

Programs, Partnerships & 21st-Century Buildings NSPRA's Tip of the Week — October 27, 2015

Source: **Adrienne Leon**, program manager, communications, Adrienne.leon@neric.org, Capital Region BOCES, Albany, NY

Education is changing. Standards are rising, calls to close “failing schools” are mounting, and the spotlight on college AND career readiness for all students is growing brighter. Employers say they can't find candidates to fill jobs and pressure builds for public schools to offer children better, more advanced programs. For many districts, program upgrades require facility upgrades. Think 21st-century, modern education centers that mirror industry environments. To accomplish this, districts need to establish and foster partnerships with the community, businesses, and in higher education. As all of these pieces converge – and academic issues and financial implications emerge – communications are integral in involving and informing stakeholders.

Define your programs.

- ◆ Give academic programs an identity. Show how the district provides students with more, and better, job skills to prepare them for the “real world.” Brand programs and use all communications channels: print, web, social media, video, media.
- ◆ Who are your audiences? Develop key messages for each audience. Explain programs in ways students, parents, teachers, and community members can identify with. Don't use jargon.
- ◆ Why should the community support these programs? Why should students enroll in them? Why should teachers want to teach them? Why should the community be proud of them?
- ◆ What needs are these programs meeting (e.g. helping students see relevance in school)?

Define your facilities.

- ◆ What learning spaces are needed to support quality, hands-on training programs that can help students meet modern work force demands?
- ◆ Explain the financial investment needed.
- ◆ Communicate to your community why creating these learning spaces is the best approach versus “making do” with existing facilities.
- ◆ Develop key messages: Why is THIS the right time for this facilities project? What community needs are met by this project? What student needs are met? What will happen if we don't do this project? What new opportunities will this project allow? Why are these opportunities important?
- ◆ Identify your audiences and develop a communications plan. Who will benefit the most from upgraded facilities?

Foster those partnerships.

- ◆ Who else could benefit from your programs? Facilities? Are there opportunities to share them? How can having partners build your credibility in the community and with your audiences?
- ◆ Identify your partners' needs — and how you can help meet them. How can your partners meet your needs?
- ◆ Allow partners to carry your message for you. Allow partners to inform decisions.
- ◆ Field trips! Go and see other educational programs and facilities. Tour work sites. Take pictures and ask questions.
- ◆ Show elected officials what you do. Share your vision and allow them to capitalize on it.
- ◆ Seek opportunities to share your programs and your vision. You never know where you might find them.

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