

# A PRINCIPAL'S TOP 10 LIST FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATIONS

## 1. COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN.

Institutions live or die by public opinion. It is important to dispel misperceptions about the quality and safety of public schools. We need to help our “customers” discover that we are giving them what they want. And remember this...you have to deliver a message 7 to 9 times in 7 to 9 different ways for it to really reach your audience. In a crisis, it is important to communicate the facts as soon as possible with staff, parents and the public. Most problems an organization has faced can be traced back to communication problems, and nationwide, most administrators lose their jobs because of communication issues. It's one of your single-most important roles as a leader.

## 2. COMMUNICATE FACE- TO-FACE AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE.

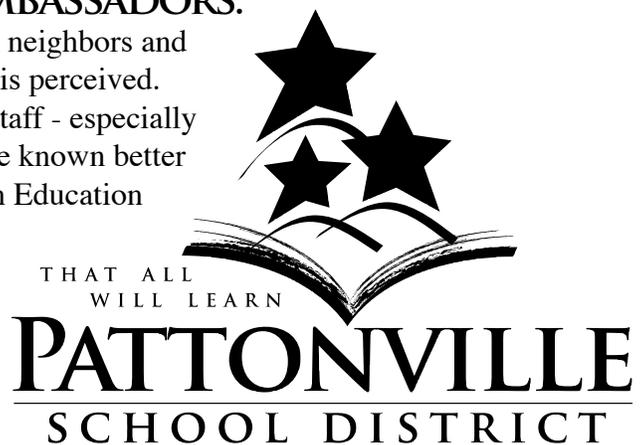
The more difficult the situation you're talking about, the more important it is to do your communicating face-to-face. Nationwide, only 22% of parents say they get useful information about their schools from radio, TV and newspapers. In Pattonville, only 2.5% percent of our residents rely on TV for news about their school district, 18.4% on the Post Dispatch, and 20% on the Suburban Journal. In the Hierarchy of Effective Communications, one-to-one, face-to-face communication is ranked No. 1 for being most effective, followed by small group discussion/meetings (2), speaking before a large group (3), and a phone conversation (4). Newsletter articles and news carried in the media are toward the bottom of the list. Remember... students are one of your audiences, too!

## 3. DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR COMMUNITY.

The late PR Guru Pat Jackson said, “Public relations is developing relationships which change attitudes that bring about desired behaviors.” Involve your community in making decision and coming up with solutions. When evaluating your school's programs, seek input from your community about how you're doing and how you can improve in areas ranging from instruction to communication. Use their input to improve. Find out who the opinion leaders are in your community (the people that everyone listens to and trusts, and they're not just parents) and get to know them. Include them in your communication loop.

## 4. START WITH YOUR STAFF TO BE YOUR AMBASSADORS.

Train your staff to understand that what they say to friends, neighbors and people in the community has an impact on how the district is perceived. As such, every employee is a PR ambassador. Include all staff - especially support staff - when communicating to employees. They are known better in the community and trusted more than administrators. An Education Week article stated that more than 70% percent of parents say they rely on personal observations and conversations and not the local news media to gather information about their local schools. Your staff should be among the first to know about any important news.



## **5. INSIST ON EXEMPLARY COURTESY AND CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR ALL VISITORS (PARENTS, STUDENTS, ETC.).**

Did you know dissatisfied people tell as many as 16 other people about a bad experience. Word of mouth is a powerful thing. What's worse, only 4 percent of unhappy customers bother to complain. For every complaint we hear, 24 complaints are communicated to others, but not to us. Think about how you feel when you approach a salesperson who ignores you until he or she finishes a personal phone call. 68% of customers move on to other service providers because they've had a negative employee contact, only 14% because they were dissatisfied with the product or service. Here's Consultant Bill Banach's ABCs of Customer Service: A) Say "hello." B) Ask "How are you?" C) Say "goodbye." Minimize inconveniences for your "customers" (and these include other staff, parents, students, community members, etc.), and delight them by doing more than they would expect. A little goodwill and positive attitude goes a long way.

## **6. HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR ROLE IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS AND WHAT THEIR ROLE IS.**

According to school PR expert John Wherry, "By far, the most important parent involvement happens at home - Reading to children, being seen reading, setting an example, showing interest in school work, and much more!" Provide training and support for parents. Help them understand they are the first and most influential teacher of their children. Let them know we count on them for their help and we value them as part of our school family.

## **7. BE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT.**

Our society is bombarded with messages. In order to get the public's attention and keep it, you must be brief and to the point. Parents can't digest lengthy newsletters. They need short articles that are broken up on the page by graphics and headlines. One sheet of paper is best. Use a 4th- to 6th-grade reading level. Remember, 80 percent of people will spend just 30 seconds reading what you send home. Think about the newspaper "USA Today" and its simple, brief format. It's easy to read and understand in a short amount of time. If you have key messages you want to make sure people receive and understand, highlight those in your headline or in a bulleted sidebar so those that don't read your article and skim your newsletter will at least "get" your main points. When being interviewed by TV media, say whatever you want to say in 8 seconds (the average sound bite on TV). Plan accordingly and practice what you want your message to be no matter what the question is. NEVER use educational jargon. PS: Just say "no" to acronyms! Most people don't know what they stand for.

## **8. NEVER LIE.**

Never, never, never lie. If you don't know the answer to something, say you don't know and that you'll get back to the person with an answer. Be sure to follow-up. Stick to facts and don't speculate.

## **9. DO A GOOD JOB.**

It sounds so simple, but 90 percent of good public relations is simply doing a good job.

## **10. DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN.**

Just like anything else, communication is most effective when researched, planned and evaluated. Find out who your audiences are, where they would like to get their information and plan measurable objectives to accomplish this. Involve your staff in getting this done. Communications plans should be updated yearly.