

WMS Parent Connection Survey

Scheduling Q&A

A1. What would be the best way to remind your family of upcoming events that affect your children? Would emails be helpful and if so how often would you want to receive them? Is the sandwich board sign outside helpful to your family?

100% of respondents prefer communication by e-mail. Subject headings should be succinct and the body of any message should be to brief, to the point, and presented in an easy to read format. Parents would not to receive emails that don't apply specifically to their children's grade level(s). Some people suggested that an initial notice of an event be followed up with a reminder email a day prior to occurrence.

70% of WMS parents view the sandwich board and/or the tripod boards in the front hall. One shortfall of the boards is that information exclusive to them does not reach parents of children who take the bus.

A2. What would be the best way to inform your family of cancellations or other schedule changes? What if the cancellations or changes are last minute?

For last minute cancellations a phone call works best. For anticipated cancellations most parents prefer email over phone. Some parents of younger children preferred signs on the boards outside the individual classrooms.

A3. If schedule changes were available on the school website, in a timely way, would you use that as a source of information? How do we get parents to use the WMS website?

Most parents currently have little to no interest in the web site. The WMS web site is viewed more as a resource for prospective parents. One tech-savvy parent suggested that the WMS web site contain information parents want while email should be used to provide parents with information they need. Examples of information that could be directed to the web site would be athletic schedules, memos, directions to other schools (for games), lunch schedules, etc.

A4. Any other thoughts re: communication about scheduling? What would you suggest as the day and time to schedule the WMS Voyage?

In general, people were pleased with what they felt has been an improvement in the school's communications recently.

Many didn't answer the question about the WMS Voyage. It appears that many parents, especially new parents, are not aware of what the Voyage is. Explaining it to parents at Family Night, Back to School Night and the spring Association meeting should help to spread the word. It was also suggested that attendance to the Voyage may be improved if childcare is provided. Many parents would prefer that the timing of the Voyage be in late October/early November.

Classroom

B1. What would be the best way to communicate with your family about class schedules, i.e. what specials happen on what days?

Again, email is viewed as the best way to communicate this type of information. Some parents requested a schedule at the beginning of the year and notes in the mailboxes. This is one area of the survey that parents thought the web site could play a role.

B2. How do you feel about Family Night when the children bring parents into the class and show them their work?

Family night is the most popular event for most respondents. A small minority feel it is too crowded or chaotic or that it is too late or inconvenient to come back to school for in the evening. A couple suggested it is more appropriate for the younger children. A few say they prefer their child take them on a quiet tour of the classroom after school.

B3. What kind of information, if any, about the classroom learning (excluding your individual child's progress) would you find interesting or useful?

Parents really want more information about what their children are up to in the classroom. Martha's lower elementary newsletter is cited as a good example of what parents are looking for. Parents would like to know curriculum, homework assignments, field trip information etc.

The math materials night was well received and it has been requested that more of this kind of event take place for different subjects.

B4. How often and in what form would you prefer to receive that information?

Emails, although a few parents suggested that each teacher have her own page on the WMS web site and update it bimonthly or monthly on what's going on in the classroom and on what is pending.

B5. Any other thoughts re: classroom information?

A number of parents would like more frequent (4x/year?) updates from their teachers on how their children are doing. It is assumed by the parent that the child is doing fine if there is no news, but some parents feel this is not always the case

Financial and Strategic Planning Information

C1. What would be the best way to communicate to your family about the schools financial needs and the importance of fund raising?

Most respondents say they desire more information on the financial matters. The consensus seems to want a gently beating drum in the form of bi-annual or quarterly “reminders” of WMS financial issues. Mixing up the means of communicating (email, web site, letters, school meetings) would help to increase the awareness of the financial issues and needs of WMS.

Many parents aren’t clear as to where the funds from specific events (like the auction and the annual appeal) go to. Communicating this information would likely help build support for fundraising events.

It is suggested that the school’s annual report(s) be available on the web site.

C2. Understanding that the school needs parents gifts in order to function, are we doing anything currently in asking for money that you feel is particularly effective, or alternatively, is off-putting?

Generally, the response was positive. A number of parents didn’t answer these questions. Polite reminders were mentioned.

A number of parents expressed a desire to know more about financial aid. Some asked that the school have a formal published policy on financial aid and some want to know the percent of the budget planned to be spent for non-paying students. Some parents seem to question the value of financial aid so maybe we need something in writing that increases the awareness of the benefits financial aid provides for our school and our children. On a separate/personal note, I think parents who receive financial aid should be requested not to discuss it with other parents in the school body.

C3. How can the school best communicate with your family about strategic planning and specific initiatives?

Pat’s meetings have been well received. Forums were suggested. It was also recommended that Pat talk to smaller/targeted groups regarding strategic planning and financial needs.

Part 2

Information from Other Schools,

Web sites from other independent day schools:

Foote School (New Haven):

- Parents' have link on school web site with a "keep connected" heading with details of all the ways to stay connected...
- Parents hard copy newsletter 3x a year
- News for parents gets emailed during periods between newsletters.
- Week at a glance – calendar sent home with kids and available online.
- Educational meetings for parents 2x a year
- Parent/teacher committee
 - PTC committee members
 - Fundraisers
 - Mtg schedule

Peck School (NJ):

- News and events right on the home page
 - Parents link
 - Overview of officers
 - News
 - Committees
 - Ways to give
 - Calendar
 - School Store

Far Hills Country Day (NJ):

- Current Families Link
 - Academic resources
 - Library resources
 - Summer reading list
 - Upper school athletics
 - Parent committee
 - Mission
 - Events and fund raisers
 - Parenting resources
- FHCDS News Center
- Athletics Calendar

Pike School (MA):

- “For Pike Parents”
 - PA
 - Class parent info
 - Officers and responsibilities
 - Calendar
 - A Day in the Life – w/photos
 - Events Gallery – w/photos
 - News
 - Events and Calendar
 -

Chapin School (NYC):

- Parents (need to login to see a lot of it)
 - PA
 - Officers
 - Class reps
 - Transportation
 - Emerg procedures
 - Parenting resources
 - Calendar
 - Info – PA fliers, upcoming events, calendars...
 - News and Events on home page
 - Calendar on home page

Part 3

Ways to improve existing events and hopefully increase parent enthusiasm and loyalty.

During our meetings our task force met to discuss existing school functions and how to create a fresh enthusiasm for them. Below please find our conclusions.

Back to school night:

- September
- Cocktails and food
- Upstairs in middle school lobby area (like the party when the new building opened)
- Short presentation during the party – in the same venue, no one has to move, just have a podium handy
 - Pat speaks and someone else?...vision, finances, annual appeal
 - PA presentation...quick introduction and highlight a few major things
 - a parent (or Pat) highlight the importance of voyage
- pie charts/posters on the walls about financial information for those interested?
- Name tags for everyone
- Advertised as a social event...get to know new families, reacquaint after summer with returning families, mentor families could make sure new families are going.....
- Take advantage of the number of people attending to hit the biggies...annual fund and auction??!!!

Family night:

- Late fall – whenever it currently is
- Families w/kids come to school
- Short presentation by teachers in classrooms, ala current BTS night, but very short
- Then kids take parents around classrooms
- Handouts for parents like at current BTS night
- Parents can ask questions to teachers as they mill around class w/kids
- Again, highlight importance of doing the voyage.

In conclusion, this task has exemplified my belief that we have an amazing, wonderful and caring group of parents. Most parents actively appreciate and really want to help WMS . As far as increasing enthusiasm for school events I think we need to keep them fresh and try as much as possible to tweak old favorites while throwing out what isn't working. A repeated theme is for making volunteerism more "fun" . Volunteers will be more willing to contribute their time if there is a social element to their respective activities.

Finally, the more of us who express a sign of appreciation to those who help WMS the more parents will be willing to participate. In a society where we all seem to be rushing around like crazy it's amazing how effective a simple "Thank you!" can be.

*Respectfully submitted,
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