank you to the 17 "Principal Files" principals who contributed to today's articles. Click to see a complete list of today's contributors. Then click to learn how you can join the "Principal Files" team or to view a complete archive of Principal Files articles.

Article by Gary Hopkins
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