

The District Leader's Year-End Playbook for Building Family Trust

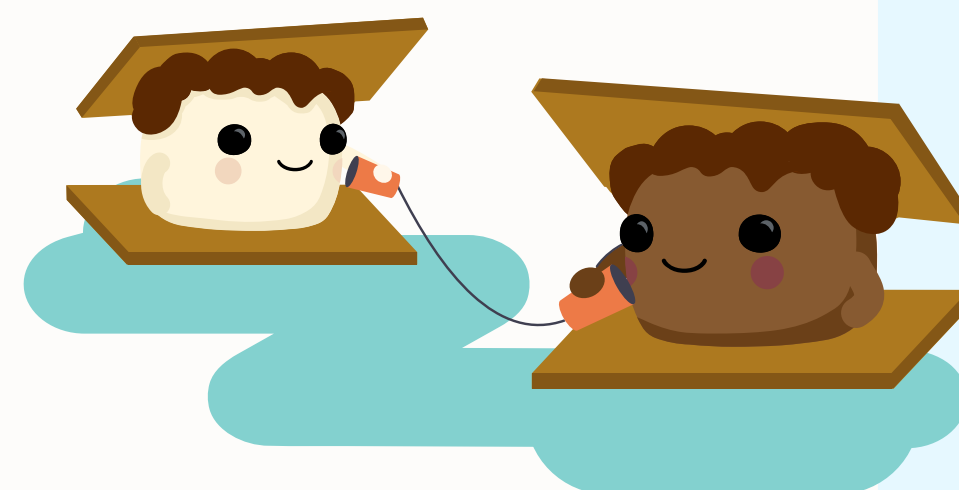


About Staying in Touch

Think about that phrase for a moment. Staying in touch. It's physical. It implies two people, both present in a relationship. You can't "stay in touch" with someone by yourself.

What does that mean for school communications?

Not "sending updates." Not "keeping families informed."



Staying in touch means two parties, both engaged, connected to something that matters to them: a child, a classroom, or a school community.

Research backs this up in striking ways. Engaged family involvement is equivalent to gaining two extra years of student achievement. Students with involved parents show better attendance, stronger social skills, and higher academic performance, and are more likely to graduate from high school.

Behind every one of those outcomes is a single value: trust. **The more families hear from their child's teachers and principal, the more they feel in the know**, the more they trust the adults at school, and the more they show up to support their child's learning in meaningful ways.

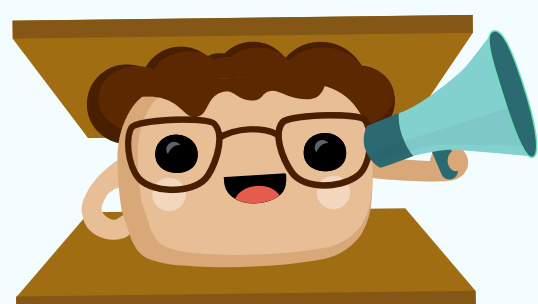
Family-school trust is built over time, through consistent, personal, relevant communication. Every message and phone call is either building that trust or eroding it.

This guide gives school leaders a framework for making the most of one of the highest-leverage communication windows of the year: the final weeks of school and the months that follow.

A Framework for Staying in Touch

Not all school communications serve the same purpose. Some messages convey information. Some build community. Some deepen individual relationships. All three matter, and the most effective school communicators integrate them, intentionally.

Think of it as a progression.



INFORM

Informing families is the starting point. Dates, deadlines, schedules, logistics. Families need this information, and schools tend to do it reasonably well. The keyword is starting point. **A school that only informs is leaving the most important work undone.**



ENGAGE

Engagement is about invitation. When you celebrate a student milestone, recognize a teacher, or share summer reading resources, you're inviting families into the life of the school. You're saying: this community is yours too, not just your child's. **Engagement builds pride and belonging, and it keeps the relationship warm** even when there's nothing urgent to report.



CONNECT

Connection is the most personal layer. A message that speaks directly to a family, that acknowledges their child by name, that arrives at exactly the right moment. **These interactions build the kind of trust that carries through an entire school year.**

Research shows that families who receive specific, personal outreach in the first month of school stay more engaged all year long. The groundwork for that connection starts now, before summer, before the first bell, before families have any reason to expect it.

The calendar that follows is built around this progression. Each communication moment is mapped to a stage, with templates your team can use right away.

The Communication Calendar

April, May, & June



Six Weeks Before the End of the Year: Inform

This is the moment for clarity. Families are starting to think about the end of the year, and the questions are practical: What do I need to know? What do I need to do? What's coming up?

Get ahead of those questions. A clear, well-organized update six weeks out gives families time to plan, reduces the last-minute scramble, and signals that your school communicates with intention.

Graduation logistics belong here too! Families planning for graduation need information early: ceremony details, ticket distribution, dress codes, parking, arrival times. The earlier that information lands, the more families can focus on celebrating when the day comes.



WHAT TO SEND:

- End-of-year schedule and logistics
- Key dates
- Graduation detail
- Field trip permissions
- Yearbook deadlines
- Library book reminders
- Supply return reminders

 **Newsletter Templates:** Monthly/Weekly Update, Graduation



Four Weeks Out: Engage

This is the celebration window. The year is still happening, and there's time to bring families into something joyful before dispersing for the summer.

Teacher Appreciation Week in early May lands right in this window for many districts. Recognizing the people who made the year possible and inviting families to be part of that recognition is one of the most natural engagement moments on the school calendar.

A Student Spotlight message fits here, too. A brief, personal note celebrating an individual student's growth or achievement gives families something that speaks directly to their child. That specificity is what transforms a school communication into a school relationship.

WHAT TO SEND:

- Teacher and staff appreciation messages
- Student milestone celebrations
- Notes of gratitude to families for their partnership this year



↓ **Newsletter Templates:** Teacher Appreciation Week, Thank You Message to Families, Student Spotlight



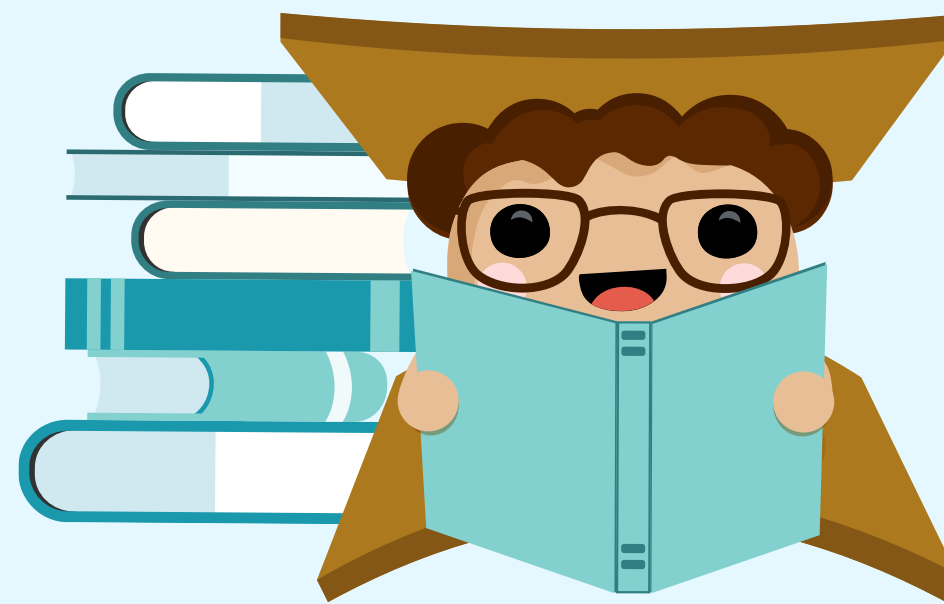
Two Weeks Out: Engage Into Summer

Families are already thinking past the last day. Summer plans, childcare, what their kids will do with weeks of unstructured time.

Meet them there. Share summer learning resources before the year ends, while families are still in the habit of reading what you send. A summer reading list that arrives in July is easy to set aside. One that arrives in May, with two weeks left of school, becomes part of how a family thinks about summer.

WHAT TO SEND:

- Summer learning resources
- Summer reading lists
- Community supports
- Enrichment opportunities



↓ **Newsletter Templates:** Summer Learning, Summer Reading

Last Week & Last Day: Connect

The end of the year is a natural moment for gratitude, and a thank you to families is always worth sending. But the most powerful communication of this window is one that goes further: a reflection on the year you shared together.

A “Look Back at the Year” tells families that their child's time at your school meant something. It names what happened, what was built, what the community accomplished together. That kind of message closes the year with warmth and gives families something to carry into summer. It also sets up something quieter and just as important: it makes the welcome back in September feel like a continuation rather than a fresh start.

These end of year communications work at every level of the organization. A superintendent can reflect on what the district accomplished together. A principal can name what made this year's community special. A teacher can speak directly to the families in their classroom. The closer to the child, the more personal the message, and the more trust it builds.

WHAT TO SEND:

- A look back at the year
- A warm close that honors the community you built together
- Communications at the district, building, or classroom level



↓ **Newsletter Templates:** A Look Back at the Year [District, School, Classroom]

Two Weeks Before School: **Welcome Back**

Families need information before the first day, and they need to feel welcomed before they walk in the door. The two weeks before school starts are when both of those things happen.

A well-designed welcome back series does more than share logistics. It introduces the people families will be trusting with their children. Meet the Teacher, Meet the Principal, Meet the Counselors, Welcome New Families: each of these messages puts a name and a face to the adults in the building. Families (and students) who feel like they already know those adults arrive on day one with more confidence and more trust.

WHAT TO SEND:

- School year logistics
- Introduction to the importance of attendance
- Staff introductions
- A warm welcome to new and returning families

↓ **Newsletter Templates:**

Why Attendance Matters, Meet the Teacher, Meet the Principal, Welcome New Families, Meet the Counselors

The First Month of School: Reach Out Personally

Everything in this calendar builds toward this moment.

In the first weeks of school, the single most effective communication a teacher can send is a personal one. A text message to a parent that says "So glad to have Michael in my class. Don't hesitate to reach out if there's anything I should know" takes thirty seconds to write. What it communicates takes much longer to build any other way: I see your child. I know his name. I am already thinking about him.

Research shows that families who receive personal, specific outreach in the first weeks of school stay more engaged for the entire year, responding to 77% of outreach as compared to late engagers, who respond to 71%. And when the message is difficult, it lands differently when it arrives inside a relationship where trust already exists, built through the communications you sent in May, June, and August.

The calendar is the setup. The personal message is the payoff.



WHAT TO SEND:

"So glad to have Michael in my class. Don't hesitate to reach out if there's anything you think I should know to best support Michael."



Communication Is the Relationship

Let's go back to the concept of staying in touch: Two people invested in something that matters.

Every message in this calendar is an opportunity to be that kind of communicator. Be the school that knows its families, celebrates its students, and shows up consistently, throughout the entire year. Don't be the school that just sends updates.

The research is clear. Families who trust the adults at school support their children's learning more actively. Students whose families are engaged show up to class, perform better, and stay connected to school longer.

Trust is built over time, through communication that is personal, timely, and relevant to each family.

This guide provides the framework. The templates give you a head start. Now, it's up to you: **decide to treat every message as a chance to deepen a relationship, not just deliver information.**

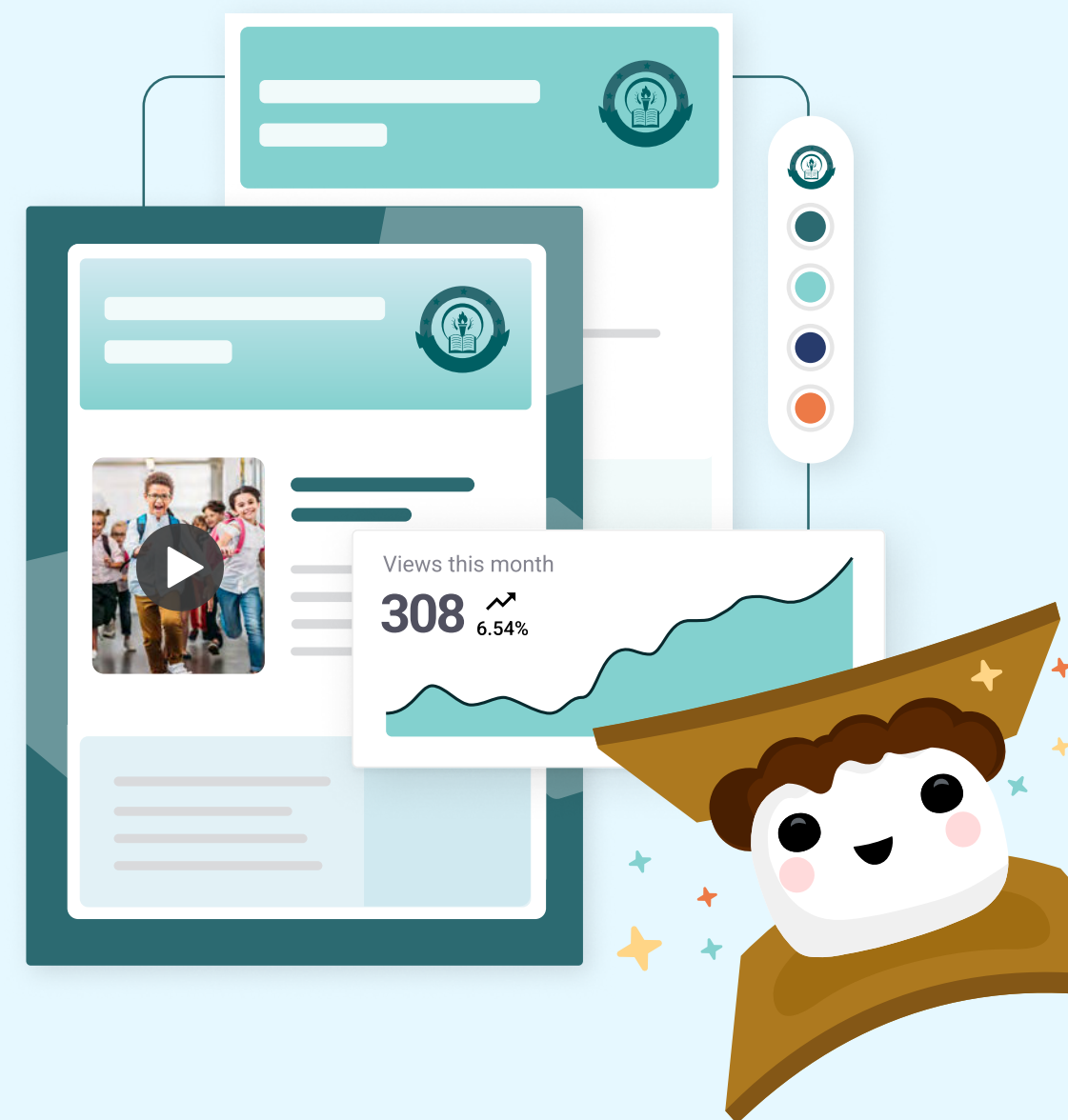
That is what staying in touch looks like. And it starts now.

Ready to take your communications to the next level?

Transform how you connect with families. Smore for Teams provides all the tools you need to create engaging, consistent, and professional communications that build trust.

With Smore for Teams, you'll gain:

- Customizable, mobile-friendly templates built for educators (like the ones in this eBook)
- Brand Kits with your fonts, logos, and colors to keep everything consistent
- Powerful analytics to track engagement and optimize your approach
- Collaboration tools that bring your team together
- A Management Dashboard for school- or district-wide oversight



Ready for a new approach to staying in touch and building family trust?

[Book a Meeting](#)

About the Author:

Dr. Kara Stern is the Director of Education at SchoolStatus. A former high school English teacher, middle school principal, and head of a rural N-12 school, she has spent her career learning what it takes to build the kinds of relationships between schools and families where every student thrives.

