FAQs on Back-to-School Letters

School and district leaders often send back-to-school letters to welcome the community – including the families of the students they serve – to the new school year and to keep them up-to-date on the happenings of their school or district. Many teachers also send a letter home, welcoming students and families to their classrooms. These letters offer the opportunity to highlight key successes, share your educational philosophy and discuss your goals for the coming year.

What goes in a back-to-school letter?

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

- **Articulate the mission and vision of the learning community.** Rather than get bogged down in the daily details of school life, set and/or reflect on the larger goals your community has for its students and schools, and your role in achieving them. Share any new programs or initiatives that will be addressing these goals this school year.
- **Share successes.** Remind the community of the great things happening in your school, district or classroom. Point to a few specific accomplishments that directly align with your mission or vision.
- **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.
- **Ask for needed supports.** Are there ways families, communities or policymakers can 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 include 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.

Who should send a back-to-school letter?

In addition to school principals, district superintendents and classroom teachers, others in the education community – including school board members, PTA officials, school counselors and more – should send a back-to-school letter. When the public hears the education community speaking with one voice, they are more likely to support the message it is sending.
Should it include logistical information?

Back-to-school letters often include important information such as how families should drop their children off at school, bell schedules, uniform policies, staff changes and more. With all the information shared, the letters can reach upwards of 10 pages.

Rather than including logistical details in the body of the letter, consider writing a shorter letter and attaching a back-to-school packet with this information.

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. In addition to sending a hard copy home in students’ backpacks, e-mail it. Also 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.