<u>Writing a Successful Back-to-School Letter to Families</u>

Educators send back-to-school letters to welcome students and their families to the new school year and keep them up-to-date on their classroom, school or district. These letters offer the chance to highlight new programs, share your educational philosophy and discuss goals for the coming year.

<u>Who should send a back-to-school letter?</u>

In addition to principals, superintendents and teachers, others in the education community – including school board members, PTA leaders, school counselors and more – can send a back-to-school letter, ideally with messaging that complements that of their colleagues. When the education community speaks with one voice, the public is more likely to support the message it sends.

<u>What goes in a back-to-school letter?</u>

In addition to welcoming families to the new school year, back-to-school letters should:

- **Share the mission and vision of the learning community.** Instead of discussing daily school life, set and/or reflect on the larger goals your community has for its students and schools, and your role in achieving them. Introduce the new programs or initiatives that address these goals.
- **Offer success stories.** Share specific accomplishments that demonstrate how you're helping students reach their full potential. Polling data suggests that parents will respond particularly well to examples that indicate how students are being challenged; the choices and opportunities students have available; student engagement; and that all students are being treated fairly.
- **Highlight the journey your learning community is on.** Be honest about where you need to improve and how you plan to do so. Or, recognizing that the science of how students learn – and the technologies that assist them in doing so – are constantly evolving, share what you are doing to ensure practices and technologies are up-to-date.
- **Emphasize the collaborative nature of education.** Everyone in the school community – teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, school board members, school counselors and other professionals – plays a critical role in helping students succeed. Highlight the contributions of those whose accomplishments are not often recognized, and assure families that you will engage with them on the important decisions that will impact their child and the school as a whole.
- **Ask for needed supports.** How can families, communities or policymakers help your work? If there are a few specific actions you'd like taken (for example, supporting a bond referendum, joining the PTA or reading to students daily), include them here. If there are several items, consider attaching a separate document as part of a larger back-to-school packet.
- **Provide contact information** and other ways that families can connect with the school or district, such as social media accounts. Assure families that you and other professionals are available to address the concerns they have.

<u>Should the letter include logistical information?</u>

Back-to-school letters sometimes include details about drop-off and pick-up, bell schedules, uniform policies, staff changes and more. These letters can reach upwards of 10 pages. Consider writing a shorter, "big picture" letter and attaching a back-to-school packet with logistical information.

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How should you distribute the letter?

Given the changing ways that information is being consumed, and the differing preferences of (and technologies available to) members of your community, distribute your letter in a variety of formats. Send a hard copy home in students' backpacks. E-mail it. Post it on your school or district website and/or on a personal blog. Put it on Facebook, tweet it out, and use any other social media platform you have available to spread the word. By using all the means of communication available to you, you will increase the number of people who read the letter, as well as reinforce the message it sends to those who access it in multiple ways.

[Access a template](#) back-to-school letter to families.