

Building Your School's Community Flywheel: A 2025 Guide for School Admissions and Marketing Directors

In today's economic climate, traditional marketing funnels are no longer enough. Forward-thinking schools are discovering a more powerful approach: the community flywheel. This McKinsey-inspired model transforms how schools attract, retain, and engage families while protecting and enhancing their reputation.

Why Traditional Marketing Funnels Are Failing Schools

Traditional school marketing methods like open days and social media often yield low conversion rates despite high resource demands. Critically, they neglect the influence of current parents.

Admissions and Marketing Directors shared with us the too often occurring scenario where significant investment in the pre-enrollment experience is undermined once new parents join informal channels like class WhatsApp groups, where their initial positive perception clashes with real-time feedback. This inconsistency creates a disjointed experience, shifting new parents from feeling valued during admissions to feeling less so after enrollment.

One Deputy Head shared with us recently

“We made so much effort to onboard parents and then embarrassingly we told them to find a WhatsApp Group to join.”

A Head of Admissions told us

“New parents get one version of information from us and then another on WhatsApp. It's not professional.”





(TFW - Slang for 'that feeling when...').

Enter the Community Flywheel

A community flywheel creates a self-reinforcing cycle where engaged parents become your school's most effective ambassadors. Unlike traditional marketing approaches, a flywheel builds momentum over time, delivering:

- Significantly higher conversion rates for prospective families
- Improved retention of existing pupils and families
- Enhanced school reputation building through authentic parent advocacy
- Reduced marketing costs through organic, word-of-mouth growth
- Strengthened school community and parent engagement





The Essential Elements of a Successful School Community Flywheel

1. A Clear Community Purpose

A concise purpose statement is essential for motivating current parents to actively participate in your school community. This shared purpose, coupled with opportunities for interaction, drives community engagement. Especially when they form friendships. Crucially members of your community get value from each other.

A clear purpose statement needs to follow a simple formula:

We bring together [who you bring together] to [what your parents gain from being part of this community] so that we can [result #1], [result #2], [result #3]

Here are three examples:

- Support Academic Growth:** We bring together parents and educators to share resources and ideas, so that we can support our children's academic growth, build a strong foundation for their future, and foster a love of learning.
- Foster Inclusivity and Cultural Understanding:** We bring together families from diverse backgrounds to celebrate our differences, so that we can create an inclusive school
- Raising funds, raising futures:** We bring together parents to socialise as well as raise funds for extra facilities for our children.

2. A Dedicated Community Platform

The foundation of an effective flywheel is a professional community management platform designed specifically for schools. While many schools rely on a patchwork of solutions (WhatsApp groups, social media, and various parent portals), this fragmented approach creates friction and limits engagement.

A dedicated platform like Classlist provides:

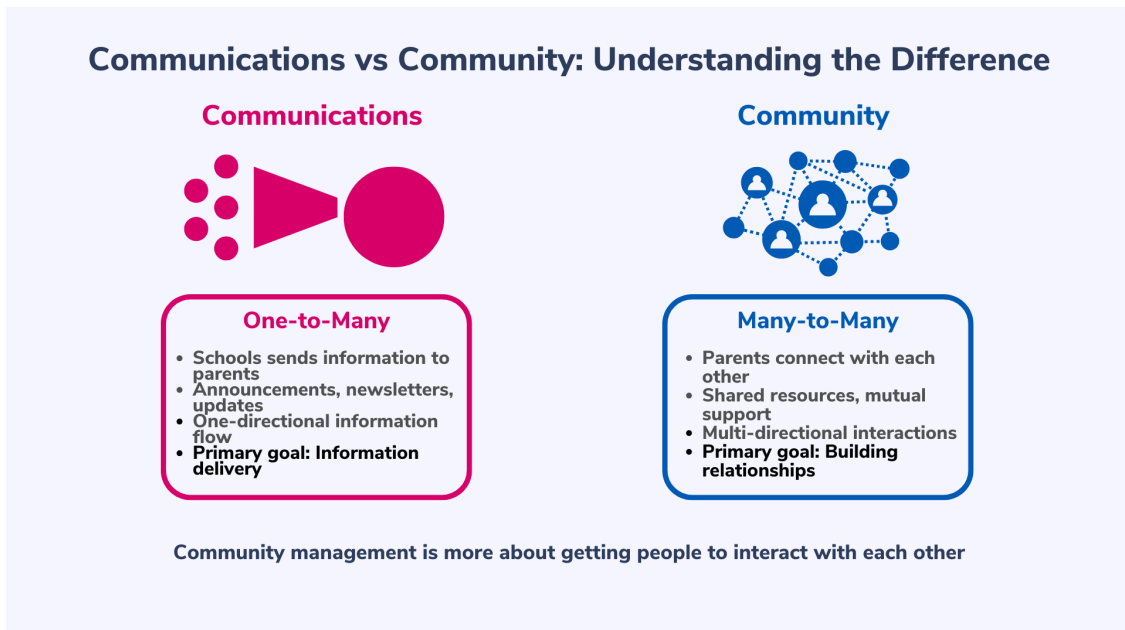
- A secure, centralised space for parent communication
- Professional community management tools
- GDPR compliance and data protection
- Seamless event organisation and volunteer coordination
- Integration with existing school systems

School communication teams and senior leadership sometimes fall into a trap: attempting to bundle community building and communication functions into a single platform. This well-intentioned effort to streamline technology is fundamentally flawed and could hamper your school's effectiveness in both areas.

Here's the reality: There isn't a one-stop shop that can meet all communication needs. The fundamental error lies in confusing communication with the community.

Communication is primarily one-directional—pushing information from school to parents.

Community management facilitates interactions between parents, fostering relationships that benefit everyone. These functions require different tools and approaches.



Download our guide for evaluating school communications and school community platforms. [Evaluating School Communications and Community Platform: A Comprehensive Guide for Leadership Teams](#)

3. Parent Ambassadors

Parent ambassadors are the engine of your flywheel. These engaged community members:

- Welcome new families
- Organise events and activities
- Share authentic and relatable experiences with prospective parents
- Create valuable connections within the parent community
- Drive volunteer initiatives

Below is a table of the kind of community leadership skills and abilities you should be looking out for when assigning parent ambassadors:

	OK	Good	Great	World Class
Welcoming	Attends an event that the school has set up	Informs newcomers about community purpose	Personalised message	Buddy programme, with regular checks two terms
Replying	Ensures most discussions receive a quick response	Provides an empathetic response and improves attitudes of member towards school	Response also encourages other members to respond positively	Popular discussions are spun out into FAQ materials for newcomers. Shared with school
Motivating	Regularly prompts members to contribute to the community	Identifies potential interest groups and leaders	Thanks and acknowledges group leaders efforts	Builds positive relationships with leading contributors of the community Looks out for successors
Facilitating	Initiates and hosts events	Creates opportunities for members to engage easily with one another through buddy programmes, small online events and in person meet ups	Creates not just the opportunities for members to engage but the spark to set up their own events and meetups Identifies tasks for volunteers to participate in the community	Encourages members to participate further depending on their position on the PCC curve Helps members to recruit volunteers by identifying tasks that are achievable and create a sense of reward. Communicate the culture, rituals and community history for future members to continue with.

4. Structured Community Engagement

Success requires moving beyond ad-hoc parent communication to create:

- Regular community events and activities
- Volunteer opportunities that leverage and develop parent skills
- Channels for parent feedback and involvement
- Recognition of parent contributions
- Opportunities for parents to share their expertise

Before creating an events programme we recommend that community leaders cast forward and imagine:

What results and transformation will you and your members get from your school community? How do these results underpin your purpose statement?

Real Results from Community Flywheels

Schools implementing professional community management platforms are seeing remarkable outcomes:

- 75% parent participation in school events
- \$100,000+ raised through parent-led initiatives
- 80+ parent volunteers supporting teachers and pupils
- 70% increase in parent engagement within three months
- Significant reduction in marketing costs and time spent responding to parent complaints
- Enhanced school reputation and [better inspection reports](#)

The Financial Impact

A community flywheel delivers compelling ROI through:

- Reduced marketing and recruitment costs
- Higher conversion rates for prospective families
- Improved student retention
- Increased parent contributions and volunteering
- Protected and enhanced school reputation

Getting Started

1. Assess your current community engagement tools and strategies
2. Identify gaps and opportunities in your parent communication
3. Select and implement a dedicated school community platform
4. Identify and empower parent ambassadors
5. Create a structured community engagement plan

Conclusion

The community flywheel represents a paradigm shift in school marketing and admissions. By investing in professional community management tools and strategies, schools can create a self-sustaining cycle of growth, engagement, and advocacy that traditional marketing approaches simply cannot match.

Ready to transform your school's approach to community engagement? Book a consultation to learn how a professional community management platform like Classlist can help you build and sustain your own community flywheel.

