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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Communications planning: Editorial calendar for the new year

You may have a mind like a steel trap, but it's nearly impossible to remember all the dates and activities throughout the year that need to be communicated to your different school district audiences.

There's so much content to create, and so many communications channels to manage. Reminders about back-to-school events. Updates on important activities, such as concerts and plays. Information about new curriculum and programs. Publication dates for district newsletters and staff communications.

And even though you may think you're organized, the reality for most school PR folks is that you spend much of your time in crisis mode, and priorities get lost in the shuffle. But there's an easy solution — a communications calendar.

### You need an editorial calendar

A communications calendar helps you manage your communications and strategically plan what you're going to say (and when you're going to say it and to whom). It's a simple tool, but it packs a huge punch. Those who use one find it's easier to stay organized and on top of the communications tasks they need to do.

There are all kinds of options for creating a communications calendar. A Google spreadsheet is ideal because you can easily share it with others, and you can access it from work, home or even cell phone. You can use new tabs for each month or quarter, so it's easy to view. Or if you prefer a calendar format, you could set up several Google calendars within one account (one for each communications channel). That way you could layer the calendars on top of each other and see everything at once.

You may need more than one communications calendar. If you are communicating about multiple programs or schools, you may need a separate calendar for each program/school. You may want a separate calendar for the different tools you use, such as one to organize your blog or social media posts and another for other types of communications.

### Add your key dates

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) publishes a useful tool for helping with your communications calendar. Their "Resources for Planning the School Calendar" lists a variety of dates that you may want to consider as you establish programs for next year. The price is \$40 per copy, plus shipping and handling, and can be ordered online at [nspra.org/products](http://nspra.org/products).

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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The calendar includes dates for a variety of national observances, from National Bullying Prevention Month to National School Lunch Week to Administrative Professionals Week. Curious about when Public School Volunteer Week begins? This calendar lists the date, along with those of Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day, National School Nurse Day, National Physical Fitness and Sports Month and many more.

*Review the Key Dates issue, published each spring, for a list of primary events and holidays.*

### **Your calendar is the key to planning your content**

By developing a communications calendar for the year, you are able to think through the different occasions you want to highlight with different audiences and plan accordingly. Along with noting the dates, your calendar is where you include strategies you plan to use. For example, for National School Nurse Day you may want to have the School Board approve a proclamation in honor of your school nurses. In addition, you may want to include a message in your newsletter and recognize the nurses at a staff meeting. By having all this on your calendar, you can plan ahead and not be faced with saying, “mea culpa,” for letting the occasion slip by unnoticed.

Communications calendars are a lifesaver when it comes to keeping a vibrant presence on social media. Social media tools, such as Hootsuite (<https://hootsuite.com>), allow you to schedule your Facebook and Twitter posts, so your pages stay active even when you’re on vacation or busy with other pressing tasks. By using your communications calendar, you can schedule posts about upcoming activities or observances weeks ahead of time. Same with blog posts.

Another benefit of a communications calendar is that it helps you regulate the frequency of your communications. Regular communications are the key to keeping your patrons engaged and well informed — not so many communications that they overwhelm your audiences but enough that they get your messages across.

Once you have your calendar, it’s important to review it regularly. If you’re lucky enough to have a communications staff, a regular editorial meeting will help you stay on track and avoid missing deadlines. It’s also a great time to brainstorm upcoming events and important dates that you want to add to your calendar.

A communications calendar is a great tool for everyone, whether you’re a PR professional or a principal or superintendent. But even if others don’t use one, be sure to share yours, so that your colleagues can better understand all that goes into communicating effectively with the variety of audiences that you have. Most are completely unaware of the wide scope of communications that is necessary to communicate effectively with a broad group of audiences. Sharing your calendar will also make them more aware of the times of year when communications are at a peak and your time is especially limited.

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*Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant*