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.

Continued on page 2
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.

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.”

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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.

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**Observances**

- **Nov. 1-30** National Native American Heritage Month
- **Nov. 1-30** Family Literacy Month
- **Nov. 6-10** Military Family Appreciation Month
- **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
- **Nov. 19-25** America Recycles Day
- **Nov. 20** National Family Week
- **Nov. 23** Universal Children’s Day
- **Nov. 28** Thanksgiving Day
- **Nov. 28** National Day of Giving (#GivingTuesday)
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.*