



On Call

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**February
2019**

Washington State
School Directors'
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Olympia, WA 98516

- **Do you have a policy for that? Crowdfunding for classroom activities and programs**

School fundraising has expanded from car washes and door-to-door magazine sales to the digital world. Online crowdfunding tools like GoFundMe.com have great potential to benefit education, but they need to be used carefully to ensure that funds are being tracked. Here are tips for a school board policy.

- **Evaluating your communications: Understanding and assessing your effectiveness**

Assessment is essential in education, and it should be built into your communications program as well. Read about different metrics and why you need them to ensure maximum effectiveness.

- **Internet censorship: How and why to moderate content and manage trolls**

Social media provides expansive forums for public engagement. With greater communication freedom comes a greater need for oversight. Be sure to set clear social media guidelines and moderate your forums to maintain civil discourse.

- **Protect your credibility through careful proofreading**

Mistakes happen — we're human after all — but they can damage credibility if they go unchecked. Here is a reminder about why careful proofreading matters and some suggested resources to help keep your writing clean.

- **When something changes, prepare your office staff to serve customers efficiently, consistently**

Big changes in your district often cause concern and resistance from the affected parents or staff. Minimize the resistance and build your network for feedback by keeping your front-line staff informed. They should be at the top of the information loop so they can respond when questions arise.

- **Insights for Parents: Monitor online activity**

Kids need supervision online, but it's hard for parents to know what they are doing virtually. Here are tips to help parents ensure that their children are safe in the digital world.



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Do you have a policy for that? Crowdfunding for classroom activities and programs

When school budgets are tight, administrators and teachers often look for creative solutions to add more educational value for students. Magazine subscription fundraisers, car washes and bake sales are old-school money-makers. Online crowdsourcing is gaining popularity among teachers and administrators for activities, programs and even school supplies, but policies in many districts have not caught up.

Crowdfunding for classrooms

Crowdfunding is a fundraising practice for specific projects or goals that is typically conducted online seeking small sums of money from a wide pool of donors. Popular crowdfunding platforms include GoFundMe.com, DonorsChoose.com and Kickstarter.com. According to DigitalTrends.com:

“DonorsChoose, a crowdfunding site dedicated to supporting classrooms, reportedly had more than 50,000 campaigns for [the 2016] back-to-school season. Potential crowdfunding donors can look through the sites to make their choice from requests from barely funded schools seeking the most basic supplies to more well-funded districts looking for special project assistance.

According to the AP, educational crowdfunding campaigns on GoFundMe and DonorsChoose raised \$31.2 million in 2010. In 2015 that number grew to almost \$140 million and was on track to go even higher in 2016.”

www.digitaltrends.com/web/teachers-crowdfunding-school-supplies

New problems with crowdfunding

Many school boards are taking action to revise fundraising policies or set new ones that cover these online fundraising trends. The guidelines are intended to ensure that the campaigns align with district values and comply with district rules and business policies.

These policies are also meant to protect staff members from accusations of mismanagement or inappropriate use of funds. And they are intended to safeguard the district’s credibility as responsible financial stewards and protect donors from unscrupulous or fraudulent campaigns.

While these new fundraising tools are expanding schools’ fundraising options, districts are identifying a need to set some guidelines for how and when those requests can be made on behalf of its schools. And some districts are prohibiting school employees from launching crowdfunding campaigns on behalf of schools or districts entirely.

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A legal discussion paper presented at the National School Boards Association Council of School Attorneys law seminar identifies potential legal issues and recommended safeguards for school employees. “The trend of crowdfunding has hit the education community by storm, but schools should approach this new trend with caution and carefully consider whether policies are necessary now to regulate what teachers are doing online in the name of specific schools.” <http://bit.ly/2DTRdwL>

“Crowdfunding is a semi-new platform,” said Belpre (Ohio) City School District Superintendent Tony Dunn. “That can be a great thing but it can also lead to a lot of complications.”

“As teachers, administrators, staff and students have already learned, other new platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media have certainly held their own complications — and school boards who were not ahead of the game in developing a policy to deal with such matters found themselves with few options in handling those complications.”

“It’s protection for the staff members, the board and the district,” said Belpre City Schools Treasurer Lance Erlwein. <http://bit.ly/2QqjVGT>

In Dayton, Ohio, the district banned these platforms altogether. In a story in the Dayton Daily News, “Superintendent Elizabeth Lolli said there are district funding streams available for many items that teachers can tap into. She said with no mechanism to track crowdfunding, DPS doesn’t want to make “an error in judgment” by allowing the process and then not having the manpower to control it.”

“The Ohio Auditor’s office this year encouraged schools to set formal crowdfunding policies. The auditor’s report said the risks of crowdfunding include compromising student confidentiality, diversion of donations for private use, inviting federal or state scrutiny of educational programs and bad publicity for the school district if a crowdfunding campaign is mishandled.” <http://bit.ly/2QqCT0i>

Developing your policy

Districts should decide where they stand on crowdfunding as a school or district practice. A new policy for crowdfunding guidelines does not have to be complex, and it does not necessarily have to ban the fundraising platform entirely, although some districts do. School boards should consider how it could align with existing policies on conflicts of interest, public gifts and public solicitation.

Dayton Public Schools’ drafted a two-sentence policy that was adopted in September: “Crowdfunding campaigns on behalf of the District, or any school within the District by any school employee or official is prohibited. Staff is not permitted to use the name of the District or any of its schools, or any images or text related to the District, in any online fundraising effort or campaign. www.boarddocs.com/oh/dayton/Board.nsf/Public#

A policy for raising funds with these platforms will strengthen your district’s trust and credibility. Jennifer Fink in “Crowdfunding the Classroom,” (District Administration, September 2016) writes: “The ease with which anyone can create a crowdfunding request — for just about anything — is exactly why districts need policies. Otherwise, administrators may need to turn down a crowdfunded kiln because the school doesn’t have an appropriate ventilation system — or send back computers that aren’t compatible with the district’s equipment.

Furthermore, without policies in place, administrators have no control over inappropriate requests, and no established procedures for guaranteeing donor expectations are met. Policies ensure accountability, transparency and coordination.” www.districtadministration.com/article/crowdfunding-classroom

Resources

National School Boards Association:

Creative revenue streaming and public schools: A Legal Discussion Regarding Non-Traditional, New and Creative Revenue Streaming Trends in Public Schools Nationwide
<https://cdn-files.nsba.org/s3fs-public/16-Gilsbach-Creative-Revenue-Streaming-Paper.pdf>

District Administration:

Crowdfunding the classroom: Districts set policy to make the most of a powerful new fundraising tool

www.districtadministration.com/article/crowdfunding-classroom

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant



On Call

Evaluating your communications: Understanding and assessing your effectiveness

Education relies on assessment processes and data. Evaluations are standard practice when it comes to professional development or systems improvement. But far too often, we forget to measure or assess our communications effectiveness. It can be hard to gauge the impact of communications. Our audiences receive information in a myriad of forms and from multiple sources. In many cases, we receive little to no feedback on how we are doing. However, with a little planning, outreach, and tracking, we can gather valuable information to help us improve the effectiveness and impact of our communications.

Setting communications metrics

Clear communication goals and metrics should be part of your district's communication plan. You may even choose to have key communications or engagement metrics included in your district-wide strategic plan. Because of the multi-faceted nature of communications and community engagement campaigns, you will likely need to set a range of metrics to gauge your effectiveness.

Type of metrics you might consider include:

Activity metrics: Activity metrics assess what you are doing. How well are you implementing your work plan? Are your activities aligned to your broader communications strategy and district goals? Examples of activity metrics include: frequency and timeliness of newsletter distribution, hitting targets for hosting community events, or achieving desired response times when responding to inquiries. Setting activity metrics can be valuable as they force you to think through what you want to do, how often, and to what end. Having a plan and system around your communication activity enables you to track your work and make adjustments as needed. However, this metric does not give any feedback about the impact of your communications.

Reach metrics: Reach metrics help you determine who you are currently communicating with. Identifying your current audience can help pinpoint gaps in your outreach and identify potential audience groups you may wish to target. Examples of reach metrics include: social media follow/like rates, newsletter subscription rates, website visits, or community forum attendance rates. As with activity metrics, these numbers on their own do not show you how effective your communications are. But they can help you identify current audiences and areas where you may need to do additional work.

Engagement metrics: Engagement metrics track when and how often your audience engages with you. Examples of engagement metrics could include: number of parent questions received per month, percent of parents attending parent-teacher conferences, or number

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of staff members attending voluntary training events. These metrics can be very valuable in tracking how effectively you are encouraging others to reach out and participate in your district's activities.

Impact metrics: Impact metrics help you track the effectiveness of your communications on shifting attitudes, influencing behaviors, or prompting action. Examples of impact metrics include: success of a communications campaign (a bond measure, an attendance campaign, etc.), change in attitude toward a controversial policy adoption (school closure, new curriculum, etc.), or achieving fundraising or community giving goals. Impact metrics look at what you are trying to achieve and gauge whether and how your communications efforts contributed toward that desired outcome.

For each metric that you select, you will need to establish a tracking mechanism. Some tracking is pretty simple. Other elements take time. But, as with everything in our technology-rich world, there are tools to make it simpler. Tools like Google Analytics can help you quickly and easily track email or newsletter open and click-through rates to see what's being read and what's not. Online survey tools can aggregate and sort responses to make analysis quicker and easier. And as you review the results of your tracking, you will be able to see not only if you met your targets but also what areas you may need to focus on or adjust in order to improve your impact and effectiveness.

Gathering direct feedback

Sometimes the best way to get feedback on how you are doing is to simply ask someone — or more precisely, a bunch of someones. Conducting audience surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews can provide valuable insight into what's working well, what could be improved, and what type of impact your communications are having.

In order to communicate effectively, we need to understand our audiences and what's important to them. Online surveys can be a wonderful tool to get feedback from a large number of people quickly and easily. An annual communications survey (separate ones by audience are generally best) can help assess which tools are effective, how people feel about your communications efforts, and what people would like to see done differently.

However, building in time for personal conversations with stakeholders can be valuable when you have specific areas you want to improve on or concerns you want to address. Conducting a focus group or individual interviews allows for a more in-depth conversation on a specific topic (boosting family engagement or improving the website user experience, for example). As this outreach can be time intensive, here are a few tips for making the most of your focus group or interview.

- **Focus on attitudes.** Explore how people think about a problem. Stakeholders don't need to design your new newsletter format or select a color scheme for your website. But gathering feedback on their experiences, feelings, and challenges can help you improve the quality and impact of the communications you provide.
- **Have people give examples.** Ask participants to share specific instances of when a communication worked particularly well. What was it that worked for them? Why did they find it effective? What was a specific message or strategy that don't work for them or was a turnoff? Why? How could it have been better?
- **Ask about habits and preferences.** Asking participants how they generally consume information can be illuminating. Do they access your website from their phones? How is

that experience? Do they read the school flier or does it go straight in the recycling bin? Do they like getting text notifications or emails? Where do they go when they want to learn more?

Acting on your data

Now that you have solid quantitative and qualitative data about your communications efforts, what are you going to do about it? Asking people for feedback should indicate two things: that you care about what they have to say and that you are open to making changes.

A solid communications plan will include regular opportunities for review and revision. Take the time to look over your analytics, survey data, and other metrics and make a plan for improvement. And of course, make sure to communicate those changes back to the audience you had gathered feedback from. Showing people that you listened and changed based on their concerns builds credibility and trust and increases your chances for effective two-way communication down the line.

Additional resources

Measuring Communications: 4 Simple Metrics Internal Comms Should be Monitoring
www.contactmonkey.com/blog/measure-communications

Measuring the Success of Your Communications Strategy
www.thenonproffitimes.com/management-tips/measuring-the-success-of-your-communications-strategy

Contributed by Crystal Greene, communications consultant



On Call

Internet censorship: How and why to moderate content and manage trolls

Social media content moderation is in the news, and it's not going away any time soon. Large social media sites like Facebook have become the go-to platform where people access their news and talk to their friends and family, and organizations focus targeted advertising. The high-volume of activity makes it easy for social media to turn into the Wild West. On some sites it seems like "anything goes," where trolls abound and feelings get hurt, while other sites are known for being so strict that people in vulnerable communities have complained about being targeted by aggressive and indifferent moderators.

The best situation for your website or platform page is somewhere in the middle, where people can feel free to express their thoughts and opinions under a banner of free speech, and get questions answered in a timely manner, without fear of harassment or abuse. Of course, that's easier said than done.

When should I moderate my community?

The short answer is "always." It doesn't take long for a page to get a bad reputation. The first question you need to answer is whether you want people to be able to post on your page without moderator approval.

If you have a moderator who is willing and able to pay constant attention to posts that need approval, that is great. Having all posts be pre-approved means that you are already limiting the ability of trolls to wreak havoc on your page. Excellent! But if your moderator, or "mod" isn't available all of the time, you may need to allow posting without approval, otherwise a post like, "Is anybody interested in carpooling from the west side to the game tonight?" might not get posted in time to be helpful, making for a frustrating experience for your users.

Choose your path forward wisely based on the availability of your moderators, and how trustworthy you think your community is in regards to following the rules.

Publish your rules and guidelines

It's not fair to ask your site's visitors to self-moderate when you haven't set a standard for behavior. Here are some rules that are a good starting place:

1. No foul language. Swearing will not be tolerated.
2. No pornographic, sexually offensive, sexually explicit, or objectifying material. Content should be safe for work (SFW).
3. No trolling. Don't make posts that are inflammatory just to get people riled up. Substance is the key to not being labeled a troll.

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4. Attack the message, not the messenger. Criticize ideas, not people. No member is allowed to engage in public personal attacks on any other member. Personal attacks are defined as personal, racial, ethnic, and/or gender-based insults, slurs, or derisive comments. Do not shame others for not understanding / misinterpreting something. Be conscious of members with learning difficulties who may not easily understand something you consider obvious. Purposely unhelpful, derogatory, or dehumanizing comments will be deleted and offenders will be muted and repeat offenders banned.
5. All complaints need to be communicated privately using private messaging, the “Report this Post” feature on the site and/or email. In the event of this, the offending post will be edited or removed, and the offending party shall receive no more than two (2) private warnings via private message and/or email, and one final administration warning. If the behavior continues, the member will be banned for a week, and upon a repeat incident, banned permanently. [NOTE: As you can see, this requires that the moderator(s) keep track of who the offenders are, and when and how often they offend. Depending on how active your site is, this can be a big job.]
6. Respect the privacy of others. Do not post phone numbers, addresses, pictures, etc., without their permission.
7. NO SPAMMING. No commercial posts, and no flooding with useless content.
8. No livestreaming without the approval of all mods and admins.

The rules should be tailored to your community’s needs, as well as the legal requirements you and your staff are responsible for following.

Be responsive and consistent

Having a stable and active moderator or team of moderators is key to having a successful and engaged community. The community manager(s) need to be accessible, and they need to be consistent about removing trolls. Setting up a forum or page is not a “set it and forget it” situation. It requires constant and enthusiastic management. Keep an eye on some of the early users and see how engaged they are — and see if they’re interested in becoming moderators. A team of mods is always going to be more successful than a single person, and it’s a great way for people to volunteer their time from home.

Encourage staff to participate

“Staff participation is widely believed to improve the quality of discussion, and if their comments are both entertaining and intelligent, then it’s more than likely to get readers coming back for more.” www.canva.com/learn/how-to-moderate-social-media

This is a big one. Your community is not going to show up on its own without encouragement. And encouragement means finding people they know who are using it. Do you have a staff member that’s willing to do a live “ask me anything” video? Can you have staff members regularly post useful information on the page so people know it’s a place they can access that information quickly?

Take some time to brainstorm how you can get more involvement by the staff, which will lead to more involvement with the community. An active social media page can be a big asset to your organization, both as a way to distribute current information, and a way to grow community involvement.



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Protect your credibility through careful proofreading

As I was preparing to write this essay, my mind flashed back to a previous relationship ... with a bank.

We'd been connected since I was teenager. I remained a loyal customer even as what began as a savings and loan was swallowed by one banking institution after another. Questionable management decisions and declining customer service eventually sent me elsewhere.

There also were the little things, such as this sign on the bank's door one day: "For your convenience, we will be closed on Labor Day."

What the bank meant was, "For your convenience, you should know ahead of time that we will be closed on Labor Day." But that is not what the bank's shorthand message said.

Such poorly worded sentences are too common. Here is one from my days as a newspaper editor: "Adults can eat all the strawberries they want for \$4 and children ages 2 through 8 for \$2." I caught that one before we told readers that adults could eat children for \$2.

We all make errors in our writing. We have brain freezes. We're tired. We're rushing. We're distracted. We hit the wrong keys. Or, sometimes, we don't know better.

Thus, it is essential that we productively proofread our work before we send it on its way. Our personal credibility, and that of the school district, is at stake.

This is why I started with the bank anecdote. The bank's inept communication was one more little irritation that helped push me more over the top. The same thing can happen inadvertently in our dealings with staff or the public.

If we misuse words — lay/lie, eager/anxious, who/whom and many others — we create errors within our writing, undercutting our validity and reliability.

Our mistakes — unclear sentences, misspellings, improper punctuation, wrong words, and the like — also can have significant legal and ethical ramifications. Many a court case has turned on that lack of clarity.

Yet the more we pore over our work, the less likely we are to spot our glitches. I came across a Wired magazine story from 2014 that explains this conundrum. The article begins: "You have finally finished writing your article. ... You comb for errors, and by the time you publish you are absolutely certain that not a single typo survived. But, the first thing your readers notice isn't your carefully crafted message." www.wired.com/2014/08/wuwt-typos

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Rather, “it’s the misspelled word in the fourth sentence.”

The article quotes psychologist Tom Stafford from the University of Sheffield. He actually studies typos, and he says our brain focuses on the higher-level meaning we’re trying to impart. The brain knows what we intended to say, so we fall into autopilot as we’re proofreading.

“The reason we don’t see our own typos is because what we see on the screen is competing with the version that exists in our heads,” says the article by Nick Stockton.

I think that is similar to why we mangle sentences, as in the bank and strawberry examples. We know what we mean! It’s obvious!

Not really.

Misplaced modifiers are a prime culprit. Consider this example I use when teaching grammar: “Originally from Arizona, the cold Oregon weather bothered the cross-country runner.”

As written, the sentence says the cold Oregon weather is from Arizona. The intended meaning is that the runner is from Arizona.

This might not seem like a big deal, because the meaning becomes clear on the second or third reading of the sentence. But every time, we force the reader to stop, we create uncertainty — and we risk losing the reader. Someone once said, “Nothing is easier than stopping reading.”

Here are tips from psychologist Stafford, writers and editors about proofreading your work (<http://bit.ly/2Rba4tF>):

- Don’t skimp on proofreading the small, supposedly quick items, such as emails, text messages and social media. They can come back to bite you.
- As you write and afterward, use the spellcheck and grammar check tools in your word-processing program. But don’t depend on them. Spellcheck only tells you whether it’s a correct spelling of a word — such as “wail” or “whale” — not whether it’s the word you want.
- Devote extra attention to double-checking article titles, photo captions, and graphics. Errors often show up there. I’ve found that to be particularly true of textbooks.
- Consider downloading and using a well-regarded grammar-checking application. Some are free. Learn to use one before you need it.
- Read your work aloud, slowly and audibly, so you are forced to focus on each word and punctuation mark. If you make a change during proofreading, read that part aloud again.

I recently lost my voice due to a cold, which made my self-editing extremely difficult during that time.

- Recognize what works for you. Some experts recommend reading your work aloud from bottom to top, from the final word to the first word. I lack the patience to do that.
- Change how you’re reading the piece. Print it out. Or change the font and appearance on

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the screen. Some applications have a “focus” feature, which can be useful.

- Take a break in a manner that shifts your brain from writing. A five-minute walk is good; letting the piece sit overnight is even better.
- Pay particular attention to your beginning and ending.

“The first paragraph and the last paragraph are where a lot of mistakes hide. It’s easy to read right over them after a while because you’ve practically memorized them,” says Amy Morgan, a former copy editor. <https://n.pr/2RAI7KZ>

By the way, Morgan says her grammar pet peeve is “misplaced modifiers like ‘Covered in hot cheese, we ate the pizza.’”

- Make lists of your unhelpful tendencies, such as words and phrases you overuse, words whose correct usage gives you trouble, and names and words that often are misspelled. Do the same for words and terms that, for whatever reason, you want to avoid. Use the search function to check for them.
- Keep a trustworthy dictionary, such as Merriam-Webster, and other reference books handy, including Strunk and White’s classic, “The Elements of Style.”
- I prefer using printed books, but I also keep several dictionary apps on my phone.
- Partner with a colleague to proofread one another’s work. Give that person adequate time and give equal devotion to proofreading that person’s writing.
- Bookmark or keep a list of trustworthy grammar, punctuation, word usage, and self-editing websites (<http://bit.ly/2C9JztY>) that you can use on deadline. Get to know them when you’re not in a rush. I’m a fan of Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL), <https://owl.purdue.edu>.

And if you fall short in your proofreading, give yourself some grace, briefly evaluate what went wrong, and do better next time.

As for me, I hope I’ve caught all my typos in this essay. I keep finding one more, right after I hit Send. Time to take a break.

Contributed by Dick Hughes, communications consultant and writing coach. Contact him at TheHughesisms@Gmail.com.



On Call

When something changes, prepare your office staff to serve customers efficiently, consistently

Schools are exciting places because they are always changing. Innovation is fun and interesting for the people leading the innovation. But for staff, student and parents who are on the receiving end, new ways of doing things can be confusing, frustrating and downright threatening.

Most schools and school districts do a good job of external communications about innovations. They let people know what new things are on the horizon and why. But often, they overlook a key audience with a very special need for information: the people who will be on the frontlines answering parent questions and hearing their feedback.

In a school, teachers are busy teaching and administrators are busy keeping things running most of the time. So, they are generally not the people answering the questions that arise when something changes. Sure, parents may eventually work their way to the teachers because they have some access to them before and after school. And likewise, administrators might be available early and late in the day. But most often, both ends of the day are very busy with the logistics of getting kids to class in the morning and back home in the afternoon.

So, who is answering the questions? Mostly office staff. In addition to all of the other things they are expected to do, they are also expected to answer the phone and talk to people in person. Front office staff are very skilled at talking to people. They know how to be polite and supportive, but that only goes so far. Front office staff need two things when big changes are afoot in the school.

Make sure office staff are in the loop

First, they need the talking points. What, specifically, should they say about the recent change? This can be as simple as a list of bullet points or as detailed as a handout to share.

The talking points should cover what has changed, why it has changed and what it means for various groups of parents (depending on the age of their children, schedule or what part of the campus they use, etc.). They also need a feedback mechanism for the parents who are not happy or have questions.

As an example, consider how parents feel when they discover a new gate blocking a regularly used pathway to the school grounds. Ideally, the school has included information about the change in parent newsletters, social media and emails. Signs on the new gate would be a good idea, too. But the reality is that not everyone reads what you send them and people will want to know more and probably a few will complain.

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The front office staff will be taking the calls and walk-in questions from parents. So they need to know the basics. Unless school staff share the real reason for the change, people will make up their own stories based on their own fears or past experience.

Say for instance, the gate is being installed because neighbors have complained for years about students cutting through their yards, leaving trash and running in front of cars. The talking points for office staff should be specific about the causes of the closure so they can provide consistent messages to patrons. Without specific reasons, office staff will be inconsistent, leading to parents come to their own conclusions about what must be going on.

This is where fears take over. Parents may suspect there are safety issues the school is not telling them about or that neighbors are intolerant or biased. Those fears can quickly become the narrative about the new gate and cause all kinds of community relations problems that will need to be resolved.

In addition to the reason for the change, office staff need specific instructions for parents — this is what it means for you if you live in the neighborhood served by the old pathway. And this is specifically what we need you to do if you used to drop your students off near the entryway that is now closed. We need you to drop them off at this spot from now on.

Ask for feedback as you develop your messages

The key to developing the talking points is to anticipate the key questions from parents. And the best way to determine what the FAQ will be is to ask a few parents what they would need to know if they were in the group affected by the change.

In terms of feedback channels, staff need to know where to channel feedback from customers. Many people will simply be curious. And a few will be happy with the change. But there will always be a few people who have concerns about anything new at school. Frontline staff will need to be prepared to pass along feedback and tell the customer how and when that will occur. They also need to be prepared to take contact information if the person giving the feedback expects a response.

Staff up, if necessary

For many changes, office staff will just need talking points and instructions for gathering feedback, but occasionally, they are going to need more bodies to help deal with customers. Administrators should think about the timing and the impact of the change when considering whether to shift staff to help in the office. Is the change major (new bell schedule) or relatively minor (a new visitor parking slot)? Is the timing immediate or next year?

Having the right number of people to answer questions and field concerns will help avoid much work in the future. For every person who is helped the first time, you reduce staff time in the future and you keep the customer happier. Schools are busy enough even when everyone has the information they need when they need it. The last thing a school needs are parents going away uninformed, confused and frustrated.

I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Apps to Help Supervise Online Activity



**February
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.

It isn't easy for parents to know exactly what their kids are doing when they are apart. Even when kids know the rules, they sometimes break them anyway when they are away from the watchful eyes of parents. That's what kids and teens do to assert their independence. That's normal, but rules exist for a reason — usually to ensure that they stay safe.

Rules for online safety are no different. There are a number of ways kids can engage in risky behavior online as well. Fortunately, there are digital tools to help parents help their children when they are online.

First, communicate with your kids

The best first steps involve communication. In a TEDxSacramento talk called, "Wake up!: Helping our youth navigate the digital world," social media safety expert Thomas Dodson said, "Only about 15 percent of young people are having conversations with their parents about their activities online." He said that kids previously had a small audience as they navigated the challenges of youth, and the internet has changed that for today's children. "Growing up is happening online in front of the entire world." www.beabovethefray.org/

Discussing what our children do and see online should happen on a regular basis, and expectations should be clear before kids get the keys to the digital world.

Consider a contract

Many parents outline the rules for digital devices and cell phone use with their children before they hand them their own device. And others go farther by asking them to sign a contract with specific consequences for violating the rules. There are dozens of sample contracts online. Find a template to customize with a simple web search. An example from cyberbullying.org is here: <http://bit.ly/2Twja0C>. The goal is to enforce safe digital activity for both the child with the phone and any possible recipients of communication via the cellphone.

Trust but verify

Parents who have concerns about their children's internet activity can fight fire with fire, so to speak. There are many digital tools and apps to help parents watch their kids virtually. There are monitoring apps that students know about and spying apps that record activity without the awareness of the user.

Parents will have to choose the app based on their concerns and taking into account any qualms about violating their children's privacy.

(Over)

Recommended parental control apps

There are a variety of apps to help parents oversee online activity. The most useful ones can help limit time on the device, track usage and location and block apps or games. Some may require a subscription fee. Before subscribing, check our digital device. Many now have controls built in. For example, Google's Family Link and Amazon's parental controls have gotten good reviews, and Apple offers some parental controls.

The following are some of the apps recommended by Digital Trends. <http://bit.ly/2saZyDD>

Family Time: For Android and IOS. Blocks apps, tracks activity, sets time limits and tracks location.

Qustodio: Android, IOS, Kindle, Nook. Blocks apps, tracks activity, sets time limits.

ESET: Android. Blocks apps, sets time limits, basic activity tracking. More features are available for a fee.

Web Watcher: Android and IOS. Blocks apps, tracks activity, tracks location without the user's knowledge. This is essentially spyware.

Apps parents should know about

Keeping up with the trendy teen apps is difficult. Conduct a regular internet search for the latest list to stay informed. Here are 10 apps teens are using that parents should know about from an ABC news affiliate. <https://abc13.co/2SFBQea>

Calculator: This app looks like a calculator but functions like a secret photo vault.

Omegle: A free online chat website that promotes chatting anonymously to strangers.

Yellow: This app is designed to allow teens to flirt with each other in a Tinder-like atmosphere.

Whisper: An anonymous app where the creators promote sharing secrets and meeting new people.

Ask.fm: Ask an anonymous question and get an answer. This app has been linked to the most severe forms of cyberbullying.

Hot or Not: Strangers rate your profile. The goal is to lead to a hookup.

Burn Book: People post anonymous rumors about others through audio messages, texts, and photos.

Wishbone: An app that allows users to compare kids against each other and rate them on a scale.

Kik: A messaging app. Kik has built apps and web content that can be filtered on your home computer.

Instagram: Many kids are now creating fake accounts to hide content from their parents. Kids also like to text using Instagram because messages are deleted once the user leaves the conversation.