



# **VANCO'S SCHOOL REGISTRATION HANDBOOK**

## ***BECOME A MASTER OF STRESS-FREE REGISTRATION***

Back-to-school registration can be a stressful time for everyone involved. Schools face endless questions and piles of paperwork while parents take on long lines and repetitive processes. Coordinating the registration process and making sure parents walk away with the right IDs, books and class schedules for students can be enough to overwhelm any administrative team.

**But it doesn't have to be this way.**

Whether the majority of your parents register in person or your school has started offering online registration this year, this guide will help you prepare for and put together a successful back-to-school registration plan.

***Vanco's School Registration Handbook*** offers advice for tackling fall registration, from early planning to post-event communication. By following these tips, you can alleviate registration frustration now and in the future. Apply this guide year after year to continuously improve your school's registration process.





# **EARLY PREPARATION FOR REGISTRATION**

*You already know that registration planning starts long before school's out for the summer. This section offers helpful tips to jumpstart that planning by improving communication, coordinating volunteers and training staff.*

## **1 Create a Comprehensive Communication Plan**

A single phone call or email is not enough to get parents ready for back-to-school registration. You must create a comprehensive plan to regularly communicate with parents. This plan should include how often you contact parents and through which methods.

For example, some schools have automated phone messaging or email systems. Using these will definitely save time but aren't necessary for maintaining regular communication. You can enlist staff, teachers and volunteers to help reach out to parents.

Use multiple methods of communication to reach parents: send emails, add messages to your school website, mail information or send flyers home with students. Encourage parents to use email as the school's preferred method of communication. Email is easier to track and will help you maintain current contact information for parents.

## **2 Collect Up-to-Date Parent Contact Information ASAP**

Before you can execute your communication plan, you need to verify parents' contact information. It's not enough to rely on last year's registration information. During the school year, families move or change phone numbers and email addresses. And they don't always update that information in your school's online portal.

The solution? Collect this information as soon as possible – before families go on vacation or stop checking the school website over the summer.

The best time to gather updated parent contact information is before the school year is over. Ask parents to verify and update contact information in the online portal during the last few months before summer break. Remind parents multiple times if needed.

### **3 Include School Contact Information in Registration Communications**

Imagine a registration day where every parent knows exactly what to do, where to go and what fees they need to pay. Pretty great, right? Though you can't read parents' minds, you can encourage them to ask questions before registration. Include your school's contact information in every single communication you send – ideally encouraging email over other methods.

Empower your parents to reach out with any questions or concerns ahead of time. By giving parents the opportunity to contact the school in a noninvasive way (by email), you can hopefully get parents through the registration process faster.

### **4 Set Up Multiple Meetings with Staff and Volunteers Before Registration Day**

Your staff and volunteers will be working hard to make sure everything runs smoothly during registration. There's a lot to discuss during these meetings and you don't want volunteers to burn out before they even start! Rather than setting up a long, all-day meeting, opt for several smaller ones.

Schedule multiple in-person or virtual meetings during the school year and summer to go over every aspect of the registration process, including greeter coordination and set up. Make sure everyone understands the role they're playing and what they're responsible for on the big day.

### **5 Train Staff and Volunteers on Software Ahead of Time**

If your school uses a student information system (SIS), train staff on how to use it ahead of time. This is particularly important if you will be helping parents register online during in-person registration (more on that in the next section, Registration Day.)

For schools that collect student fees, you will also want to train staff on how to use your preferred payment processor. We encourage schools to integrate their payment processor into their SIS to make it much easier to collect school fees during the registration process. Doing this will also speed up payment reconciliation afterward.

### **6 Offer Online Registration (If You Don't Already)**

If your school does not currently offer online registration, now is the time to adopt it. There are so many benefits to letting parents register online, including shorter lines during in-person registration and reducing the amount of paperwork you'll need to process. Schools can also reduce costs by needing fewer staff members present when parents arrive and spending less time manually entering data.

Getting set up with an online registration system now – and encouraging parents to use it – is also beneficial if you need to move the process from in-person to strictly online in the future. Making that switch will be so much easier if you're already set up to handle online registration.

If your school already offers online registration, start setting expectations now that online registration is preferred. It's easy, secure and saves parents a lot of time. Depending on your

payment processor, parents can also take care of student fees while registering online. They can pay technology, class or other fees right from their computer. No need to send payment to the school or make an extra trip to drop off a check or cash.

Include information about online registration in every parent communication and encourage parents to use the online portal throughout the year to make payments, check student records and update contact information.

## **7 Create or Update Parent Guides to Student Accounts/Registering Online**

Do you have clear instructions for how parents can log into your online portal? How about for online registration (if you offer it)? If not, consider creating a short guide and making it available online during the school year. You may not think the process is complicated, but people have different comfort levels with technology.

A friendly, easy-to-follow guide with clear visuals and instructions could lead to more parents using the online portal and registering online. Adding screenshots of each area goes a long way in helping parents connect instruction to action.

If you already have guides, consider updating them. Were there questions parents asked over the school year that you could answer here? Now's the time to add, update, or remove sections of this guide before parents turn to them for help. Again, try to make this as parent friendly as possible.

## **8 Coordinate Schedules to Ensure Staff Coverage During Every Shift**

Many schools offer many multiple registration times. It's a good idea and we highly recommend doing this to accommodate parent schedules and alleviate congestion during the busiest times.

But there is a downside to having many time slots and dates for in-person registration. You may be unprepared for a surprise mid-day rush if you're not fully staffed throughout each day.

With that in mind, you want to coordinate staff and volunteer schedules ahead of time to make sure every available hour is fully staffed. Ask for volunteers to be on call for other shifts just in case someone cancels at the last minute. Send out a few reminders to everyone involved to make sure you don't have any unexpected gaps in coverage.

## **9 Plan Ahead for Potential Pain Points**

Think back over previous years' registration events. What were the most common delays or problems you encountered? Were there any pain points in the process that you could address now?

For example, what happens if you have an influx of parents around mid-day and the lines get too long? A solution would be to hand parents in line clipboards or iPads so they can fill out paperwork while waiting. To do this, you'll need to have these materials ready to go ahead of time.

It's better to prepare for the worst rather than face unexpected challenges during registration. Talk through each of these potential problems or concerns now so you can find solutions now.



# **HERE WE GO! IT'S BACK-TO-SCHOOL REGISTRATION TIME.**

*Get ready – fall registration is here! Volunteers and staff members are at their stations and you're prepared for long hours of answering questions and facilitating paperwork. Here are some day-of tips to keep spirits high and avoid delays during registration.*

## **10 Meet and Greet Parents at the Door**

In-person registration can be a frustrating process for parents, especially when the first thing they see is a long line. Station at least one volunteer by the door who is prepared to greet parents and point them in the right direction. These volunteers should also be able to answer any immediate questions about the process or paperwork.

## **11 Offer In-Person Online Registration at Computer Stations**

Set up computer stations in your gym or registration event space so parents can opt to register online, even if they came for in-person registration. You could even have volunteers asking parents waiting in line if they'd like to register online instead. Not only will this keep lines short, but it will also help parents understand the process so they can register online at home next year.

Something to keep in mind here is that you'll want to make sure you have volunteers who are familiar with your online portal enough to walk parents through it. Include this in your pre-registration training.

Make sure you encourage parents to register online at home throughout the year, so you won't be inundated with large groups of parents wanting to complete forms at your computer stations.

## **12 Walk Parents Through the Online Portal and Registration Process**

During registration, you have parents in front of you giving staff their full attention. Take advantage of this moment to remind them that they should be using the online tools your school provides. Ask staff to stand near the computer stations and be ready to walk parents through your online portal and registration process.

By doing this, you can have a quick technology training session with parents who aren't so tech-savvy to make sure they know how to use the portal they'll use the rest of the year. Show parents how to check their child's attendance, grades, lunch balance and anything else. This way, if you need to shift to virtual classes in the future, parents will already be set up to use these online tools instead of calling in or visiting the school.

## **13 Reward Preparedness**

This tip is quick and easy. If a parent has already filled out their paperwork, don't make them stand in line. Have someone, like your greeter, take the forms and send them on to the next registration step or station.

## **14 If Collecting Fees, Let Parents Pay How They Want**

If you're collecting fees from parents, offer multiple payment options. Some parents may prefer to write a check while others may want to pay with their credit card or cash. By accepting credit or debit card payments as well as check or cash, you won't run the risk of parents having the wrong form of payment and needing to come back later.

Consider including payment options in your early communication so parents can be prepared before they arrive.

## **15 Make Parents Pay Only Once**

Throughout the registration process, parents may need to pay multiple fees for classes, extracurricular activities or materials. Don't make them pay each fee individually. Instead of asking parents to write multiple checks or swipe their card over and over, consolidate these fees so parents only need to pay once.

Doing this will also save staff from having to track and reconcile multiple small payments.

## **16 Double-Check Paperwork Before Parents Leave**

Don't let any parent leave without staff making sure their paperwork is complete. You don't want to have to call or email parents later looking for missing or incomplete information. Make sure parents have paid all fees, filled out every form and picked up class materials before walking out the door.



## **AFTER REGISTRATION: SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS NEXT YEAR**

*You made it! Registration is over and you're finally ready to take a break. But before you kick back and relax, here are some final tips to finish strong and set yourself up for success when next year's back-to-school registration comes around.*

### **17 Thank Your Volunteers and Staff**

Take some time after registration to thank everyone who volunteered to help. Consider sending a "Thank you!" email or a card in the mail. You could also bring treats (may we suggest cookies or cupcakes?) to share while your volunteers are taking down tables and organizing paperwork.

### **18 Schedule a Post-Registration Meeting**

Registration may be over, but now's the time to start planning for next year (Yes, really!).

Set up a meeting with staff and volunteers to talk about any issues they encountered during the registration process. Be sure to record these issues so you can start working on a solution now before next year. Talk about what worked well and what didn't, then ask for suggestions on how to make the process even easier going forward.

Also, keep track of common parent questions or frustrations. You can address these later in a follow-up email to parents, in next year's pre-event communication or in a how-to guide.

## **19** *Send Follow Up Communication to Parents*

You put the time and energy into walking parents through their online portal and explaining how to register or pay fees online.

While it's fresh in their minds, send a follow up email to parents reminding them to use their online portal to check student grades, attendance records and class schedule. Provide login instructions and the portal URL but do not send their username or password!

Take this opportunity to also remind parents they can register and pay online for next year.

As mentioned before, always provide school contact information so parents can call or email with questions about the online portal, registration or fee payments.

## **20** *Start Scheduling Meetings to Plan Next Year's Registration*

It might seem silly to set up a meeting for something happening in a year, but you'll be glad you did. Put time on your calendar to go over the issues and questions from this year's registration. You don't want to be rushing at the last minute to solve a problem you could have handled now.

While you're thinking ahead to next year, start planning on how to communicate to parents even earlier to encourage more online registration in the future. You can set expectations now to communicate by email, use student online portals and register online. Your future self will thank you for taking these proactive steps to ensure an easy back-to-school registration for years to come.



# **MASTERING BACK-TO-SCHOOL REGISTRATION**

Never dread fall registration again. By following these tips, your school can face registration with confidence knowing you are fully prepared to handle parent questions, process fee payments and streamline the registration process. You will also set teachers and students up for success by teaching parents how to use their online portal to check lunch balances, grades and more.

If your school is looking to further improve the registration process, consider partnering with a payment processor that integrates with your existing school software.

Vanco offers premiere payment software with a custom Web Store that simplifies registration, meals, student fees and more. With Vanco, all payments are collected within one system that's easy to use and takes little time to set up.

Take the three easy steps to save hours of work and reduce headaches for parents:

- 1. Request a demo and receive our free consultation.**
- 2. Let us customize our system to fit your unique needs.**
- 3. Enjoy time-savings and simplicity.**

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