When it comes to parent communication, not every message can be delivered effectively in the same way. For example, your newsletter could be a fine place for listing the month’s events, but it’s probably not the best way to get last-minute volunteers for your upcoming Family Night. Not to mention—parents are busy! Try these tips to maximize the reach of your communications.

Newsletters

Newsletters have long been a popular way to communicate with parents. These days, groups can send home hard copies with students, post a downloadable document or publish it directly on a website, or deliver an electronic newsletter by email.

**What messages work best:**Your newsletter is a good medium for messages you want parents to be able to refer to easily—details about school activities, a calendar for upcoming events, and the like—and content you want to deliver in a fun way, like event photos. Newsletters are also a good place for longer-form pieces like profiles of students and updates on how your fundraising money is spent.

**Newsletter success tip:** How you publish your newsletter can determine the kinds of content you include. For example, if you have a large and active group with a lot of information to share, an e-newsletter will let you do it more quickly and easily than a printed version. On the other hand, if you don’t have email addresses for most parents or you know that many families don’t have access to a computer, paper copies will work best.

Bottom of Form

Emails

Even in an age when text-messaging is so popular, email is still a primary communication tool for daily life. It’s fast and easy, and it allows for relatively quick exchanges that involve multiple people.

**What messages work best:** Email is a good catch-all that can support many types of messages—group or one-on-one, announcements, reminders, and agendas. There are some parameters, though. Keep your messages straightforward, and be careful to avoid controversy or contention. If you see a message string headed that way, take the conversation offline before it gains momentum.

**Email success tip:** If your topic requires substantial feedback, save it for your next in-person gathering, phone call, or even casual conversation.

Texting

As in other areas of life, texting within parent groups has quickly become a prevalent (and preferred) means of communication. With so many texting apps available, groups rely on it for everything from officer discussions to classroom party planning to quick event reminders.

**What messages work best:** These days, texting works a lot like email, at least in terms of how you might use it for your afterschool program, with the added bonus that it’s viewed as more immediate (and less old-fashioned) than email. But like email, it’s easy to become overwhelmed by the number of text messages received and overlook messages that could be important. Among your staff and local evaluation team, get everyone on board and use texting for group conversations that need to happen in real time. With parents, save texting for messages that are brief, need to be received quickly, and don’t require lengthy replies.

**Text message success tip:** Think about timing. A quick reminder to parents about crazy science day is an ideal use, but it’s less ideal if the message is sent too late the and the parents can’t get time off.

Social Media

Facebook, Instagram, and other social channels have become quick and current ways for communicating to parents. Social media feeds get your messages in front of all the parents while they’re already browsing for other updates.

**What messages work best:** Keep your social media messages informative, light, and focused on building your community: event and meeting reminders, inspirational quotes, photos of your students’ engaged in afterschool program, past events, etc.

**Social media success tip:** Social media posts are most effective when they’re part of an overall plan. Set up a schedule that includes a mix of content, then adjust the frequency as needed.

Flyers

They’re easy to make, they’re easy to post online, and they’re easy to print or send—whatever other ways to connect with parents, there’s still a place for flyers in your overall communication plan.

**What messages work best:** Use flyers as a visual way to let parents know about upcoming events or meetings or to remind them about approaching non-school days.

**Flyer success tip:** Keep your flyers to a single message with brief text; don’t use the same flyer to announce your Spring Family Carnival and the upcoming conference days. For maximum effectiveness, post flyers in areas around the school, if parents are not allowed in the buildings-place on doors and windows (highly trafficked hallways, on prominent bulletin boards) and also send home a printed copy with each child.

Combine Methods To Reach More People

While certain methods are effective for specific types of messages, keep in mind that different parents will be more likely to see messages in different places. There’s no magic formula for what will work best—the key is not to rely too much on one way of reaching every parent. Think about how various types of communication can work together:

* If you send home a flyer several weeks before an event, follow up with an email a week in advance, then a text message a day or two prior.
* When your newsletter is ready, send a text with the link where parents can read it online, send home paper copies (if you print them), and email the link or PDF file to parents.
* Not everyone uses social media, so if you post photos of your enrichment activities, positive successes in the program, quotes from the kids and teachers (good one☺) may also be included in your next newsletter.