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STEILACOOM
Historical School District No. 1



Effective Communications Guide for Teachers

The Challenge: Effective Communications

Effectively communicating with families has never been more important, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to connect with key stakeholders. Why?

School is usually one commitment out of many for busy families, and school communications can easily get buried among everyday responsibilities. If schools and districts send uncoordinated messages from too many places and too often, it's easy for parents and guardians to experience message fatigue and stop listening. Combine that with message content that is inconsistent, wordy, or disorganized, and you have a recipe for communication difficulties.

The results of ineffective communications translate to low response rates for requests from the district, schools, and teachers for things like supplies and volunteers.

The concepts of content and cadence are critical for effective communication practices, and these concepts will be addressed in this guide.

Make Your Content Easy to Absorb and Act On

Whether you're sending an update for the week or requesting forms, make it as easy as possible for your audience to absorb the information and act on it when necessary.

Give your subject line a lot of thought

Bad subject lines get lost in the sea of emails and app notifications competing for attention. If your subject lines are generic, confusing, or require a second glance, chances are you may lose parents before they even open your message. To maximize opened emails, give your audience some clues as to what your message is about and what you're expecting them to do with it.

Check your subject line:

- Is it easy to absorb?
- Does it accurately communicate the topic so readers will open it?
- Will it translate in other languages?
- Can readers tell if a response or other action is required?

Here are some examples of how to take a subject line from boring and vague to eye-catching and informative:

Instead of this:	Try this:
Back to School Night	RSVP: Back to School Night, Thursday, August 22
News from Ms. Firth	Ms. Firth's Class: Field Trip Photos, Weekend Enrichment, Volunteer Request

Organize and Focus Your Message

An organized and focused message is critical for conveying information. Reading, understanding, and engaging with your communication shouldn't be a time-consuming task for busy families. Long paragraphs of plain text take valuable time to read and understand, and they're sure to fatigue families and make them less likely to engage and act.

Here are some writing tips for easy-to-absorb, engaging messages:

- Is the essential information at the top of the message, with more details available for those who want them?
- Do you have a clear call to action? What do you want people to do with your information?
- Is it visually easy to absorb? Use section headers, bullet lists, and bolded text so information stands out. But – please do not use numerous fonts, font sizes, colors, etc. to the point of being distracting and unappealing.
- Is it interesting to look at? The days of using clip art are long past – instead try using video, images, and color (again, in moderation).
- Before sending to everyone, have you sent a test to yourself to make sure your message looks good? Do images, paragraphs, and line breaks show up correctly?
- Do you avoid using K-12 jargon, as well as idioms and expressions that families may not understand?



Which of these two posts would you prefer to receive?

Think about creating messages that show excitement and have specific information, clear-cut expectations, and positive reinforcement broken down into digestible bullet points and sentences.

Instead of this ...

Subject Line: Homework

Hello Parents,

I sent home an assignment for students today about fractions. The assignment covers how to add, subtract, divide, and multiply fractions. They should have it completed by tomorrow morning because they are going to start our next math unit, decimals, after this worksheet is completed. Fractions can be a challenging, onerous, and difficult activity for some students, so I wish them luck with the assignment. Learning fractions is actually a very essential part of our curriculum, as students will be tested on them on the state tests at the end of the year. I explained the assignment to them in class, so they should be able to get most of it done without much help. If they have questions, they can ask me in class tomorrow, or you can email me ASAP.

Thanks,

Ms. Smith, 5th Grade,
Saltar's Point Elementary

Try this ...

Subject Line: Information & Tips for Tonight's Fraction Assignment

Hello, Room 20 families!

This year is off to a great start. I'm so grateful for all the students' hard work this year!

This week, we are learning about **fractions**. I sent home an assignment with your students that should be **completed by tomorrow morning**. For your reference, I have attached a copy of the assignment here.

The assignment is about:

- Multiplying fractions
- Adding fractions
- Dividing fractions
- Subtracting fractions

I have included a video here that covers what I expect from your student on this assignment.

While I know this can be a difficult subject for students, they can do it! We will go over the assignment on Wednesday, so don't worry if they get stuck on some questions. I'm always here to help!

Sincerely,

Ms. Smith, 5th Grade, Saltar's Point Elementary

Don't bombard parents with too many messages, too close together

After a long day at work, how do you feel when it's time to clear all the emails, text messages, and app notifications you received that day? If an organization floods you with messages, how long does it take to block, mute, or turn off app notifications? Probably not long.

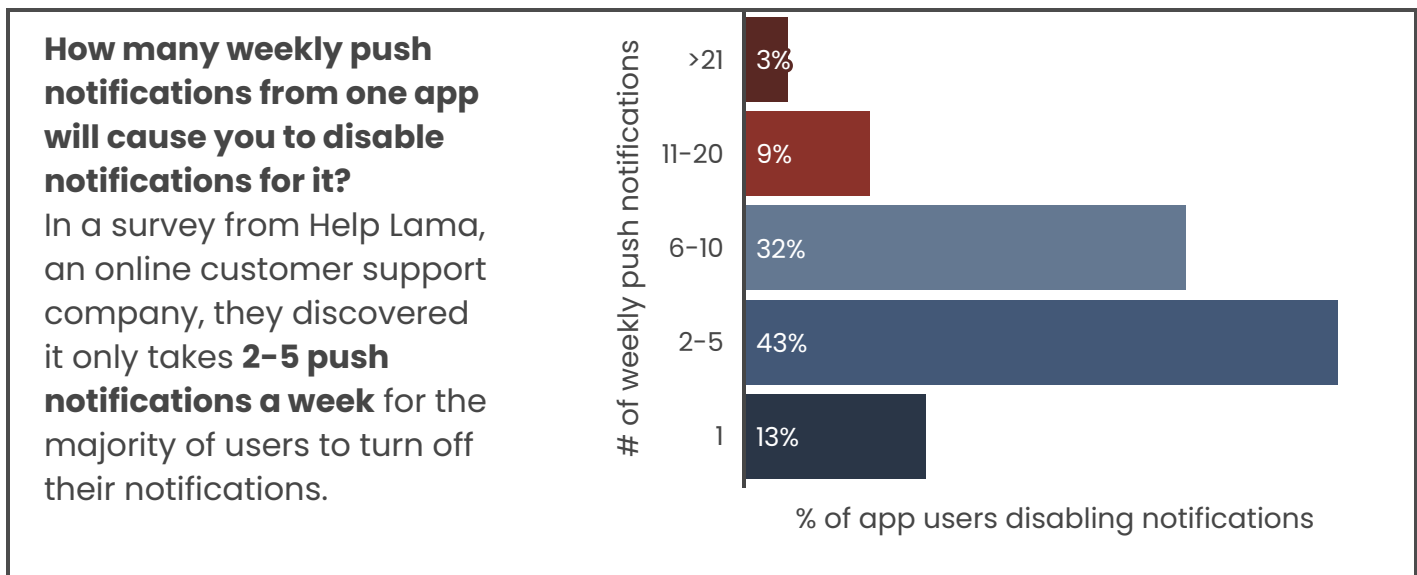
Our families deserve the same consideration. While they may not unsubscribe from an email or block all school notifications, too many interruptions can hurt parent satisfaction and dampen their willingness to engage. Critical messages are getting lost if too many uncoordinated announcements are competing for attention.

Optimizing the volume and timing of regular school-home communications is a powerful way to increase parent engagement and reduce the risk of message fatigue.

Consolidate communications for fewer interruptions & consider timing

One strategy to reduce message fatigue is consolidation. **Consider grouping regular communications into a single, weekly message for your families to review all at once.**

Additionally, **please do not send ParentSquare posts prior to 7:00 a.m. or after 8:00 p.m.**



"When we recognize our parents as necessary and important partners, it's easy to maintain a positive tone with them. Let your families know they're important. Tell them that. Always maintain an upbeat tone, especially when it's the hardest."

– Tony Williams, Instructional Technology Leader

Use Consistent Formats and Structure

Why is this important? There is a lot of information competing for our families' attention every day. Thoughtful, consistent formats helps us break through the clutter so our communications are immediately recognizable.

Templates are a great way to make consistently branded and well-structured communications. They can help us stick to content best practices. ParentSquare now offers Studio Editor, which is an easy to use newsletter platform. ParentSquare's help pages are a great resource for all things ParentSquare, and you can find information regarding Studio Editor by clicking the  icon in the upper right corner, then clicking on Help Articles.

The District encourages teachers to keep newsletter styles, colors, logos, and fonts consistent with each communication.

In your weekly newsletters, think about creating messages that show excitement and have specific information, clear-cut expectations, and positive reinforcement broken down into digestible bullet points and sentences.

Mrs. Smith's 5th Grade Class

Celebrating our achievements together!

SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

Welcome to our class!

Welcome to our class for the 2025-26 school year! I am so excited to welcome each of your children to our classroom, and I know we are going to have an amazing year filled with learning, growing, and fun!



Weekly Class Newsletters

I understand your families receive a lot of communication from a lot of different sources, and it can be overwhelming.

In an effort to help eliminate message fatigue for your family, I will - as much as possible - limit my classroom communications to once a week.

Each Monday, you will receive a weekly newsletter from me, where will share important weekly updates, reminders, and information.



Classroom Expectations

In order to make this the best school year, here are some expectations I shared with your children this week. I would love your help supporting these expectations at home.

- Treat every person who comes into this room with respect
- Listen with your eyes and ears
- Follow directions the first time they are given
- Follow all classroom procedures
- Raise your hand when you have something to say
- Do your best!



This Week in Science

This week in our science unit, we covered

[Volunteer Information](#)

ParentSquare Tips and Tricks

Information about ParentSquare and some Frequently Asked Questions can be found on our website at www.steilacoom.k12.wa.us/who-we-are/departments/staff-resources/parentsquare



ParentSquare Pitfalls and Better Options

- **Inserting a PDF into the body of your post**

Why it doesn't work: This is usually not ADA compliant, is often difficult to read, and ParentSquare cannot translate this information for our MLL families.

A better option: Type what you want to say directly in the body of the post/message.

- **"Commenting" instead of "replying" on a post**

Why it doesn't work: Parents won't see your response if you comment under their question on a post.

A better option: Make sure to click the "reply" button under their comment and type in the "reply" box so they can see your response.

- **Typing in ALL CAPS**

Why it doesn't work: Families with visual impairments will hear this as an acronym.

A better option: Use bold, underlining, italics, different color fonts, or larger text for emphasis (Please make sure to use darker colors that are easily read).

- **Inserting a photo with words into the body of your post**

Why it doesn't work: This is usually not ADA compliant, is often difficult to read, and ParentSquare cannot translate this information for our MLL families.

A better option: Type the information directly in the body of your post.

ParentSquare Pitfalls and Better Options, Continued

- **Adding a QR code to your post**

Why it doesn't work: QR codes are designed to be used on paper in order to bridge the gap between the real world and the internet. It is not helpful to include one in a digital document/website because you can't scan a QR code that's displayed on your phone.

A better option: Use a link instead – Make sure to name the link to indicate its destination, rather than making the entire URL visible to the reader.

- **Failing to use all the available tools**

Why it doesn't work: Post Add-ons like “[RSVP](#),” “[Forms](#),” “[Ask for Items](#),” and “[Request Volunteers](#)” are there to make your job easier.

A better option: ParentSquare has lots of great tools, so use them!

- **Not including alt text for images**

Why it doesn't work: People with visual impairments won't know what you posted.

A better option: When you add an image, click the “i” in the drop-down box to add a sentence briefly describing what's happening in the photo.

- **Asking for a student or parent's name, grade and class in Forms**

Why it doesn't work: ParentSquare already knows this information and includes in it your spreadsheet. No need to ask twice!

A better option: Use ParentSquare forms instead of Google Forms to make it easier for parents. Fewer questions and more convenient. [Learn more about forms and permission slips here.](#)

- **Not adding events to your calendar**

Why it doesn't work: Not adding events to the calendar makes it difficult for parents to see what's coming up.

A better option: For school-wide events, ask your school secretary to add it to the school's calendar. For classroom or private events, use the “Calendar Entry” in Post Add-ons. You can also include RSVP and automatic reminders so they don't forget!

- **Over-communication**

Why it doesn't work: When parents are bombarded with too many messages, they start to tune out and end up missing important information.

A better option: Create a regular cadence for classroom communications – once a week is great – with all the important updates for your class. Use “Messages” to communicate with individual parents about their child's achievements.