

5 awesome ideas for your school holiday communication

By Jay Cooper

It's that time of year – the start of the holiday season. It's a compressed time of celebrations, religious observances, shopping, entertaining, travel, overeating. You have your lists; you're checking them twice, right?

Well, here's another list to add to your list of to-dos: using the holidays to connect with your parents, students, staff and the entire school community.

Just because your students and fellow staff are gearing up for the holiday break, don't be shutting down your school communications. In fact, you should seize this time of the year to impart information and build connections. Helpful tips, fun news, entertaining photos and videos – all facilitated by your school community – can go a long way to building and maintaining the relationships that are so vital to school success.

I've assembled five awesome ideas to consider this month. In addition, I've listed a bonus 20 specific ideas you can put to use right away.

1. Show appreciation for key school personnel

Nearly everywhere you look in your school, there's someone deserving of some special recognition: the first grade teacher who's taught two generations of families; or the science teacher just this side of wacky who has a way with kids and a way to make science more than fun, but something worth pursuing for a career. And it's not always an instructor.

Custodial staff and support professionals are often just as deserving of a pat on the back as your dedicated teachers. On the heels of Thanksgiving, there's no better time than the end of the year to recognize the "gifts" your school has in the way of the people committed to making your school great.

Just as important as it is to recognize the individual, spreading the word about his or her contribution is a powerful communication opportunity for your school. Recognition can be made at school assemblies, PTO meetings, morning announcements, newsletters, school website, and the many social media at your disposal these days. Use the holidays to show your students, fellow staff, parents and your entire school community who you appreciate.

1. Use multicultural holidays to celebrate your school

The holidays present a good opportunity for schools to connect with themed communications that can bring together your entire school community. There are many [ways to incorporate multicultural holiday celebrations into the classroom](#), and there are ways to use the holidays to reach out to your entire school community.

I know we all take this separation of church and state pretty seriously – and in fact it can be a contentious topic for some – but recognizing the diverse cultures and religions can be a unifying gesture by a school looking to spread holiday cheer this month. Simply acknowledging these events can go a long way to fostering tolerance and understanding.

Sure, you have your **Christmas** for Christians, **Hanukkah** for Jews, **Kwanzaa** is big in the African-American community.

Ramadan, an important event on the Islamic calendar, falls in the summer months. It, however, is hardly a party, rather a month-long time of fasting. You may be surprised to learn many in the Islam faith celebrate the birth of their prophet Muhammad on December 24. This holiday is called **Mawlid**.

Here's one more and more schools should be in tune with: **Las Posadas**. Huge in the Spanish-speaking communities, Las Posadas occurs prior to Christmas, commemorating the journey Joseph and Mary made to Bethlehem. A school district in Illinois hosts a [community-wide celebration at the high school fieldhouse](#) to unite the community. They even use the event to collect food for the local food pantry.

Key Holiday Dates:

Hanukkah – Dec. 6-14

Las Posadas – Dec. 16-24

Christmas Dec. 25

Kwanza – Dec. 26-Jan. 1

Mawlid – Dec. 24

Chances are your school includes families and students who observe these events. If you [want your school communications to be more multicultural](#), don't overlook the holidays as a great time to demonstrate that.

2. Cash in on holiday shopping mindset

The holidays are time when everyone's wallets or purses are open, so make sure your school is taking advantage of the generous spirit of your parents and staff. Whether it's hosting a **Holiday bazaar** or a **Christmas fair**, your school can reach out to parents looking to pick up some gifts while building fellowship and good cheer. Involve your PTO. [Check this list twice for holiday-themed fundraising ideas for your school.](#)

For added dimension, tie-in a holiday party with a fair. Ply your students' parents with some holiday punch and cookies, and you might just build some great connections that last long after the holidays are over.

3. Send a traditional holiday card, non-traditionally

Don't overlook the most time-tested of holiday gestures: the holiday greeting card. There's no need, however, to burden the U.S. Postal Service. Use email.

Email, still the most effective way to reach your parents, is a great way to send customized holiday wishes. A simple holiday email greeting from the superintendent or principal, or something more practical, perhaps, from a teacher can go a long way in engaging your parents.

Don't forget to include a link in your email directing the reader to more content – maybe a page on your school website or an invitation to a holiday event. I wrote up something previously you might want to check out on [how to create effective school emails](#).

4. Make sure your school 'socializes' during the holidays

Your social media needs to stay as vibrant as that Christmas sweater of yours. Make sure you keep your Facebook account humming throughout the month. Your school Twitter account is a great way to send out reminders about holiday plays and school activities, while Instagram enables you to stay in touch through pictures. All these channels should be utilized over the break as well.

Make sure your social media calendar is as active as your social calendar. My friend Andrea Gribble at SocialSchool4edu is always full of ideas on timely ways to use social media to stay in touch with your school community. [Check out Andrea's blog here.](#)

Don't neglect your school website either during the holidays. Over the break is a time when many parents will be checking in to plan for the return to school, it's a good time to make sure your school calendar is up to date.

20 more ways to connect during the holidays

Finally, have some fun with your social media during the holidays. I've put together some ideas for posts for holiday-time social media messages. For events, lists, news, photos, videos, social media can be a strong bridge for you to stay connected to your parents and students over the holidays.

In many cases, think in terms of using these posts to get the dialogue going.

1. Make your school-related New Year's resolutions
2. Lookalike contests (Rudolph, Charlie Brown?)
3. Homeroom door decorating contest
4. The Christmas party
5. Letters to Santa Claus
6. Community service – food banks, clothing drives
7. Favorite holiday music lists
8. Obscure holiday music lists
9. New Year's greeting from the school
10. Adopt-a-family news
11. A Christmas sweater contest
12. Creative gifts for teachers and classmates
13. Thank you to the local media outlets
14. Light displays – best-lit house in the district
15. Carolling contests – video clips
16. Dreidel decorating
17. Favorite holiday movies
18. Holiday cookie decorating contest
19. Menorah – Festival of lights displays
20. Holiday survey – playful or serious, a great way to start dialogue

The holidays sometimes give us license for fun and frivolity not afforded any other time. What are some ideas you can share to seize the season and communicate with your parents, students, staff and community?

Jay Cooper is marketing director and content strategist for Campus Suite. Jay's a former school public relations specialist who's helped businesses, schools and colleges use the power of web communications to improve their image, generate support, and optimize relationships.

http://www.campussuite.com/5-awesome-ideas-for-your-school-holiday-communication/?utm_content=224754968&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkedin