

# Producing a School Newsletter Parents Will Read

by Rhonda Jones

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*Child care directors set the stage for future parent involvement by promoting effective home/school communication during a child's early years. Involving parents at the preschool level and emphasizing the importance of parent partnerships helps create an alliance that will continue through a child's schooling. Parent communication takes many forms, but an often overlooked way of reaching parents that is both inexpensive and underutilized is the school newsletter.*

The newsletter allows schools to reach large numbers of parents in the least amount of time. A well written and consistent school newsletter can keep parents up to date about your school's progress, philosophy, special programs, and future plans.

The newsletter can enhance your school image by delineating the quality of services you provide. Often parents will show the newsletter to friends and family members, which can mean new business for you.

Your newsletter can be used to recruit parents to assist with special projects and volunteer needs.

And it can be a great public relations tool. Send it to local media, community leaders, neighboring schools, and board members. It will exemplify the positive and proactive activities taking place at your site

and keep your school's name at the forefront for possible referrals.

## What Should I Put in the Newsletter?

What to place in your newsletter is just as important as how it looks. Some basic elements are essential if you want to gain and keep the attention of parents, including:

**The director's message.** No child care newsletter is complete without hearing from the head of the program. To many parents, the director's philosophy and teaching perspective is of the utmost importance. The administrator sets the tone for what goes on in the rest of the school. Therefore, parents need to perceive some type of dialog.

Share your viewpoint on important issues, your educational philosophy, child development information, upcoming changes, future plans,

and the like. Parents will see you as more approachable and less threatening by knowing more about you as an individual. Don't be surprised if a parent strikes up a conversation about one of your *hot* topics.

**School news** will probably be the essence of your newsletter and can be displayed in many forms: a school calendar, monthly events, classroom themes, fund raisers. Parents enjoy reading about activities in which they might participate.

Keep items short and to the point with a poignant, descriptive headline to get parents' attention. You may also want to use the who, what, when, why, and where approach to ensure that you cover all aspects of the program.

**Parent education articles** are a wonderful way to enhance parenting and educational skills on a variety of subjects. Your newsletter may be the only source of child development information some parents read. The topics are endless! You can find articles in your local newsletter, editorial services, or from neighboring childhood consultants who might be glad to write a short article for a free byline at the end of their piece (name, specialization, and phone number).

**Parent profiles or volunteer of the month columns** are a sure way to generate readership and continued interest in your newsletter. People enjoy reading about themselves, the more names you can include in your newsletter the better. This can include a special spotlight on just one parent who is doing an extraordinary job or a list of parents who participated at the school that month. You'll be demonstrating your appreciation for their help, and you may lure in other parents as well.

If your school relies on the contribution of parent volunteers, here is your chance to plug **school needs**. Include the title, job description, times and days needed, and who parents should contact. Spell out as many specifics as you can. Make it as easy as possible for parents to make that first connection.

There isn't anything that makes parents happier than seeing their **child's name** in print. Include the names of children who successfully completed potty-training, celebrated birthdays, graduated to the next class, said their first word, legibly wrote their name, or began to walk or crawl.

One child care director wrote short autobiographies on each student, indicating their school interest, personality, recent achievements, hobbies, and other special details. She said enthused parents would often ask her when their youngster would be in the spotlight.

If your school is fairly large, this may be a project for individual class teachers as a supplement to the regular newsletter. It can be attached and distributed only to parents of children in that particular class.

## Design Suggestions

Your newsletter should be appealing as well as interesting to parents. Faded, cluttered, or poorly developed literature will not generate the same interest as one produced with forethought and professionalism.

Design your newsletter for easy reading. Your masthead should distinguish your publication and include your school name, the month and year of the issue, and school logo or symbol.

Avoid making it too long — four pages (11" x 17" folded in half) should be the maximum size per issue.

Articles should be to the point and succinct and written in a conversational style.

Use clip art (at least two or three items per page) throughout your newsletter to add character and personality. Clip art books can be purchased at teachers' outlets, Bible bookstores, and computer stores. You can purchase clip art in book form or images on computer disks.

Photographs are another option you may want to consider. If you decide to include volunteer or staff profiles, a photo along with the story will create additional interest.

**Highlight a staff member** in each issue. Share background, personality, and professional achievement, as well as the history of this person in your center.

Young children are always delighting parents with their witty, candid remarks. Capture these in print by creating a special column called **Wee Words of Wisdom**.

Use **children's artwork** throughout your newsletter. Be sure to give each student credit for their artful expressions.

You may wish to include these additional columns:

- book reviews;
- nutritious recipes;
- class summary and/or upcoming monthly program from each teacher;

- family learning activities;
- community events; and/or
- resources.

## Selecting Software

Once you've gathered all the information, artwork, and designed your masthead and format, it is time to organize all this material into something tangible. That's where your computer comes in. Consider one of the software packages for publishing newsletters on the market that can easily guide you through creating your newsletter. Some come with already prepared templates that allow you to just plug in the information. Your existing word processing program may already have the capability of making columns and graphics.

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## Getting Your Newsletter Home to Parents

As a child care facility, you have a significant advantage over public schools in getting the newsletter home to parents. Since parents are required to sign in and out each day, placing the newsletter at this location will ensure it is seen and picked up. You can also place the newsletter in each child's cube or mail it directly to parents.

Designating a certain day of the month or week as newsletter day will help parents to know when to expect it and aid in your distribution efforts.

### Conclusion

With a little imagination and ingenuity, your school newsletter can be an invaluable wealth of information for families who will look forward to reading each and every issue.



*Rhonda Jones, parent and former parent involvement coordinator, has many years experience developing newsletters for schools, churches, and organizations. She is the author of the step-by-step manual, **Producing a School Newsletter Parents Will Read!***

*To order, please send \$21.95 (includes shipping) to: Image Control, PO Box 231302, Sacramento, CA 95823. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.*