

Gaining Positive Online Reviews

Why should you care about your school's online reviews?

- 95% of consumers read online reviews¹
- 93% of consumers' decisions are influenced by online reviews² = *parents are forming opinions on your school before they even get to your website*
- Only 3% of consumers would consider a business with an average of 2 or fewer stars³
- On average, 1 negative review needs 12 positive reviews to counteract it = *one negative review can ruin your online reputation / rating*
- 62% of consumers believe they've seen a fake review for a local business⁴ = *five stars is not enough; narratives need to be specific to prove they are not spam*
- Online reviews are the digital version of word-of-mouth
- ...it's **FREE** marketing!

Places for online reviews:

- Google (Business Review) (high priority) - *Have you claimed your Google business? If not, stop reading right now and [claim it here](#). While you're at it, make sure you are linking your Facebook page to your Google business. [Click here to learn more](#).*
- Facebook (high priority)
- Niche
- Great Schools
- Private School Review
- Yelp

¹ [Northwestern Spiegel Research Center](#) (2020)

² [Zendesk Study](#) (2020)

³ [Brightlocal Consumer Report](#) (2021)

⁴ [Brightlocal Consumer Report](#) (2022)

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Before starting a review campaign:

- **Respond to negative reviews beforehand:** Before inviting reviews, make sure you have responded to any negative reviews. [Click here to read more](#) and [click here to set up a Google alert](#) to report mentions of your school on web pages, discussion boards, blogs, and more.
 - *[Name], we would like to apologize for your negative experience.*
 - *[Name], we apologize no one responded to your inquiries. We have since changed our inquiry procedures to ensure that all families receive a timely response from our administration. Should you be willing, we would like to touch base with you to ensure that the updated policies will prevent the situation that you experienced. Please feel free to contact our admissions department directly at ###-###-####. We look forward to hearing from you.*
 - *[Name], thank you for taking the time to share your experience. Your review has been shared with our leadership team so we can look into the situation. We would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you individually to gain further insight and find ways to improve the experience for future families. Please consider contacting our office at #####@###.org. Thank you.*
 - Google reviews can be changed, updated, or removed by the user. *Dear [Name], thank you for taking the time to meet with us to discuss your experience and growth opportunities within our school. We hope you will consider providing readers with an update on your experience.*
 - While tempting, the review section is not the place for back and forth communication.
- **Evaluate communication channels:** You are about to invite others to share their positive experiences. Do your stakeholders know how to communicate any concerns or grievances with the school? If not, you might find these issues brought up in your reviews.
- **Know your school policy:** What is written in the parent and/or student handbook regarding defamation? Does your policy outline possible consequences for public/online defamation against the school from a currently enrolled parent and/or student?

Considerations when inviting stakeholders to leave a review:

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- **Be transparent:** Explain *why* a review is important to the school. Has there been a situation of fake negative reviews? If so, consider pointing that out to your stakeholders.
- **Emphasize positivity:** Reiterate in your messaging that you are looking for them to share their positive experience.
- **Use direct links:** Share the direct link to the school's profile, not simply the website. You want to make this as easy as possible for the reviewer. Consider a QR code. Engaging a stakeholder that is not tech-savvy? Walk them through the process on the phone or invite them to the school to assist them. It's worth it!
- **Provide detailed instructions:** Share sentence frames and guiding questions to help with the review. Adjust the sentence frames and questions based upon the stakeholder, time of year, school changes (e.g. implementation of a new initiative), or hot topics in education (e.g. social emotional learning, school safety).
- **Share a good, great, amazing example:** Let the reviewers know what is helpful when writing a review. The more specific they are, the better.
 - **Good:** We have enjoyed our time at [school] and know our children are getting a quality education.
 - **Great:** Over the last five years at [school], we have seen our three children thrive because of this school community. We are confident that they are receiving a quality education that will help them experience lifelong success.
 - **Amazing:** We joined [school] in 2017. Over the last five years, our three children have thrived in the faith-filled, community environment that [school] offers. With hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, our children have developed not only the knowledge base, but the critical thinking skills that will help them experience lifelong success.
- **Don't ask for reviews at the same time:** Spread out the invitations so there is not an influx of reviews that look suspicious to viewers.
- **Consider all stakeholders:** Look beyond the obvious choice of current families. Ask alumni, the school's neighbors, feeder schools, retired teachers, donors, business sponsors, parish staff, priests, deacons, and grandparents to leave a review.

How to invite stakeholders to leave a review:

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- **Direct Ask:** Have someone from the leadership team (that has a good relationship with the stakeholder) reach out directly. If the secretary has never met the parishioner or retired teacher, do not have them reach out.
- **Parent Teacher Conferences:** After a positive parent-teacher conference, send a follow-up communication to the family.
 - Verbiage suggestion: *Thank you so much for sharing your positive experience with us at the parent teacher conferences. We are truly blessed to have your family in our school! Would you be willing to share your positive experience with our community through an online review?* [Outline desired location and provide link]. *Because we know getting started with an online review can be a daunting task, here's a few suggestions to help!* [provide sentence frames, prompts, or examples]. *With your help, we can make sure our community knows about the great things happening in our school!*
- **Student Assignment Follow-Up:** When teachers come across stand-out reflection from students (e.g. Catholic Schools Week thank-you notes, end-of-year reflection, etc.) this should be shared with the school leadership. More and more, parents are including their child in the school selection process; therefore, having the perspective of a current student is very valuable.
- **Reuse Messaging:** Whether a parent did an interview with The Leaven, a student gave CEF a testimonial, or an alum sent a teacher a thank-you note, reach out and ask if the stakeholder would be willing to share some of the message through an online review.
- **Exit Interviews:** All schools should conduct exit interviews when families have a student that is graduating, not returning for the next school year, or withdrawing (mid-year). This is an opportunity to learn about the family's experience and identify families that would be willing to share their positive experience. A family that is withdrawing or not returning due to moving (e.g. relocating, job change, military, etc.) can still provide a positive online review.
- **Prize Drawing:** Consider a quarterly prize drawing where anyone that has left a review will be automatically entered to win a giftcard or special treat (e.g. P.E. teacher for the day, parking pass, etc.). Be careful with your wording - you are still looking for an honest review from your community stakeholders.
- ***Service Hour Opportunity:** For schools that require volunteer / service hours of families, allow an online review to count towards the requirement.

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***Service Hour Opportunity:** Use a Signup Genius (or other signup form used for volunteer opportunities) to post a monthly online review opportunity. This allows for the school to spread the reviews out over time and different platforms. Families will signup and then will be responsible for sending the school a screenshot of the review they posted online. To save your staff time, I would make it clear that if a family does not send the screenshot to the appropriate school personnel, they may not receive credit for the service hour requirement. (This also reiterates to the family that the staff will be aware of any negative reviews left, which might be enough to dissuade a family from using the review section as a grievance board.

Example:

Month	# Reviews (Signup)	Location (Platform)	Topic Considerations
January	5	1 Niche, 2 Google, 2 Facebook	(why) Re-enrolling for next year
February	4	1 Great Schools, 1 Private Schools Review, 2 Google	(Catholic Schools Week) value of education
December	3	1 Yelp, 1 Google, 1 Facebook	Faith in Schools