



How To Start A Staff Newsletter That Teachers Will Actually Want To Read

By Justin Belder

“Why are you giving us ALL this stuff to read?”

I was a little surprised at this teacher’s reply to my first staff newsletter. “Well,” I said, “I’m just taking all the stuff that would have come in separate emails, and putting it in one place.”

“Oh, yeah, I guess that is kind of helpful” was the reply.

Having a regular staff newsletter is a great idea, but you want people to actually read it, and you certainly don’t want to start on the wrong foot.

How can you get your staff newsletter up and running with a minimum of hassle and resistance?

3 Mistakes to Avoid

First, don’t make these mistakes.

1. **Being long-winded.** Be concise. People are busy, and they appreciate it when you get to the point quickly.
2. **Making it optional reading.** If your newsletter isn’t *the* essential source for school happenings and information, people won’t read it.
3. **Making it hard to read.** You want people to actually read your newsletter, so make it easy for them to get the information they need quickly. Don’t send a Word document that can’t be read on a mobile device, or a PDF that’s an extra step to open. Just send a regular old email.

Let's look at how we can create great newsletters that avoid these pitfalls.

Provide Essential Information

The most important information people need each week is schedule- and event-related information:

When do we have an early dismissal?

When are we having an assembly?

When are students or teachers going to be absent? (Your lunchroom manager will appreciate the reminder)

If you're just getting started, have your secretary type up a plain-text list of the week's events, day by day, like this:

Monday

10am Pep Rally

Tuesday

3pm Team Meetings

Wednesday

8am Leadership Council

3pm Staff Meeting

Thursday

10am-2pm – 4th grade state capitol field trip

Friday

3pm Please leave chairs up for floor waxing

Have your secretary send this to you, so you can send it to the staff.

It's important that this message come from **you**, because it helps your staff form the habit of paying close attention to your weekly email. When you start adding content

and making the email more time-consuming to read, you'll want people to already be in the habit of reading it carefully.

But *do have your secretary type it up*, because she knows things you aren't thinking about or don't know. (Am I right?)

Celebrate Your Staff and Students

People love to be celebrated publicly, though they'd never admit it. In your weekly schedule email, move a step closer to a full-on newsletter by adding a comment about something great you saw a teacher or students doing.

You might even include a fun picture you took on your smartphone.

No one ever complains about reading good news or seeing an encouraging photo. You want teachers to feel great about reading your newsletter, so this is a great second step.

Use Consistent Sections As You Expand

When you're ready to move beyond the calendar and a quick celebration, and you want to add more detailed announcements, add a new section clearly labeled "announcements."

Better yet, label each announcement clearly with "FYI" or "Action Required" so people can scan for key information quickly.

You might also add a "To Do" section, to call out action items even more clearly.

Whatever sections you have at present, keep the order and format consistent so people know what to expect.

Incentivize Close Reading

When you start to add non-urgent information, like your reflections on instructional practice, it may be harder to get people to pay attention.

But a little cash goes a long way.

In a longer paragraph, trying burying an offer of a Starbucks or iTunes gift card to a randomly selected person who replies with their thoughts on the issue, then celebrate this person in your next newsletter.

Over time, the value of these instructional conversations will become apparent, and people will make an effort to engage—perhaps not Monday morning at 7:45 when they're scanning the week's schedule, but when they get a chance (and a hankering for Starbucks).

Weed Out Competing Sources of Information

Ultimately, people will pay attention to your newsletter more if there aren't alternate ways to get the information. The more you can restrain yourself from sending multiple emails throughout the week, the more your newsletter will be valued.

Just have a newsletter, send it by email, and people will read it.

What Do I Need To Communicate?

Ultimately, what you communicate determines what people focus on and what gets done. What to omit, then, is an equally important decision. Choose wisely.