



National School Public Relations Association

PR Tips for PRincipals

Engaging Seniors in Your Community

Often a forgotten audience, seniors can bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and a special camaraderie for your students and teachers.

Here a few ideas to engage this important group:

- ✓ Encourage seniors to use the school track or other school facilities before or after school for walking exercise.
- ✓ Encourage seniors to teach mini-lessons about a hobby, trip or historic event they may have experienced.
- ✓ Establish a pen-pal relationship between elementary school students and seniors.
- ✓ Arrange for various student groups to frequently visit senior centers to volunteer or conduct service projects.
- ✓ Distribute Golden Passes that give seniors free admission to school events like band concerts, sporting events and plays.

From NSPRA resource files.

PRincipal Communicator

Concise, practical public relations help for your school

October 2017

From Teachers to #tweetchers

Despite leading their region in graduation rate and having the most A-rated schools in Southwest Florida, Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) found themselves on the defensive. Contentious school board races in recent years resulted in misinformation being presented as fact, creating a media-driven narrative that didn't reflect the successes that the district was achieving.

Among those most upset by this were CCPS teachers. Those teachers knew that countless success stories were taking place every day throughout the district's 50 schools. Since the media was focusing on the criticisms of a vocal minority, CCPS decided to create their own wave of information to counter the falsehoods and fictitious assumptions. Who better to lead the charge than the teachers who experienced these successes every day?

#tweetcher?

To share those stories, and to empower those teachers, CCPS created the #tweetcher. As part of the CCPS initiative, "Opening the Classroom Window, One #tweetcher at a Time," teachers in each school served as volunteers to share the successes of their students.

The #tweetcher project involved posting video, pictures and information to school Twitter and Facebook pages. By utilizing the #tweetcher hashtag, parents, students, and community members could make each of these posts easily searchable.

Establishing Procedures

With the assistance of their parent messaging software vendor, CCPS developed a special teacher-level permission within the messaging system. This allowed #tweetchers to log in and post content using their existing computer network credentials, making the system easy to use and preserving password safeguards across the district.

Once volunteers were identified, CCPS Executive Director of Communications and Community Engagement Greg Turchetta personally conducted training at all 50 schools over a six-week period. This training included presentations at full faculty meetings, as well as coaching calls with principals at any time of the day or night. "Principals are absolutely critical to social media success," according to Turchetta. "They do not have to do social media. However, they need to bless the effort and give staff permission."

Overcoming Obstacles

Numerous challenges were identified and had to be addressed before #tweetchers could send their first message. Several of those were most evident at the building level, including overcoming fears.

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#tweetchers

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During initial discussions with principals and a teacher pilot group, three fears were identified which could possibly squelch teacher interest: general fear of technology, fear of violating student privacy, and fear of mistakes which could lead to disciplinary action. Each of these concerns was addressed during rollout training and follow-up coaching.

Additionally, past prohibitions on social media use were revised, easing concerns and encouraging teachers to participate, and a new Communications Guide for schools was created, which included best practices for social media use.

Stating and Carrying Out the Mission

In order to convince principals and district administrators to give their blessing, as well as convincing teachers to volunteer, identifying and communicating the project's mission was essential. For CCPS, the mission was:

We must demonstrate the innovative teaching techniques and exclusive learning opportunities happening in our classrooms each and every day.

While the #tweetchers on the front-lines were the keys to carrying out the mission, the most successful schools had principals who supported the effort, along with assistant principals and #tweetchers who created the content.

Turchetta adds, "I cannot tell you how many principals went from skeptics to believers when they started hearing the praise from parents and community members."

The Results

Principals and teachers have responded positively to the #tweetcher initiative. According to one principal, "Social media has opened our schoolhouse doors and created a dynamic relationship with our families! The posts allow us to capture the daily learning and update our families like never before." Turchetta noted, "Title I schools who needed something to change the narrative of their schools found a voice through social media."

Parents enjoy the increased volume and quantity of communication from their child's school. "There is a direct correlation between effort and results when it comes to social media success in schools," Turchetta observes. "This social media effort has opened the classroom window for parents and has changed our district forever."

Currently, CCPS is in the process of recovering from the damage caused by Hurricane Irma. The connections and goodwill generated by the #tweetcher initiative have brought the school district and the community closer together in a time of crisis. "You truly see the power of what you have created in the middle of a hurricane recovery effort," says Turchetta.

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The #tweetcher program, led by NSPRA Member Greg Turchetta is a 2017 Gold Medallion winner. To learn more, visit nspra.org/awards/gold-medallion-winners.

Observances

- **Nov. 1-30**
National Native American Heritage Month

Family Literacy Month

Military Family Appreciation Month
- **Nov. 6-10**
National Young Readers Week
- **Nov. 7**
Election Day
- **Nov. 11**
Veterans Day
- **Nov. 13-17**
World Kindness Day
- **Nov. 13-17**
American Education Week
Visit nea.org for resources
- **Nov. 15**
Education Support Professionals Day

America Recycles Day
- **Nov. 19-25**
National Family Week
- **Nov. 20**
Universal Children's Day
- **Nov. 23**
Thanksgiving Day
- **Nov. 28**
National Day of Giving (#GivingTuesday)

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Quotable

- “How wonderful that no one need wait a single moment to improve the world.”
~ Anne Frank
- “To encourage literature and the arts is a duty which every good citizen owes to his country.”
~ George Washington
- “A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference”
~ Eeyore
- “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature... Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”
~ Helen Keller
- “You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”
~ Eleanor Roosevelt
- “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”
~ Benjamin Franklin
- “When Plan A doesn’t work, you have 25 other letters to work through.”
~ Unknown
- “There’s only one way to succeed in anything, and that is to give it everything.”
~ Vince Lombardi

Best PRactices

Why You Should Spend More Time on Internal Communications

When is the last time you took a closer look at your most effective communication channel: your teachers and staff? You should be communicating with staff as much as you do with parents and students, and you can do it in a way that provides them accurate and timely information without overwhelming them. Below are 10 reasons why you should always communicate from the inside out.

- **Message framing.** People are communicating about your District with or without you. Provide staff with accurate and timely information to proactively frame important messages.
- **Credibility.** Staff, and in particular non-teaching staff, are seen as reliable and unbiased sources of information about your district. Make sure recognition, positive news stories and other engagement programs involve non-teaching staff such as custodians and front office support staff.
- **Position in the market.** Public schools are competing for students AND talented staff.
- **Giving credit where it’s deserved.** We communicate about the great things staff and students are doing in our schools. Your stories are public recognition of their hard work.
- **Meaningful communication.** It’s what we all want. Survey after survey show that staff value effective communication just like parents do. It’s human nature.
- **Communicate internally and improve.** For example, teachers know their students’ parents. Teachers can provide constructive insights to improve your parent communications before they are distributed.
- **Advocate your staff’s perspective.** When difficult but necessary decisions are made, poor communication to staff can make things much worse.
- **Be a resource.** Create a consistent communication program that staff will rely on. Create an editorial calendar for ideas for each edition. Share summaries of school board meetings so they are aware of high level decisions.
- **Communicate and repeat.** Repeat your key messages often – five to seven times. You’ll know you’re getting somewhere when your colleagues discuss changes and initiatives using your messaging.
- **Refute misinformation.** For example, the many unknowns during a State budget year can put people on edge and nagging falsehoods can exacerbate the situation. A concise and consistent message can provide some peace of mind to staff (and in turn parents) in the face of uncertainty.

From NSPRA resource files.

Celebrate Veterans Week to Enhance Curriculum and Connect with the Community

We annually celebrate Veterans Day on November 11 to honor our nation's heroes. But have you ever thought of extending the day to a week? A weeklong celebration can enhance your school's curriculum and give you time to connect with a special audience.

The following are activities that were successful in other schools.

- **Work closely with local veterans and military groups**, including local Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legions in event planning.
- **Poll students, parents and staff** to identify veterans and active duty service personnel in your community.
- **Consider events and activities** such as breakfasts, receptions, assemblies, veterans speaking to classes and historical and informative displays created by students.
- **Create a special Veterans Week page on your school website** to list all Veterans Week activities, stories, photos and videos.
- **Hold a Veterans Week essay contest.** Winners can be selected by a committee of district employees, veterans and community members. Then, honor them at a Board of Education meeting and a school event during your weeklong celebration.
- **Have students and staff write thank you notes and cards** that can be sent and delivered to veterans in the community and local members of the military across the country and around world.
- **Produce a video** to document the activities and events. Then post it on the school website and on social media. You could also produce a special video thanking veterans for their service.
- **Publicize Veterans Week activities and events** in the school newsletter, in parent emails, on the school marquee, on signs and posters in the school lobby and on social media.
- **Don't forget to invite local media, as well as local government officials and state legislators** to your events. Take advantage of the opportunity to get key stakeholders into your school.

From NSPRA resource files.

Communicating with Parents

- ✓ **Know your audience.**
Find out how parents get their information, how they want you to communicate with them, and what kind of information they want and need.
- ✓ **Remember the maxim: "People beat paper just about every time."**
Interpersonal, relationship-building techniques are the most effective way of engaging parents. Emails and phone calls have their place, but research tells us that they're not as effective in changing opinions and building support.
- ✓ **Give parents opportunities to respond, and when they do, listen.**
Truly effective communication is two-way. Activities like "Q & A" sessions, parent meetings, phone calls, a suggestion box, surveys and discussion sessions enable parents to feel they are valued stakeholders.
- ✓ **Focus on meaningful involvement.**
When you're able to involve parents, make sure they have something meaningful to do. They need to feel they are contributing and have an active role in the decision-making process.
- ✓ **Don't forget to say thanks.**
Everyone deserves a "pat on the back," especially parents when they contribute their time and effort for a school project. Always find a way to recognize them. Another maxim? "Public relations can be as simple as saying 'thank you'."

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