

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

inside

Communications training for principals

Good communication from the principal makes parents and staff feel like they are part of something great. Poor communication makes people question school operations and programs. Most principals don't get enough formal training on communication leadership. Here are tips to help them succeed in this important role.

Getting the message: How schools and parents communicate

Good communication between schools and parents is key for reducing parent stress and building support for your school. Read how some schools have implemented new communications channels and social media strategies to improve communication between schools and parents.

Share your good news with your community

School communication sets the tone for community perceptions about schools. Communications is a daily effort — not a one-time event. While it is important to communicate adverse events effectively, it is as important to consistently share your good news stories.

Update your school letter templates for the new school year

When unexpected events happen, schools should have letters ready to send to parents with key messages. Here are templates for principals for some unexpected events that require responses in the midst of stressful situations.

Where do you find your good news stories?

You want to boast about the great things happening in your school, but where do you find the good news stories to share? Those stories are everywhere. Read tips about harvesting them to build a platform for all the great work in your school.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Setting limits on social media

Researchers have calculated that the average social media use over a lifetime equals five years and four months. Combined with new research that links screen time and depression, parents need to be aware of the children's online activity and consider taking steps to curb it.

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Communications training for principals

Communication can make or break a new principal. Good communication from the principal makes parents and staff feel like they are part of something great. Poor communication makes people wonder what, if anything, the school is accomplishing for students.

The bad news is that new principals don't typically get any formal training on being a communication leader for their school. The good news is that district staff can help them become good communicators quickly.

For those mentoring the new principal, start with the basics. One meeting at the beginning of the year and a couple of checkups can set a course for communications success. Ongoing communications support from the district will never disappear but it can decrease over time as the principal finds their groove.

What is news?

The first thing to cover with a new principal is the concept of newsworthiness. Breaking news is anything with a wow factor. In the news business they say "Dog bites man is not news. Man bites dog is news." Hopefully nobody is ever bitten by a dog at school. But the point remains, the more a school program or event seems unusual or innovative, the more likely it will be considered newsworthy. Not everything that happens at school can be made into sizzling hot news, but by focusing on the unusual aspects, the principal can create a news "hook" to grab the attention of the audience.

Sometimes all it takes is a little bit of digging and conversations with teachers to turn a mundane, perennial event like the first day of school into something newsworthy. So encourage the principal to look for something new or ask staff what is innovative in everything that happens in their building. What is new or different on the first day of school this year? Parents dropping kids off on the first day? No. Teachers welcoming their new students? Probably not. What about the new portable classroom for music education? Or the falcon that built a nest in the tree on the playground over summer break? If it is something new, it could be the news hook to draw the audience in to the story about the first day of school.

In a school, not all news is going to be wonderful to everyone who hears it. Sometimes a change is seen as a controversy or crisis by certain audience members. And that is OK. Oftentimes, tough issues can create an opportunity for the principal to show leadership in communicating news that not everyone wants to hear. She may not make people happy, but she will likely gain respect by being transparent.

In the case of tough news, the key is for the principal to be proactive and treat every issue as an opportunity to reaffirm the positive vision they have for their school. For instance,

(Over)

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.



if a bullying problem arises, that is a great time for the principal to get the news out proactively with basic messages around the problem, the solutions being implemented and a reminder about the safe, welcoming environment that she is committed to providing at her school.

What channels are available?

Cover the various communications platforms or channels available for the principal including internal and external. Does the school have a parent newsletter? Staff newsletter or weekly email? Social media and web page? Go over the inventory of communications channels at the school. Next, talk about the district-level options available: Electronic newsletter, district web page, district social media, board meeting presentations, etc. Let them know if there are parameters on various district channels, for instance a newsletter that is just focused on student success or staff innovations, so they know the rules of the game and don't waste time submitting the wrong stories.

Remind them that communication is a two-way street. They need to think about what channels are available for them to hear back from the parents, students, staff and community partners. Do they want to get emails? Do they want to attend parent club meetings and neighborhood association meetings? Help them think about the ways they can receive as well as give information.

Finally, cover all of the community partner and professional channels available. Perhaps there are service clubs willing to help spread school news. Talk about local education reporters in the news media as well as cable access or other community-based news outlets. Some churches and local clubs are open to hearing directly from school leaders or helping spread school news via social media and newsletters.

Dealing with bad news

Make sure the new principal is armed with knowledge about common incidents that might become bad news in any given school year. Certain things happen almost every year: stranger danger incidents, a student or staff member is arrested, a student is injured in a crash, threatening or biased messages in graffiti, etc. Such issues are fairly common in school districts, but for the new principal this will be the first time they have been responsible for communicating about them. So, make sure they know the basic approach to dealing with such common issues and problems.

It is extremely helpful to cover the common pitfalls that can come with each of these incidents. Transparency is generally good, but there are times when investigations by human resources or police could be jeopardized by releasing too much information. For instance, let them know that in stranger danger cases, you will want to coordinate with the police before releasing suspect person or vehicle information. And in the case of students being injured or killed in a car accident, avoid violating health privacy laws. Such wrinkles can make the difference between making a bad situation better, or making it much worse for the school.

One of the most common pitfalls in any bad news situation is the error factor in first reports. Often, the first report is not 100% accurate, so the principal should be encouraged to fact-check, or have other staff do that, before releasing any information or responding publicly. It is much easier to delay the first communication than to try to correct bad information released too quickly.

When to call the district office

Training Principals

October 2019

Page 3

One of the most important things to let the principal know is that the district office is there to support them. Let them know it is always OK to call the district office for support. In their first year, this could happen just about anytime something unusual happens, which is fine.

As the years go by and they become more familiar with the common issues, the principal will eventually learn how to handle the issues independently. But there are still times when they need to give a heads-up to the district office. Nobody likes surprises, especially unpleasant ones. So let the principal know when to call headquarters and what kind of information to be prepared to share. For instance, anytime parents go to the media with allegations of staff misconduct, let the district office know right away. If the local paper is covering a fundraising activity, it isn't necessary to call it in to headquarters.

If the principal notifies the superintendent's office when something sensitive may be in the news the next day, they can let board members and other community partners know. They can share the key facts of something before it is on the news. In certain circumstances, the district office will want to send out an email to all staff to let them know that the district is aware of the issue and working toward solutions before the news breaks city-wide. When in doubt, let HQ know.

Keep checking in

A new principal's first year is an important one for the students and the district. The district office can help make Year One a success by meeting at the beginning of the year and checking in periodically to offer guidance and support on communications, one of the most important aspects of the principal's job.

Contributed by Jay Remy, communications consultant

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Getting the message: How schools and parents communicate

At some point, every parent has fished a random flyer from the bottom of a backpack and asked, “When did you get this?” But they wouldn’t be the first. Decades ago, a child could even come home from school with a message pinned to their clothing! Fortunately, thanks to smart phones and apps, we may be past the time of using children as carrier pigeons.

Good communication is key for reducing parent stress. “Communication with the school is particularly important to us because our daughter is minimally verbal,” observes Kathy Graydon, who has a nine-year-old in third grade. “Add to that the fact that our lives are busy and stressful, so I need a lot of reminders. It’s not that I don’t want to have her participate in things, it’s that I have a lot on my plate and I forget.”

The right platform

Apps and well-managed school webpages are making communication more fruitful. Shannon Moore’s son is in first grade in the Simi Valley School District, which has his profile on the school’s app. This allows Moore to keep up with his assignments, fundraisers and pay for school lunches. The app provides the lunch menus, which Moore says are helpful because if there’s something he won’t eat, she knows to pack him a lunch for that day.

Moore prefers the app over the private Facebook group his kindergarten class used. “The Facebook group had photos, but you’d have to friend the page and then you open yourself up to friend requests from other people in the group and those people can get into your business. The app is better.”

Jill Ramirez has children in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It’s one of the largest school districts in the country, serving ten percent of California students. Ramirez points out that no matter how efficient the system is, communication requires effort, even if there’s an app. “The individual classrooms use an app which is only as effective as the teacher using it,” Ramirez notes. “The administration is still doing the flyers in backpacks, and a robocall thing. I would love email updates, but the only people using email regularly are the PTA moms who put a list together on their own time.”

In another corner of LAUSD, Sara Skelton is very pleased with her school’s parent communications, but notes it’s the parents that are driving it there as well. “Thankfully our school has an excellent PTA and we have a communications board position,” explains Skelton. “She has done an amazing job of making sure the information is always accessible to all parents. Teachers are on an app where they can communicate directly with parents. Our website is always updated with all events. We have a classroom rep. who emails all the parents every week with reminders on anything important happening during the week. We have a weekly

(Over)

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.



newsletter that's emailed to all parents and links to the website. Sometimes the info is repetitive but parents can't complain that they don't get the information!"

Frances Callier's daughter attends a school that doesn't use an app but, again, shows communication is people-driven. "Our school is AMAZING about communication. There is a newsletter about information and calendar events from the principal every Sunday night, then there is a grade-specific communication that goes out as well."

Focus on basics

Keeping apps and information up to date can help avoid a communication breakdown as well as protecting privacy, whether it be the teacher's privacy or the families. A school with its own network is more secure and comfortable for everyone. "My son's first teacher used her own email account, which felt a little awkward," Moore shared. "His new teacher uses an email with the school district's server address, so I don't feel like I'm bothering her during her personal time if I email at odd hours."

At the other end of the communication spectrum, Lorrie lives in rural New Hampshire where her daughter's school in the Pittsfield District keeps contact basic. "We have a populace of 3,500 residents — it's a small town," she explains. "We don't get robocalls. We get a personal call with a human on the other end. Phone calls and texts work best for us."

Room for improvement

It's important to acknowledge when communication is not working. David Solovieff, whose sons are in middle school in the Montgomery County District of Maryland, feels like he is being made responsible for the communications himself. "There are rare outgoing messages or contacts from teachers," he says. "You need to send the first email."

There is no downside to improving communications between your school and parents because almost everything is improved by involvement. When it's making their lives easier, parents are more eager to assist. At Skelton's school, the PTA Communications position heads up parent-teacher communications for the whole school. "And she has an assistant!" If your PTA doesn't have this position, maybe it's time to add it.

Allowing parents to choose their mode of communication can help. Do they prefer calls, flyers or emails? There are many apps on the market that can help, and can be customized to your school. Once you've chosen your modes of communication, things will go best if you make the first step to let parents and teachers know they can stay on top of sharing information with the tools you've chosen. Good communication can be the core of a happy, high functioning school community.

Contributed by Jack Sanderson, writer and communication consultant living in Los Angeles.

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Share your good news with your community

The way a community feels about its school district is based in large part on how well the district communicates. A district may have wonderful programs and may be making great strides in meeting challenges. However, if it doesn't have a purposeful way of communicating that information, the public may never know or appreciate it.

Often districts approach communications as a singular event, something they do when they need to pass a bond or mitigate a public relations calamity. Informed districts, however, know that communications is a continuous process. It needs to happen year-round, in good times and in bad. Former President Lyndon Johnson had it right when he said the time to make friends is before you need them. That's true of school districts as well as politicians.

Besides keeping your patrons well informed, regular communication helps districts build a bank of trust and goodwill. When patrons feel good about their schools and believe you are being upfront in sharing news, they are more apt to give you grace when things go wrong.

Individual schools tend to do a pretty good job of communicating with parents. Teachers often have webpages and newsletters to keep parents informed about what's happening in their classrooms. Parents come to back to school night and concerts and other school events and see first-hand what their children are learning and doing. So it's no surprise that parents generally feel good about their own child's school.

On the other hand, districts aren't always as consistent in sharing good news. And as a result, people who don't have school-age children don't get much information about the schools and don't always feel so favorable.

Each year the Phi Delta Kappan magazine conducts a poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools. The 2018 poll shows a stark contrast between how people view their local school versus schools in general. Seventy percent of the parents polled gave their own child's school an A or B grade. But only 43% of the general public gave their local schools A's or B's. The nation's schools as a whole received lower ratings still, with only 19% giving them A's or B's.

This disparity is always concerning but becomes especially critical when districts are trying to build public support for a bond or other money measure. Voters aren't likely to dig into their pocketbooks to support schools that they don't feel are effective or doing a good job managing their money.

Good, consistent communication is a key piece of building trust, confidence and strong relationships with your community. That means communicating well and often. While it's important to talk about budget and school board business, it's equally — and maybe more important — to talk about the things students are learning, and how they are using

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.



(Over)

technology, and how the athletic teams are doing, and about the concerts and plays that are open to the public. These are the things that connect people to their schools.

It's important to develop a yearly communications plan and identify specific events and strategies for communicating with different stakeholders through different communications channels. Your communication plan should also identify who is responsible for the different communications, whether it's a designated communications specialist or a principal or other staff person. That way, you can track and evaluate the effectiveness of the communications.

While districts have a long "to-do" list, communications must be one of the priorities if you want your community in your corner.

Some things to consider:

Tell your stories. Our schools are full of good news, but teachers and other staff are often so busy doing their jobs that they don't take time to let others know about it. Remind them to post photos and short narratives on their school webpage and social media sites about the good things happening in their classrooms — whether it's a guest speaker or students at work. Don't expect local media coverage for this good news; share it on school media channels to engage school communities.

Some ideas for posts:

- How students are using new tools and technologies to learn.
- How classrooms look different these days, with more hands-on, collaborative learning activities.
- How schools are partnering with local employers to prepare the next generation of skilled workers.
- How students are earning college credits while still in high school, with some graduating high school with one to two years of college credit.
- How students and educators are giving back to their local communities.

Engage senior citizens. Seniors are a growing population, and in many districts, senior citizens are the largest block of voters. It's important to keep them informed about schools, so they have the information they need to be supportive, not only with their vote but also their time. Invite seniors to become volunteers, tutor students, eat lunch with students once a week, help supervise the playground at recess. Include a senior representative on important district committees, such as the budget committee.

Educate your lawmakers. It's important for elected representatives to recognize the good things your schools are doing and the challenges they are facing, so they can make informed decisions that support public education. Meet with them regularly for coffee or lunch. Send them copies of your newsletters and other communications. Invite them to school events or just to visit your schools and observe great teaching and learning in action.

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Update your school letter templates for the new school year

Fall is a busy time for schools. When an unexpected event happens, schools should have letters ready to send to parents with key messages and reassurances. Here are letter outlines that principals can revise to quickly update parents while managing the other aspects of the particular crisis or normal operations.

These letter templates address some common school events. They are adaptable and can help ensure a faster response when a crisis hits.

These letters are addressed to parents from the school principal. Schools should print them on letterhead, modify them as needed and send with a principal's signature — or email them if that is standard practice. Replace any italicized text with school-specific information.

After they have been sent, post the key messages from the letters on school websites and social media sites.

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

The letter topics in this packet include:

- Stranger danger reminder
- Stranger danger incident
- A student or staff member is arrested
- A student is injured on school grounds
- Biased messages in graffiti or on social media

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.

**From the Principal:
Stranger Danger Reminder**

This letter is about the important issue of safety. Here at (*School Name*), the safety of our students and staff is our first priority. We have a safety and emergency plan. All staff members are trained in school safety, and we teach safety to students.

We are dedicated to keeping all students safe, which is why we need your help teaching kids about personal safety. Please help us share safety messages by talking to your child and going over basic safety rules. The best way to protect children is to talk to them and teach them personal safety lessons.

Please go over the following tips with your child. We are all working together to keep kids safe.

- Talk to your child about stranger danger.
- If your child walks to and from school, walk the route with your child.
- Point out safe places for them to go if they get into trouble.
- Tell them to never go anywhere alone - to always travel with a group.
- Make sure your child knows his/her address and phone number, and how to reach you in case of an emergency.
- Get together with other parents and see if you can share the responsibility of walking students to and from school.
- Remind children that adults who need help should not ask children to help them. They should ask other adults.
- Remind children to use the buddy system. It is safer to be in groups when going somewhere or playing outside.

Thank you. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to give me a call at (*school number*).

Sincerely,
Principal

**From the Principal:
Stranger Danger Incident**

Dear Parents,

School safety is our priority. We work hard to keep students safe, and I am writing to you about an issue that happened today and an important safety reminder.

Today a student reported being approached by a stranger on the way to school. The student is safe. They followed safety tips and ran to the school building, which was nearby.

Police are investigating the incident, and we are thankful that there was no additional contact between the stranger and the student. However, this event is a good opportunity to review safety tips with your children to teach them how to be safe in public.

Please remind your children to walk in groups, avoid dark or deserted areas and avoid talking to strangers or approaching strange vehicles. We will provide these lessons at school as well. We can work together to keep our students and our community safe. If you have any questions, please call me at the school office.

(Over)

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Principal

**From the Principal:
Arrests: Staff Member**

Dear Parents,

You may have heard about the arrest of one of our staff members today. I know there are many concerns and fears based on the arrest, and I'm sure you have questions. I am writing to tell you that we care deeply about our students, and we will do our best to protect them and ensure that school operations continue as normal.

The police are in charge of the investigation, and we are honoring their role by letting them determine what information to share about the case. The police do not tell us what we may or may not say, but we must avoid any communication that could compromise their investigation.

If you have information that pertains to this case, please share it directly with the police. We can pass information along, but it is best for people to work directly with the police because they are conducting the investigation.

If the police ask us to share specific information, we will. I can't answer questions about this case, but I can assure you that student safety is our priority. If you have any questions about our student safety procedures, please contact me.

Thank you for understanding.

Sincerely,
Principal

**From the Principal:
Arrests: Student**

Dear Parents,

Today, one of our students was arrested on charges related to conduct toward another student. School officials are cooperating with the police investigation, but this is a police matter. Any school investigation would only occur after the police have finished their work.

We understand that people will be curious about the incident, but the investigation will determine the official facts, and we will not release confidential student information or pass along unofficial versions of what happened.

In the event that a school investigation is necessary, any information about student conduct and discipline would be part of the confidential student record.

We will continue to focus on supporting the students and staff in our school and ensure that they can continue to learn in a safe environment.

(Over)

Sincerely,
Principal

**From the Principal:
Student Injury on School Grounds**

Dear Parents,

I want to make you aware of an incident that took place at our school today. Your children may have questions or concerns, and we want you to have accurate information.

An accident took place on our school playground today. A student was injured, and paramedics transported the student to the hospital. School staff reacted quickly and made sure the student received medical treatment right away.

Providing a safe learning environment for our students and staff is our top priority. This was a very unfortunate incident. We are investigating it and will take steps to prevent incidents like this from happening in the future.

We also have counseling available for students who may have anxiety and need to discuss the event. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (*school number*).

Sincerely,
Principal

**From the Principal:
Biased Messages in Graffiti**

Dear Parents,

We think it's important to keep you informed and wanted to share information about an incident that took place today.

This morning, our school custodian noticed graffiti on our school building that contained racial slurs. He immediately began efforts to remove the offensive messages, but some students who were arriving for the day may have seen it before it was gone.

We want to assure you that we work hard to build a welcoming, safe and inclusive school culture. We will conduct a school investigation, and we will take appropriate disciplinary action against any student we find to have taken part in these activities to damage school property and demean other students.

Creating a positive school climate is essential for students to be successful, and it is the right of each student to be treated with respect.

If you have questions, or if your child has tips to help us identify who may have written the graffiti, since it might have been visitors or someone else, please contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Principal

October 2019

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Where do you find your good news stories?

Opportunities abound to share good news about your school district.

I prefer the term “good news” to “positive news,” as the latter implies more of a value judgment; the district is managing the news to portray itself in a positive light, which becomes counter-productive. In contrast, “good news” avoids that spin while presenting informative and explanatory pieces along with news of student, staff, and district achievements.

Finding stories throughout that continuum can require out-of-the-box thinking, planning, and a school board and administration that are “all in.” Equally important is the commitment of teachers, classified employees and other line staff who will alert you to good news and who understand how to recognize that news.

Here are a few ideas for generating that discussion.

Heed the buzz

What is the buzz — the things about a class or an event or a personal/group achievement that has everyone talking? You might think of them as the stories that staff or students share around the dinner table (although dining together at the table is becoming less common). These items might be nuggets for a newsletter or social media, or they might be worth a story pitch to news outlets.

The key is to get staff and students to share items with you instead of assuming that no one will be interested, that they must gather all the details first, or — as too often happens — that you already know.

Start earlier than you think you need to

Many opportunities for news get overlooked or delayed until their news value is lost.

For example, a science fair is worth internal news coverage but probably not coverage by the media. These days, even newspapers avoid covering static events in favor of ones that produce good video. Some newspapers require reporters to produce video with every story. For video, the students’ actual construction of intriguing science projects would be much more interesting than the fair itself, so start the coverage process early.

Along with posting your own videos and photographs on your website and social media, consider sharing them with each sponsor of an event — especially if the video highlights and/or thanks the sponsor.

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

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.

Recruit student moviemakers

Finding Good
News

October 2019
Page 2

Even though my communications work includes being a professional videographer, I continue to be surprised when school districts needlessly hire video companies instead of using experienced, reliable students.

Students can put together good mini-movies of that science project construction for use on your website and social media, and potentially as B-roll for news media. Such work has an educational value for the students, requiring them to combine the science of photography and sound with the art of communication — interviewing, writing scripts and narrating via sound or captions.

Consider hiring students. You also could work with student media, student clubs or classes to pursue video-related projects. Your school district also could host a student video contest on a specific topic with meaningful prizes, such as giving members of the winning high school team their own parking spots for the rest of the school year.

Most videos will be short, less than a couple of minutes. Shorter is almost always better. A quick search of the internet will lead you to the latest trends and recommendations for video lengths and approaches.

Once you post your videos to YouTube and other social media, remember to track the analytics.

Share the curiosity

What is it that you always wondered? That curiosity can become a story, especially with student-created video.

Follow the preparations for a prom, a play or a concert. Have a school custodian strap a GoPro or similar camera to her or his head and record “a day in the life of.” Have students record a school bus driver on the job, a video that could be a good recruiting tool for drivers. Do that with a principal, sports coach, or another intriguing person.

Another option is to have students prepare a video about the complexities of completing a student schedule, the school budget, or a special education plan, which could build empathy for those decision-makers as well as an understanding of their work.

Twitter can be your friend

Encourage teachers and others to tweet every school day about what they’re doing at school, using software to collect those tweets in a rolling feed displayed on the home page of your district website. This might seem controversial, but districts are doing this successfully. Look online for examples during this new school year.

Your district staff must have a thorough understanding of your policies on social media, student identification, and inclusion of students in photographs and video. Initially, you might want someone well-versed in effective social media to review the tweets before publication and to gently coach the participants as needed.

This is not an invitation to simply heap more work on educators. As with any form of media, there must be a clear rationale for why it is being employed, who the target audiences are, and what the desired outcomes are. Social media simply for the sake of social media is counter-productive — a waste of time, resources, and staff goodwill.

(Over)

Staff members who embrace the tweet-a-day philosophy — not a requirement! — will find it worthwhile. The tweets can help parents, colleagues, and the public better understand the daily progression of the classroom.

Additionally, there are several other valuable reasons to tweet like sharing classroom ideas that another teacher might find helpful; seeking ideas and resources from others; honoring students and volunteers for their ideas or achievements; providing a daily recap for or by students (and student teachers); highlighting upcoming school events; thanking business partners; being a source of story ideas for local news media (because they'll follow you on Twitter); and building the public's habit of following the district Twitter account for the latest news.

As appropriate, Twitter's limited length also can be used like the short-journal apps that have become popular. A tweet is a nifty way to focus a person's goal for the day or sum up the day's progress, albeit in a public forum.

These approaches can work for social media besides Twitter. The advantage of Twitter is the recognition that it is quick and short. It embraces brevity as a virtue instead of an obstacle. It can appeal to a variety of audiences. And so far, it remains relatively straightforward, unlike some social media platforms that use complicated algorithms to determine what shows up where.

Reminder: you don't have to be on all the social media platforms. Stick to three or four that work for you.

Speaking of journals

Keep a running list of your "good news" ideas and of staff members whom you can count on to suggest other ideas and to honestly evaluate yours. Categorize these ideas by which are appropriate for school or district newsletters; video or in-person presentations at school board, service club or other community meetings; social media; the district website; press releases and pitches for news coverage; and others uses.

Create your own events

High schools regularly hold signing ceremonies for student-athletes who commit to play sports at a college. Why not hold similar ceremonies for students who commit to apprenticeships in the trades?

Because signing ceremonies for apprenticeships are uncommon, they are one way that schools can gain media coverage while fulfilling educational goals — in this case, signaling that entering the trades is just as worthy, rewarding, and important as attending college. Indeed, any resulting media coverage is a bonus to the positive message sent to students.

Or what about ceremonies for students who commit to summer or post-high school internships? The employers or educational institutions providing those internships could be interested in your photographs or videos of those signings.

Or have ceremonies honoring students who join the military, or students who will attend the local community college, or educators who gain additional certifications and skills.

In a similar vein, invite civic leaders to try their hand at being trained as bus drivers — again, a potential recruiting tool for drivers — or serving as referees and umpires during a preseason

sports practice, or acting as interviewers/commentators for a culinary arts competition. Each of those could become interesting video.

Finding Good
News

Opportunities abound for good news stories. Seek them and tell them.

October 2019
Page 4

Contributed by Dick Hughes, communications consultant. Contact him at TheHughesisms@gmail.com.



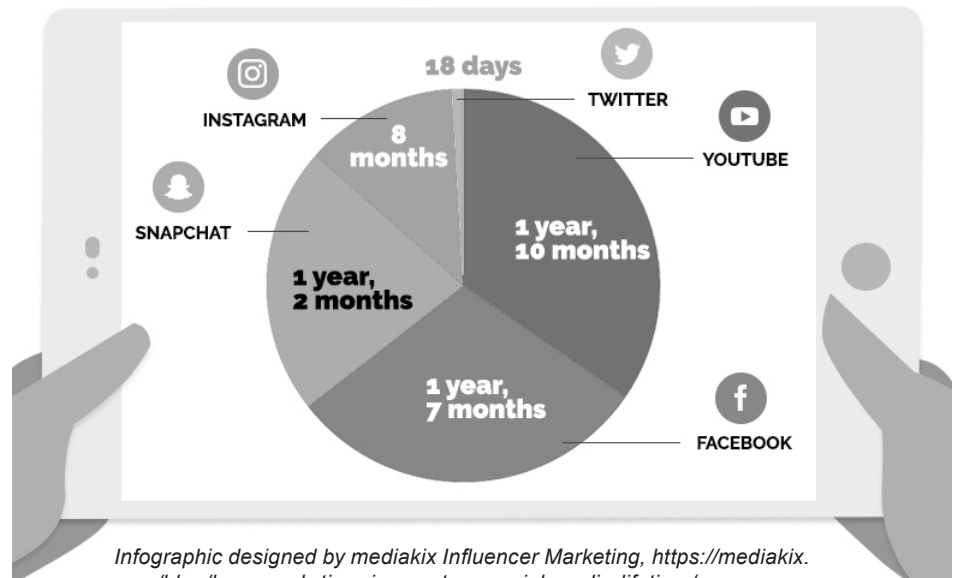
Setting limits on social media



October 2019

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child’s school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

TIME SPENT ON SOCIAL IN A LIFETIME



Lifetime social media use = 5 years, 4 months

The latest estimates of social media use over an average lifetime is five years and four months. That is not simply screen time; it is time spent from childhood to old age on currently popular social platforms. Specifically, it is Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook.

These numbers don’t include time shopping online or streaming movies or texting. And MediaKix, the researchers behind that number, admit that this is a snapshot of a growing and rapidly changing environment.

Kids and teens on social media

It is interesting, and even sobering, to see how most of us spend our time on digital platforms. Second only to watching TV, which has a lifetime estimate of seven years and eight months, social media use tops time spent eating and drinking, grooming and in-person socializing.

For kids and teens, who have never known a time before digital tools, lifetime usage is likely to keep growing. Do we understand the health and social effects of this relatively new environment on child and teen development?

Effects on mental health

“A new groundbreaking study called “Association of Screen Time

and Depression in Adolescence,” published this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics journal links social media usage to depression and it’s one of the most comprehensive pieces of research on this subject to date.” <http://bit.ly/2lSGiuE>

“A new groundbreaking study called “Association of Screen Time and Depression in Adolescence,” published this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics journal links social media usage to depression and it’s one of the most comprehensive pieces of research on this subject to date.” <http://bit.ly/2lSGiuE>

Taking steps to prevent social media-related depression

As mental health researchers study the effects of social media on teens, they are connecting increased use to increased depression and anxiety. Parents, and even teens themselves, should consider setting limits.

“Every hour of screen time results in becoming more vulnerable to anxiety, depressive episodes, loneliness, sadness or hopelessness. Not only that, but psychologists are talking today about “second-hand anxiety.” This is the anxiousness a teen can pick up just from being around a peer who is anxious. Just like second-hand smoke, when being around someone puffing on cigarettes, it’s contagious” <http://bit.ly/2lzBM4k>

Setting limits on digital devices and online interaction can be easier said than done. Tim Elmore, Millennial and Generation Z expert, suggests the following:

1. Set your smartphone up to track the screen time you spend on it each day.
2. After you spend some time on social media, observe how you’re feeling.
3. Set time limits when you’re on a favorite site; stop when your alarm goes off.
4. Discuss the data on this reality: People who spend under two hours a day on social media are less vulnerable to anxiety; those who spend more than two hours daily become significantly more vulnerable.

Talking to your kids, tweens and teens is an important first step, but it is often overlooked. Your children may want to protect their own self interest--their phones--at all costs, but they may also be reasonable about limits after a discussion of the risks and your concerns.

Consider the following suggestions for family rules about screen use:

- No texting during meals.
- No TV during meals.
- No TV or devices until homework and chores are completed.
- No TVs in bedrooms.
- Computer use should be done in a public room in the house.
- Set and observe curfews for screen use.
- Set daily limits for phone use. Most phones will track time and content use.

<https://wb.md/2lXEgJT>