

January 2021

ONcall

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inside

Parents are partners in education

Smart schools understand that parents are important partners for thriving classrooms. When parents and teachers work together, the impact on student learning is impressive. They support teachers, participate in schools as volunteers, help their children with schoolwork at home and carry messages of support to their networks in the community. In turn, schools should nurture this relationship. Here are tips for building successful school-family relationships.

Policy refresher for school boards

Setting school board policy is a primary function of all school boards. New board members should understand what policy is and why policies are needed. All districts should review policy on a defined schedule and be ready to draft new policy as issues and needs arise.

Speak carefully to avoid miscommunication

A careless remark or thoughtless comment can create a firestorm of reaction. Countless politicians and public figures have dealt with disruption and mistrust because they said something they didn't mean to say. These tips can help you avoid saying things you will regret by choosing words carefully for your audience.

Website accessibility benefits everyone

Is your website accessible to all visitors? Are you aware of all of the features it should include to ensure that visitors who need specific accommodations can access the content? Read the key considerations to ensure that your site has features to accommodate the needs of all of your viewers.

Here's to You! Tips for your good health

This issue has information about Covid-19 vaccine recommendations, beverage benefits that include new research on drinking tea to prevent dementia, and tips to combat pandemic fatigue.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Focus on skill building

Employers want to hire people who can be flexible, adaptable and capable of learning new skills. If there is a bright side to our current circumstances, it is the opportunity to build skills that will help us in the future. Read this list to learn more about the skills employers want their employees to have.

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Most teachers and principals recognize the importance of partnerships in building a thriving classroom. Partnerships with local businesses can provide resources and expertise that enrich student experiences. Partnerships with area colleges can offer opportunities for advanced learning.

But don't overlook the most important partnership of all — the one with parents.

When parents and teachers work together, the impact on students is phenomenal. Test scores go up. Attendance improves. Discipline problems go down. Graduation rates improve.

The research is really clear that when parents get involved in their child's education — whether through volunteering or participating on school committees or helping with homework — children do better in school. Parent involvement sends a powerful message to children that their parents care about their education and are willing to invest their personal time in making it better.

Savvy teachers make it a priority to develop opportunities for parents to get involved both in their child's individual learning and in their classrooms. They quickly discover that students aren't the only ones who benefit. Parents who are heavily involved in their schools tend to like and respect the teachers. They are more likely to support teachers with their time, energy and resources.

Teachers who encourage parent involvement typically find that the parents can provide valuable information about their children, from medical and social history to personality traits and what motivates them. This insight can be used to better understand students and shape curriculum and assignments that are more meaningful.

There are some shared beliefs that contribute to building a successful collaborative relationship with parents, according to research outlined by the Institute for Student Achievement. A key one is that families are equal partners in helping their children be successful in school. By sharing information and opinions, teachers and parents can jointly make decisions in the best interest of the student.

It's also important to recognize that both in-school and out-of-school times and experiences influence a student's school performance. Decisions made at school affect home, and vice versa.

The Institute for Student Achievement outlines other beliefs that are associated with positive family-school relationships:

1. **Family-school relationships should be focused on student progress and success.** The

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reason for educators and families to coordinate and collaborate is to enhance learning opportunities, educational progress and school success for students. So family-school interactions should focus on what each partner can do to improve the development and learning of children and youth.

2. **Sharing information about child behavior across settings is valued.** Children don't necessarily behave the same in school and at home. Educators believe that sharing information with each other can be useful for assessment and intervention planning.
3. **Collaboration has a positive impact on student learning.** By working together, teachers and parents can accomplish more than either home or school can accomplish alone. They can reinforce equality (the willingness to listen to, respect, and learn from one another) and parity (the blending of knowledge, skills, and ideas to enhance positive outcomes for children).
4. **Families should be active partners in decision making.** Schools should avoid such practices as making decisions in separate meetings prior to meeting with parents. By recognizing parents' expertise, teachers seek input from them on a regular basis and include them when addressing concerns about student learning.
5. **Problems are solved mutually without blaming each other.** When students are experiencing school difficulties, two-way communication between schools and parents is necessary. They realize that they see the children's behavior in their respective settings and withhold judgment until both sides have had an opportunity to provide input. Blame is not attributed to only the family or only the school.
6. **Problem solving is based on a positive, strength-based orientation.** Families and school personnel operate from a non-deficit model, and they focus on the strengths of individuals (educators, parents, students). School personnel view parents as resources for addressing educational concerns. Collaborative problem-solving efforts help to foster optimism about what school personnel and families can accomplish by working together.
7. **Family-school relationships are cultivated and are sustained over time.** Family-school relationships are an ongoing process. Families and educators work together within and across school years to address mutual concerns and provide mutual support for enhancing the learning progress of children and adolescents. Thus, educators realize that working as partners with parents this year will strengthen the partnership in subsequent years.

While schools do well to cultivate multiple partners in education, the one with parents should always top the list. Parents and schools working together on behalf of students are a powerful combination.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant

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Policy refresher for school boards

Whether you are a new or experienced board member, everyone needs a refresher on board policy. Why? The board's primary function is to set policy that administrators put into action. Successful board members understand the importance of developing policy to guide the district, and they involve the community in the policy-making process.

What is policy?

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) defines policy as “statements that set forth the purpose and prescribe in general terms the organization and program of a school system. They create a framework within which the superintendent and his/her staff can discharge their assigned duties with positive direction.”

Policy is the what, the why and the how — it tells what a board wants to happen and sometimes includes why it should happen and how it should be enforced.

Why is policy needed?

In addition to the legal requirements for setting policy, school board policy also communicates the board's goals and philosophy to the public. It establishes a legal record and legal basis for board actions and saves time and effort. It ensures consistency in enforcement of the rules and administration of discipline. It can be a shield to protect staff and the district against accusations of unfairness or bias.

The NSBA's Center for Public Education published a research brief that listed eight characteristics of effective school boards. The brief states that effective school boards “are policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and classroom instruction.”

Read the full article here: <https://bit.ly/2IeK7Gg>.

When is new policy needed?

A new policy is needed when a school board wants to give direction to the superintendent, when a district philosophy or stance is needed to provide clarity or direction, or when there is a new law and regulation. Board members must stay current on educational trends and federal and state statutes, regulations and court rulings.

A community expectation may also identify a need for a new policy. This year, school boards adopted new policies related to distance learning, the pandemic and race-related issues. After the recent worldwide protests against systemic racism, many school communities voiced their desire for school boards to create policies on Black Lives Matter, racism and equity, political

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speech and dress codes. Listed below are a few examples of school districts that adopted new policies this year:

- The Seattle Public Schools board adopted a new dress code policy in collaboration with the community to address racial inequities.
<https://bit.ly/39T8yob>
- The Tigard-Tualatin school board in Oregon passed a bias-incident and hate-speech policy after students pressed for a resolution as the Black Lives Matter protests began.
www.ttsdschools.org/Page/9837
- The Sarasota County school board in Florida adopted a policy addressing the requirements to wear face masks during the pandemic.
<https://bit.ly/36AG00y>
- For more examples of school board policies that address equity and diversity, the Puget Sound Education Service District has resources on achieving equity through policy.
<https://bit.ly/3IEFYZQ>

How should you review policies?

School boards review existing policy as needed or on a regular schedule. When was the last time your board reviewed its policies? Do you have a review process in place? Establishing a review cycle ensures your policies are relevant, legally compliant, reflect district practice and produce the intended results. School boards should be aware of state standards for any required review cycles. There also may be certain policies that must be reviewed more regularly to comply with current law. When adopting a new policy or reviewing an existing policy, ask these questions:

- Is it legal?
- Does it reflect current practice? Make sure the policy and the actual practice match. If it does not match, you may need to change your practice or revise your policy.
- Is it working? What needs changed?
- Do we need it?

Contact your state's school board association for policy guidance to ensure your policies meet legal requirements.

Contributed by Erin Good, communications consultant

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Speak carefully to avoid miscommunication

One of my mother's favorite sayings was, "Keep your words soft and sweet; you never know which ones you'll have to eat."

I often thought of that phrase when I advised school board members and administrators, "If you don't want to see what you say in print, don't say it. Be doubly careful not to include those remarks in a memo or email them to anyone." Before you say something, imagine the headline that might accompany the media coverage of your comments or the engagement it might generate on social media.

Remarks made and inadvertently broadcast have embarrassed elected officials and candidates on hundreds of occasions, and the internet allows them to be found easily and replayed repeatedly. A quick search on YouTube yields a long list of examples where a political figure, celebrity or someone who is very ordinary finds their remarks have gone viral — often with devastating personal, professional or organizational consequences. These are "hot mic" moments and offhand comments made without forethought.

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The following examples are among the most notorious:

In 2013, officials at Beth Israel Medical Center, New York City, learned that lesson in headlines nationally and internationally when heiress Huguette Clark died at age 104 after spending 20 years in the hospital's care. The officials' emails discussing and commenting on Clark's residency and potential contributions to the hospital were subpoenaed by unhappy relatives and published in news reports and broadcasts around the world.

There are, of course, countless cases of forgetting the microphone was hot when speaking "confidentially." Remember President George W. Bush's comment, caught on a live mic, about a reporter who was a "major league (bleep)"?

Presidential candidate Mitt Romney assumed he had a friendly audience at a campaign fundraiser when he made his now-infamous remarks about the "47 percent of the population" who will vote for Obama because they pay no taxes and rely on government entitlements. His comments were filmed by a food server and shared with Mother Jones magazine (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/03/the-lesson-of-mitt-romneys-47-percent-video-be-nice-to-the-wait-staff/>).

Vice President Biden has been known to put his foot in his mouth throughout his term. There are well over 100,000 Internet search results for Joe Biden verbal gaffes. This was during his vice presidential term. The list is longer now.

Paula Deen battled fallout from racist comments she admitted to in a deposition. Her public image has been tarnished, and she has lost many of her endorsement deals.

And don't forget Hillary Clinton's fundraising speech at a campaign event in 2016 when she described Trump voters as a "basket of deplorables." The phrase was repeatedly used against her throughout the campaign.

We've all said things verbally or in print that we didn't mean to say. Generally, these kinds of miscommunications are caused by unclear communication — by failing to determine who really needs to know, what they need to know and how best to tell them, or by failing to accurately gauge your audience's understanding of an issue. And we often don't give enough thought to how our words will sound to the listener.

Here are seven ways to help make sure the words you use convey the messages you want your audiences to hear and understand.

1. Check your policies and/or administrative rules to be sure they include guidelines for determining appropriate district/school spokespeople for media inquiries and the use of social media, especially email and Facebook pages or blogs the district or schools may have.
2. Remind all staff about these policies. Be sure they understand that anything they say or post using district equipment in their role as a district employee or using their district ID becomes a public record.
3. Actively listen to what you are being asked. Take time before you respond to find out exactly what the person wants to know.
4. If you are giving a speech, presenting a controversial topic in a public meeting or being interviewed, take time to anticipate the kinds of questions you'll be asked. Develop talking points to help you respond appropriately.
5. Share those talking points with staff in the district who may get similar questions so that your responses are consistent.
6. Keep your talking points and responses brief and relevant. If your response is simply and plainly stated, it will be more understandable and more credible.
7. Follow-up to find out if you were heard accurately, reported accurately and/or got the response you wanted.

Contributed by Jeanne Magmer, communications consultant

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Web accessibility benefits everyone

Is your website accessible to all visitors? Are you aware of all of the features it should include to ensure that visitors who need specific accommodations can access the content? There are standards to help you understand accessibility requirements and features and build them into your site.

Web accessibility standards benefit everyone because content is easier to perceive. Accessibility makes content responsive across devices and accessible when situational limitations arise. Web content should be accessible, perceivable and navigable to all people, regardless of their abilities, demographics or locale.

Content and software need to work together for a website to adhere to accessibility standards. This includes browsers, text, multimedia content and every component used for producing, managing and accessing websites.

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act doesn't specify website compliance requirements, the consistent interpretation is that websites are included in Title III of ADA because they are "places of public accommodations" (www.ada.gov/ada_title_III.htm). The Web Accessibility Initiative, as part of the World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3.org), created internationally recognized standards for web accessibility. This is a summary of the most essential accessibility practices.

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Key considerations

Web users may have a variety of challenges when it comes to sight, hearing, movement and cognition. Think about these considerations when you're designing a website and producing digital content.

Sight: Text and background colors must have high color contrast for legibility. The same goes for all graphics on the site. All visual elements, including charts, icons, buttons and images, must be accompanied with alternative text, and data visualization must include text descriptions to enable audio descriptions. Animated and flashing web elements are not accessible because they can cause seizures or physical reactions.

Hearing: Closed-captioning or transcriptions must be included for all videos and sounds. Videos and sounds also need to be accompanied with brief descriptions. Sign language is also an acceptable method of making audio accessible.

Movement: All aspects of the website need keyboard functionality, meaning a mouse is not required for navigation. Additionally, all tools must provide keyboard support.

Cognition: Time limitations should be removed or extended for people who may need more

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time to process and engage with content. Likewise, all elements and navigation should maintain continuity throughout the site.

Aspects that are often overlooked

Content or copywriting should be composed of short, concise sentences that avoid additional characters, abbreviations, acronyms or jargon.

Text headings need to be labeled in order of appearance, which is often referred to as page hierarchy. This helps reader programs maintain accuracy, and it makes the website easier to navigate. In fact, all page elements should be used properly. Web content management and design platforms usually have an accessibility guide available that explains how to use their programs in the context of accessibility.

Downloadable files should be created as accessible before they're added to the site. This includes flyers, PDFs, Word documents, Excel files, PowerPoint and slide presentations. Newsletters that are embedded on the site also need to be made with accessibility standards. Crafting embedded content with accessibility in mind will save time and resources.

Test content before publishing

Test your work before you publish content. Accessibility website Webaim.org offers resources to test content scaling, find screen readers, and check color contrast. For help with technical implementation, review the accessibility checklist: <https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist>.

Practicing web accessibility is more than staying in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It's a pragmatic way to increase engagement with your audiences that gives broader access to your communications and values. Building a website and its digital content with accessibility standards at the helm is a tangible way your organization, agency or business can practice inclusivity. A website that is easy to use must be easy to use for everyone.

Additional resources

Web Accessibility Initiative

www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/

Portland State University Digital Accessibility Training

www.pdx.edu/accessibility/training#basics-series

Web Accessibility Initiative Alt Decision Tree

www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/

WebAim Contrast Checker

<https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>

FCC Closed Captioning

www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/closed-captioning-television

National Center on Disability and Journalism Disability and Language Style Guide

<https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Here's to You!

Tips for your good health provided by your district

January 2021

See ya, 2020! Hello, 2021!



It's time to look forward to a new year, and there is reason for optimism. Last year was difficult — to put it mildly. Political strife, social conflict, weather events, wildfires and, of course, the global pandemic caused stress, grief and

instability. We can only hope the new year will be better, and we have reason to believe it will be. There are promising signs that things are looking up, including a covid vaccine, scheduled for wide distribution starting next year.

This hope and optimism can help guide us. Optimism, the belief that empowers us to cope with challenges, can have a positive impact on our outlook and positivity. Research shows that while positive thinking may not determine the outcome by itself, it can motivate us to take action to work toward our goals and the outcome we envision.

So, for 2021, we can think good thoughts and do our part to engage in the scientifically based health recommendations that will contribute to ending the pandemic.

Happy New Year!

Get a vaccine. Experts say it's safe, and it will help you.

A plan to end our global nightmare depends on a vaccine for Covid-19. At least two versions of this vaccine are in the production stages with plans for the initial round of distribution.

A vaccine is only as good as the ability to disperse it among the populace. The two current vaccine contenders, produced by Moderna and Pfizer, have high rates of efficacy — 94.5% and 90%, respectively. At those rates of effectiveness, an estimated 65-70% of the population would need the inoculation in order to achieve herd immunity, according to Dr. Brian Garibalid, a medical director at Johns Hopkins Biocontainment Unit.

There is concern that a significant number of Americans will refuse the vaccine over safety concerns. Messaging is a key factor in shaping public opinion about the safety of this vaccine.

Here are the key points in favor of vaccinating.

- It will protect you from serious illness from this

contagious and deadly infectious disease as infection and mortality rates rise. It will not give you Covid-19.

- It will help protect the people around you.
- It should provide lengthy immunity protection; however, the scope of the immunity is still under review.
- The vaccine has passed rigorous testing to ensure its safety.
- It will allow us to return to pre-pandemic normal life sooner.

<https://bit.ly/3qvdoxu>

Here's to You! is published for school district staff members in the interest of your good health. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Here's to You! is written and published by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Graphics from *The Noun Project*, www.thenounproject.com.

Can drinking tea prevent dementia?



The right beverages can have tremendous health effects.

Coffee

A growing body of research has shown that coffee drinkers may be less likely to have type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, dementia, certain cancers, heart disease and strokes.

<https://wb.md/33Koll7>

Tea

Now tea has joined the list of beverages with important health benefits. Second only to water in worldwide consumption, tea of any non-herbal variety can have significant health effects to regular drinkers.

Research in the *Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging* has found this now includes a lower risk of dementia, especially in those who have a predisposition to the disease.



“Researchers followed 957 older adults, average age 65. Of these, 69% drank tea on a frequent basis. After a five-year period, the researchers found that the tea drinkers had a 50% lower risk of dementia. This is consistent with earlier findings that showed tea consumers scored higher on various cognitive tests.”

Researchers in the study found the type of tea was not as important as the amount for best health effects. Black, green and oolong tea were equally beneficial.

<https://bit.ly/3IjISRL>



Sad? Worried? Are you suffering from pandemic fatigue?

Pandemic fatigue is an onset of intense day-after-day emotions that are making you tired.

It isn't surprising to experience greater fear, anxiety, loneliness, hopelessness, frustration and irritability. Our lives have been disrupted, based on a real threat, since March 2019.

People are too isolated, juggling a new work environment, or a lack of work, and trying to find ways to continue school for their children. It's a lot, and it's disruptive to our sleep, focus and motivation.

These tips from UCLA Health may be the helpful reminders we need to counter these negative feelings about circumstances we can't control:

1. Take care of your body. Remember the basics: sleep, eat well, exercise. It helps.
2. Limit your news intake. Too much bad news can make things worse.
3. Lower your stress. This is always good advice, especially now.
4. Connect with others by phone, email and virtual tools. Social contact is crucial, but it doesn't have to be in-person.
5. Accept your feelings. We feel what we feel. Acknowledging your feelings helps you refocus.
6. Create new traditions. When normal life changes, we can create a new normal. Find a hobby or a regular feel-good activity to look forward to.

<https://bit.ly/36LuKyB>



Focus on Skill Building



**January
2021**

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.

The pandemic has profoundly affected daily life, education and work in a very short period of time, and we have been adjusting to these changes since last spring. We are all doing the best we can to maintain our normal routines or adapt to a new environment by learning as we go.

Our children have watched many of their parents adapt to remote work, and most of them have had to learn and practice remote learning skills for some or all of the school year. It hasn't been easy or perfect, but the bright side may be that they now have experience with rapid change and skills to pivot in a changing environment.

Building skills for the future

According to a report by Dell Technologies Institute For The Future, 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet.

<https://bit.ly/3o7bn8H>

Students will need flexibility, adaptability and a willingness to learn quickly. They will need to develop the ability to build skills to meet the demands of the work environment for future jobs as well as the skills for the job itself. If the prediction by Dell is true, they need to start now and keep working on it — 2030 isn't that far away.

The pandemic has been a tragic event that has negatively impacted our lives in so many ways, but it may have helped kick-start a new focus on skills to help students learn how to learn.

Key skills now, according to employers

“Hard skills concern an employee's ability to do a specific task, and soft skills are more about the way they do them — how they adapt, collaborate, solve problems, and make decisions.” <https://bit.ly/2HQgQ4l>

Hard skills, or technical skills, are important for specific jobs. You apply for jobs based on your specific skills for the position. More and more, employers are seeking candidates who also have “soft skills.” They are the non-technical skills for how you work, not the skills for a specific position. Don't let the word “soft” fool you. Employers are serious about hiring staff members who have the traits to be an effective team member and problem solver.

Help your child build in-demand skills at home now. At-home activities can help develop the top skills that employers say they want most:

Tech Savviness: More than basic computer and social media skills. Employers want candidates who can adapt to new technologies. This is essential and should be easy for students to develop through computer use for school and play.

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Emotional intelligence: Recognizing and responding to our own emotions and the emotions of others to help navigate complex social interactions.

Decision-making: Identifying and evaluating options and making decisions that will have a positive outcome.

Problem-solving capabilities: Approaching a dilemma from various angles and finding effective solutions.

Leadership: Demonstrating good communication, problem-solving, and project management skills.

Conflict resolution: Having the ability to work through and move past disagreements.

Written communication: Writing clearly, concisely and without errors for any type of business communication.

Verbal communication: Speaking clearly and confidently to relay information to save time and help avoid the misinterpretation of messages.

Creativity: Designing products and solutions and contributing to team projects.

Adaptability: Adapting to change in the workplace and learning new tools. This skill is more important than ever.

Negotiation: Having strong negotiation skills is a must-have in the workplace for teamwork or customer relations.

Willingness to actively help others: Being a team member who can work with and help others succeed as a unit is highly valued in the workplace.

Collaboration: Working with others on the team is a critical attribute in the workplace. When companies are tasked with complex projects, employees' ability to collaborate with others becomes increasingly important.

People management: Demonstrating leadership skills by managing people is among the most important leadership skills that hiring managers look for. This skill has a direct impact on productivity and morale. Individuals who possess strong people-management skills can help lead teams through workplace transitions and periods of uncertainty.

Critical thinking: Viewing a problem from all angles and understanding how to analyze and evaluate the information they have before they make a decision is high-level thinking about complex problems. Critical thinkers understand that problems aren't always black and white.

Time management: Managing time effectively to accomplish more in less time, but strong time-management skills can help you focus and be more successful in the workplace.

<https://online.maryville.edu/blog/2020-skills/>