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The importance of working with realtors

One of the first questions potential home buyers ask their realtor is, “How are the schools?”

So, making sure your local realtors are familiar with the good things happening in your schools should be a priority for every district.

It’s worth your time to cultivate good relationships with local realtors and not just trust that they have the same high opinion of your schools as you do. They need to be knowledgeable about the district as a whole and about the individual schools and how they differ.

Typically, realtors are eager for information about schools because it is such an important issue with potential buyers. Those with young children want to know which school might be the best match for their child. Those with older children want to know about the athletic teams, performing arts and other opportunities.

Connecting with local realtors

At a minimum, districts should give brochures and marketing materials about their schools to realtors, the local Chamber of Commerce and others — and those should be updated every year or two. To make an even bigger impact, invite your realtors to an open house or other special event each year to personally update them about your schools. Check with a realtor or two to determine a good day for this.

Prepare a short program — perhaps a short video or PowerPoint presentation — highlighting the district. Leave plenty of time for questions and answers. If you have recently added new schools or done significant remodeling and updating, consider taking the realtors on a short bus tour so they can see the improvements firsthand. Pack a box lunch to make it more fun.

Share your highlights

Be sure to highlight the special qualities that make your district unique. Some communities are known for supporting education and for passing construction bonds to keep their schools modern and effective. In some communities, schools are defined by the support that parents and businesses give to help make schools better for children. Perhaps they donate backpacks and school supplies for needy students. Or at Christmas, they may adopt students and their families and provide gifts and food baskets. Those are the kinds of things that families appreciate and can tip the balance in deciding which school to attend.

Other districts are notable for special programs: a construction class where students build a high-quality house every year, a welding program where students are guaranteed a job afterwards, an immersion program where all students in the school speak fluently in two languages, etc.

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While families are always interested in test scores and how schools compare with those in other districts, help your realtors understand all the other components that can be just as important in identifying a good school.

Give them enough materials to share

Be sure to send the realtors home with printed materials that they can share with families who are shopping for homes. Brochures about your district and schools are ideal, but even a one-page fact sheet would work.

In preparing for your presentation to realtors, make sure you have answers to questions such as these:

If it's an elementary school:

- Is there an active Parent Club? How many parents participate? What kinds of activities do they sponsor? How do they spend the money that they raise?
- Is there a before-school and after-school childcare program?
- Are there after-school activities, such as violin lessons or Mad Science or soccer?
- Does every classroom have computers or iPads available for student use?
- Is there an active volunteer program in the school? Are volunteers welcome in the classrooms?

If it's a middle school:

- What electives are offered?
- Are athletic teams offered through the school?
- Are there after-school clubs and activities?
- What is the ratio of computers to students?
- Is there a dress code?

If it's a high school:

- How many electives are offered and what are they?
- Is there an online program where students can take some or all their classes online?
- Are there opportunities for students to earn college credits while taking their high school classes?
- Are there opportunities for students to participate in the arts — vocal music, band, orchestra and drama?
- Does the school offer career-technical programs, such as woods, welding, horticulture, drafting, auto shop, etc.?
- Is there a college center where students can get information about different colleges and scholarships and how to apply for them?
- What percentage of students go on to college or technical school after graduation?
- Is there a strong sports program?

The more information you can give to a realtor, the more they can help you in communicating about your schools — not only with prospective homebuyers but with other contacts in the community.

Keep an open-door policy with your realtors year-round so they feel free to contact you or stop by your schools when they have a question or need information. By giving your realtors a variety of information with a full picture of your schools, they will be better equipped to answer questions from families and able to counter any misinformation with facts and figures.