

Ninth District



everychild.one voice.

Ninth District PTA-Summer Leadership Conference-June 6th, 2015 **Session Four 2:45 pm – 4:00 pm “Newsletters”**

- I. Introduction to Session
- II. What We Will Be Covering Today
 - a. Why Communication in a PTA is Important
 - b. Key Messages of PTA
 - c. What it Means to Communicate Strategically
 - d. Hard Copy Newsletter vs. eNewsletter
 - e. Best Practices for eNewsletters
 - f. Tracking and Reports of eNewsletter Effectiveness
 - g. Programs for Creating eNewsletters
 - h. Samples of Successful eNewsletters
 - i. Questions
- III. Why Communication in a PTA is Important...
 - a. The parents' image and perceived value of PTA is completely based on the people, programs and tangible benefits they see at their own school. Perceptions about PTA are formed at the local level.
 - b. If you are communicating well with your PTA members and you showcase the programs and services that PTA brings to your school, then the parents will have a good impression about PTA.
 - c. If your PTA isn't communicating well, then parents won't see the value of what PTA brings and they will have a very poor impression (or none at all) of PTA.
 - d. YOU have a tremendous opportunity to influence parents' perception of PTA in your communication efforts.
- IV. Key Messages of PTA...
 - a. Programs and Services: Highlight the programs and services that are considered valuable and are being provided at the local school site. Make the connection between the PTA and the valuable programs or services.
 - i. Ex. Highlight your science night, share a quote about how the PTA reading program increased grades, post photos from a field trip that the PTA paid for, etc.
 - b. Connection: PTA is the main connector of parents and families to the school. Reinforce that PTA is strengthening relationships between parents, teachers, school administrators, community members and even students.
 - i. Ex. Include letters from the principal in your newsletter, invite community members to contribute articles to the newsletter, have students contribute articles to the newsletter, etc.

- c. “Your Child”: PTA makes “your child’s” school a better place-and thereby boosts “your child’s” education. Parents want to know that they are helping to make a difference in their child’s education. Many parents join PTA for their kids, yet continue their involvement/volunteering for all children.
 - i. Ex. Include thank you letters from students in your newsletter, have students write an article about a PTA event and how it impacted him/her specifically, etc.
 - d. Advocacy: Some bigger picture messaging about advocacy and legislative accomplishments can be sprinkled in and framed in practical terms and the impact on the local school site.
 - i. Ex. “PTA has a seat at the table when the calendar requirements for our school will be decided”, “PTA had a resolution passed regarding climate change being a children’s issue”, etc.
 - e. Membership: Messaging should address primary concerns all parents have about lack of time. Dispel the myth that “membership” means that they must volunteer. Joining PTA is a valuable act in and of itself that shows support for the school and their child.
 - i. Ex. Include in volunteer notices the amount of time estimated to complete the project, what time of day it will be done and if it can be done at home.
- V. What it Means to Communicate Strategically – 4 Steps...
- a. Step 1: What are your communication objectives?
 - i. What is your desired outcome?
 - ii. You want your members to take a certain action. What is it?
 - iii. The clearer you can be with this, the better your newsletter articles will be.
 - iv. Ex. Maybe you want parents to buy books at the book fair to support reading at your school, so perhaps simply telling parents the date and time of the book fair won’t accomplish that goal (too vague).
 - v. You can better achieve your objective by communicating a different and specific message.
 - b. Step 2: Who are you going to talk to?
 - i. Sounds simple, but understand your key audience for your communication objectives
 - ii. Ex. Maybe your objective is to increase membership among teachers. If you spend all of your time communicating to parents, you would still see an increase in your PTA membership, but no in the group you most wanted-members.

- c. Step 3: What are you going to say?
 - i. These are your details addressed to the “who” in order to obtain your “objective”.
 - ii. Ex. You want to get parents to buy books at the book fair...Communicate TO the parents...Give the details of the book fair and don’t forget to remind them to “Buy books at our book fair to support reading at our school!”
 - d. Step 4: How are you going to talk to them?
 - i. That takes us into newsletters!
 - ii. Other effective forms of communication: flyers sent home, eblasts, posters on campus, web site, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- VI. Hard Copy Newsletter vs. eNewsletter...
- a. It’s about choosing the right tool for the right job for the right audience.
 - b. Some parents prefer hard copy newsletters (and if they can make it home in the kids’ backpacks all in one readable piece), then go for it!
 - c. Other parents (as well as the schools) are more electronic based in which case an eNewsletter might be the best approach for your PTA.
 - d. There is no right or wrong solution (and sometimes the solution is both). It’s about communicating strategically and choosing the right tool for the right job.
- VII. Hard Copy Newsletters...
- a. Pros:
 - i. Feels official, it’s something tangible.
 - ii. Can be photocopied for members with no access to computers.
 - iii. Can provide you some indication of who’s fallen off your database list when newsletters are “return to sender” from the mail.
 - b. Cons:
 - i. Length of newsletter is dependent upon your printing budget.
 - ii. Time-intensive to produce so usually it’s distributed monthly or quarterly.
 - iii. Budget is definitely an issue-printing, postage
 - iv. Budget usually doesn’t allow for color images
 - v. Can feel “old school” to younger generations who are usually more mobile-driven
 - vi. Save the trees!
- VIII. eNewsletters...
- a. Pros:
 - i. Usually less expensive than hard copy
 - ii. Easily forwarded, can lead to increased readership and circulation
 - iii. Usually quicker, more immediate impact
 - iv. Can be printed and distributed if needed (posted on a bulletin board at the school)

- v. Can be linked for more information (valuable for advertisers)
 - vi. Can be easily archived on your web site
 - b. Cons:
 - i. Too many emails, can get deleted or lost
 - ii. Could be an issue for those with no internet access
 - iii. Can be easily overlooked or ignored
 - c. As more and more of our world (and schools) become electronic and mobile-friendly, an eNewsletter should be considered as part of your communication strategies for reaching your members.
 - d. How many of you are currently using eNewsletters?
- IX. Best Practices for eNewsletters...
- a. Don't make your eNewsletter SPAM!
 - i. Take the time to create a strong subject line. People are quick to delete an email if your subject line isn't clear. A good strategy is to write your newsletter first. Get all the photos, links, articles, everything completed-then go back and craft your subject line.
 - ii. Don't use all caps in your subject line.
 - iii. Don't use words such as "FREE", "Act Now" or "Last Chance" as those typically feel like a sales pitch and may get your eNewsletter deleted or in the SPAM folder.
 - b. Avoid overloading/over-designing your eNewsletter.
 - i. Do create a professional template. Include your PTA logo, contact information, links to your social media sites, etc. You want people to know that this is a real association. It also shows that your PTA cares enough to think about how your audience wants to receive information.
 - ii. Don't use distracting backgrounds or use "everything but the kitchen sink" in your layout and design. Also be careful not to have too many columns. Usually a one or two column eNewsletter is ideal. This helps with being able to clearly read and see everything on a handheld or mobile device.
 - c. Content is EVERYTHING!
 - i. Spend the majority of your eNewsletter time on the content. It's what's going to make your eNewsletter interesting and relevant.
 - ii. Do think about your content. Be brief, use as few words as possible. Include links to read more or to download flyers, or better yet, links to more information on your web site.
 - iii. Make your eNewsletter visually appealing with images.
 - iv. Try to be more story-driven in your content. Instead of just saying "Basketball Tournament Tomorrow", consider including a photo and a quote about how much basketball means to one of the students.
 - v. Keep your key messages about PTA in mind. Ex. Highlight a program or service and demonstrate the value for "their child".

- vi. Include a link to “Download the eNewsletter” rather than simply attaching it as a PDF. Make it easier on the reader.
- vii. Remember to communicate your eNewsletter and its messages strategically. Try to relate back to one of the key messages that resonate.
- viii. Don’t be long-winded, text-heavy with no images, links or photos.
- ix. Don’t be boring. Have fun. Be exciting. Be motivational.
- x. Don’t be demanding in your call to action, but have a clear “ask”.
- d. Share your eNewsletter!
 - i. Once you email it out, print a copy and post on campus, share it on Facebook, put a copy on your website, send it to organizations that were mentioned in the eNewsletter, etc.
- e. Get your students involved in your eNewsletters!
 - i. Have students write article or cover PTA events for the newsletters. It will increase your chance that parents will see it as parents love viewing work done by their children!
- f. Advertising in your eNewsletter
 - i. Advertising in PTA publications is addressed in the Toolkit, Section 6.3.31 *Accepting Advertising*. It is legal for PTA publications to accept advertising-but with some important precautions:
 1. Will the hard copy newsletter be mailed directly to parents or will it be distributed to students to take home? If it’s distributed in school, you have to check with your school district to find out if they allow students to carry home publications with commercial advertising.
 2. If a PTA receives income for paid advertising, then it may be considered taxable unrelated business income. Paid advertising may be considered to be subsidizing your newsletter and you are receiving “printing” in lieu of income. You would probably want to talk to a tax expert about that.
 3. PTA recommends that you print a disclaimer for any publication carrying advertising.
- g. Photos of students in your newsletter
 - i. Use a general disclaimer at the start of the school year for photo permissions. Perhaps see if you can get in the back-to-school packet from the school, or add a line to the school’s photo policy.
 - ii. Use photos where the students cannot be easily identified, and having permission for those who are. Perhaps also not using their last names in the caption (or be generic in captions; ex. Third graders enjoying Science Night!). Electronic permission is acceptable, just hang on to the email.

- X. Tracking and Reports of eNewsletter Effectiveness...
 - a. Do check your open rates, unsubscribes, etc. This will give you valuable feedback as to what your audience finds interesting and compelling. But don't let these numbers rule your world in communicating! Average open rate for newsletters is in the mid-20%. Just because they didn't "open" it doesn't mean that they didn't in fact see your newsletter as preview screens don't capture open numbers.
 - b. Do expect a certain amount of unsubscribes, especially at first.

- XI. Programs for Creating eNewsletters...
 - a. There are plenty of free and low-cost services that your PTA can utilize for developing eNewsletters:
 - i. Mailchimp-offers basic services for free with the option to add on options and packages for low monthly fees depending on your needs.
 - ii. Benchmark-Services as low as \$10 per month.
 - iii. Constant Contact-Services start at \$15 per month with discounts if you pre-pay for 6 months. Also allows integration with social media accounts, event support, surveys, etc.
 - b. Don't use Outlook, gmail or yahoo to create your eNewsletters. It can't provide you with the customizable options or reporting that you need in order to have a successful eNewsletter.

- XII. Samples of Successful eNewsletters...
 - a. San Diego Unified Council of PTAs
 - b. Mason Elementary PTA

- XIII. Questions...