

February 2021

# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

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### **Celebrate virtual learning**

Learning looks different now, but students are doing great work and making progress. Schools can still share their joys and achievements during this remote learning year. Read how to keep your parents and community informed about the good things happening in your school buildings.

### **Make a plan to review your successes and failures of the COVID crisis**

Nobody welcomes a crisis, but they provide opportunities to learn and improve. Although the pandemic is not over, we can use the lessons from this crisis to help prepare for the next one. Take some time to review what is working and what should not be repeated to help you be ready for future challenges.

### **Meet your communications goals with an E-newsletter**

Electronic newsletters are great ways to build community trust and credibility. They are a low-cost, efficient tool for sharing key information about events, programs and action items, and they can help connect with readers who can be the base of support for initiatives. Read how the Bend-La Pine District shares tips for producing content for their award-winning e-publications.

### **Treating your staff with extra care and kindness**

Stress levels are high because of the pandemic. When staff are living with the strain of prolonged stress, communication is less effective, physical and emotional health is challenged, and their effectiveness is reduced. School and district leaders can help staff manage stress levels, which will benefit the whole school community.

### **Your annual report is a report care for your community**

Annual reports may seem old-school, but they aren't out-of-date. They are a classic tool to help stakeholders understand your progress, achievements and challenges. It will always be important to share information with your community and taxpayers in a consistent, transparent manner. Read tips to help you get started producing this effective annual publication. Links to award-winning annual reports are included.

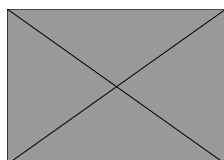
### **INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Being a good digital citizen**

Many people assume that students have good technology skills because they are "digital natives," born after technology was in widespread use. Technology is a learned skill that requires exposure to a variety of technology tools, regular practice and good judgment. These tips can help parents and students understand how to stay safe and smart online.

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## Celebrate virtual learning

No two schools in America look the same this school year — but one thing they all have in common is that learning looks different from ever before, and many schools are partially (or completely) offering learning in a virtual environment.

Students are still learning, and that is something to celebrate. Just as we share our joys and achievements during an in-person learning year, we can share them during this remote learning year. Still, it will require expanding your communications team to include parents, family members and students themselves.

Capturing stories about student learning now requires some creative thinking. It won't be as easy, but they are just as important, if not more so.

Lakeville Area Schools in Minnesota (<https://isd194.org>) found a way to crack open the doors to its classrooms and share everyday learning successes through the “What I Learned This Week” feature.

Stephen Rydberg, Communications Specialist for Lakeville Area Schools, said that the feature was born out of a simple idea: How do we better highlight our kids? Stephen and his colleague, Grace Olson, were already spending time in all of the Lakeville school buildings. They decided to start with a simple question — “What did you learn this week?” — and see what kind of quotes or footage they could capture. He said that the benefits of the feature have included more online engagement and appreciation from teachers.

### How to start the “What I Learned This Week” feature

Your feature could be a video, an audio clip, or a written quote. If you go with a written quote, make sure you capture a photo of the child, too.

Stephen said that he and Grace do not prompt or script the children they interview. They simply ask the question and record the response. Of course, sometimes it takes asking a few times to really get a good response, but the key is to capture the authentic words of the child. Each interview takes only 2-3 minutes.

Before showing up to film, the Lakeville team lets the school principals know they are coming so that the principal can work with teachers to identify a couple of students to interview. They also track which schools and grade levels they are featuring, so they are able to get a good cross-representation of the district.

The completed videos include a Photoshop background that was imported into Adobe Premiere Pro software. Your video production could be more or less fancy. See sample videos: <https://fb.watch/2PC74oBMAL/>.

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This feature could work at your school. Start small — maybe 1-2 times per month — and consider making it a weekly feature that your audience will look forward to seeing.

### **Six more creative ways to celebrate virtual learning on social media**

These ideas were curated and compiled by two #SocialSchool4EDU leaders; Heidi Feller, Chief Inspirational Officer, and Stephanie Sinz, Chief People Officer, who have daily, hands-on experience with school social media.

We've made it easy to share these ideas with your staff. Download all six virtual learning ideas on this handy PDF: <https://socialschool4edu.respond.ontraport.net/celebrate-virtual-learning>.

#### **Elementary School Ideas**

**Idea 1:** Parent or guardian involvement is key at the elementary school level. First, communicate with your families and remind them of your district's social media channels. This could be done through email or through your school newsletter(s). Teachers can also communicate directly with their classrooms.

Next, ask those teachers to make submitting a photo part of some class assignments\*. They can then forward those photos to you, for inclusion on social media, with a brief description of the assignment.

**Idea 2:** This idea will also require some family involvement. Ask guardians to snap photos of everyday virtual learning routines. This could include the Pledge of Allegiance, an at-home P.E. class, or even a brain-break activity. Keep it simple. Small moments captured in a photo really resonate with your community.

#### **Middle School Ideas**

**Idea 3:** Middle school students might be a bit hesitant to showcase their learning, but that doesn't mean you can't gather content from these tech-savvy kids.

It's simple: "Show and Tell." Ask teachers to require their students to submit a photo or video demonstrating what they're learning. Maybe it's reciting a poem in a foreign language or a book recommendation. Band practice? Ask your musicians to send you a 15-second video. Science labs, writing assignments, and fun challenges highlight middle schoolers in all their glory.

#### **High School Ideas**

**Idea 4:** The high school experience is still happening, even if your district has transitioned to virtual learning. How about celebrating seniors and their future plans?

You could also post about student clubs and extracurriculars that are still taking place, even if those activities have been moved to the virtual environment.

**Idea 5:** One way that teachers engage their high school students is through group learning. So ask your students to submit a photo or video of them working "together."

**Idea 6:** Just like with elementary and middle school students, make photos and videos part of the assignment. With high school students, you can get even more creative! For example, ask

your history students to record a commercial about a specific time in history or compose a rap song involving biology concepts.

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*\*Be sure that students and parents know photos from school assignments may be shared on social media.*

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*Contributed by Andrea Gribble. Andrea's passion is helping schools recognize their daily awesomeness and sharing that story with the world. She's built a team that celebrates hundreds of schools across the country! #SocialSchool4EDU provides full social media management, personally coaches social media teams and individuals, and offers a vibrant online community that provides ongoing professional development for school social media champions.*

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## Make a plan to review your successes and failures of the COVID-19 crisis

Benjamin Franklin said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” Those were wise words in his era and still hold true today, especially as schools look to move beyond the disruption and turmoil of the past year.

COVID-19 turned schools upside down. The new vaccines mean there’s light at the end of the tunnel. And with that, comes hope for a return to normalcy.

It’s natural to want to focus on the future and leave the upheaval of the past year behind us. But a lesson from this crisis is that schools must be ready for next time, whatever that might be.

So, where to start?

### Update emergency plans

Schools should update their emergency plans, addressing safety measures for epidemics and ways to continue educating and supporting students if schools are closed. Who would have imagined, before this pandemic, that this step would be needed? Few believed that schools would ever face a crisis that essentially kept the doors closed for nearly a year.

Review how your district and schools handled the COVID-19 crisis. Convene a cross-section of stakeholders to document steps that were taken throughout the pandemic and then evaluate their effectiveness. Include representatives from teachers, parents, principals, food service, custodial, special programs, athletics and others. What worked and what didn’t work? What could you have done differently? How can you be better prepared for a future crisis?

A good tool is a spreadsheet with three columns. In the first column, list the action that was taken. In the second column, evaluate that action, listing both positives and negatives. In the third column, include steps you didn’t take but perhaps should have.

As part of your analysis, assess your facilities and what changes might be needed to make them ready for distance learning. Evaluate your technology and the tools you have to deliver learning in alternate ways. One of the challenges many districts faced is a lack of technology to deliver online learning effectively. Some didn’t have enough Chromebooks or laptops to provide to every student who needed one. Some were situated in remote areas where all families didn’t have access to the internet. Some lacked the staff to provide sufficient technical support to teachers and families struggling to use new learning tools.

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## Compare notes

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Another key step is to compare notes with neighboring districts. Learn from their successes and failures, and be sure to share yours with them. Collaborate with community partners, such as law enforcement, hospitals, colleges and others. Share your experiences, and brainstorm how you might all improve your services and responses by working together in a strategic, collaborative manner.

## Refer to CDC guidance

Preparing for a pandemic is not totally foreign to schools. In 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued guidance on preparing schools for pandemic flu. The guidance identified specific actions to plan for a flu pandemic before it occurs, which can be adapted for COVID-19 contingency planning.

1. Update the existing emergency operations plan based on various scenarios a school may face during a flu pandemic.
2. Address key prevention strategies in an emergency operation plan, such as promoting everyday preventive actions at all times, providing flu prevention supplies in school, identifying space that can be used to separate sick people, and developing a risk assessment and risk management process for the school.
3. Discuss and plan for school dismissals if the flu gets worse, including educating students if schools are temporarily dismissed (web-based instruction, email, social media, local television, radio stations or U.S. mail); identifying strategies to continue essential services; and identifying action steps for reopening school.
4. Communicate about pandemic flu and nonpharmaceutical interventions through updating emergency plans for distributing timely and accurate information across staff, students, suppliers and key community partners. Address potential language, cultural and disability barriers associated with communicating pandemic flu information to staff and students.
5. Get input and support for emergency operations and communications plans by sharing with staff, students and key stakeholders and developing training and educational materials about the plans for staff as well as testing and updating the plans every 12-18 months.

## Amplify the role of schools as community pillars

One of the good things that has come out of the pandemic is a greater appreciation for public schools. Pre-pandemic, the public was aware of the role of schools in teaching academics, but an eye-opener for many is how critical schools are in supporting the mental and physical well-being of students. In addition to teaching students, schools also feed them and provide social, physical, behavioral and mental health services. Another realization is how important schools are to the infrastructure of communities. Schools often are one of the area's largest employers, and while they are educating students, they are allowing parents to go to work without the worry and expense of finding childcare. Schools should understand their role as a foundation of their community and continue to build trust within their communities.

Until the current crisis is over, it is easy for schools to focus on more immediate needs and relegate updating emergency plans to another time. Just don't delay too long. The time to develop a thoughtful plan for dealing with a crisis is not when you're in the middle of one. You never know when the next crisis will come, and you want to be ready.

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## Meet your communications goals with an e-newsletter

External and internal newsletters can be a useful vehicle to provide key information about events, updates and action items — a platform to keep staff and families informed. But used in the right way, newsletters can be much more than simple news updates.

In Bend-La Pine Schools ([www.bend.k12.or.us/district](http://www.bend.k12.or.us/district)), we see newsletters as a way to not only share information, but to also share our core values. Over time, the featured stories, images and headlines create a powerful narrative about the district's culture and mission, while also keeping stakeholders informed.

Our goal for our e-newsletters is to provide relevant information that individuals need to know, while sharing a mix of light-hearted and heartfelt features that showcase who we are and what we value.

Our first staff newsletter began six years ago, and we consistently have an open rate between 70-80 percent for our more than 2,000 staff members. We began a family newsletter in January of 2019 and consistently have an open rate between 50-60 percent for our 18,000 families. We send our newsletters monthly. Our family newsletter is in English and Spanish.

We developed the following suggestions for best practices and examples of stories that we feel are most effective.

### Internal tips:

Keeping staff members informed is key. So, too, is developing a district-wide culture. A regular newsletter can help on both of those fronts.

**Develop sources:** For us, our office managers are our best connection for items for our newsletter, so we keep them informed and make sure to show our appreciation.

**Babies and weddings:** We have a section called Milestone, and in it we share photos of babies, weddings, engagements and other life milestones. Tip: Accept all submissions! A step-grandbaby was born? Share it. A son is headed to the military? Share it. The goal is to celebrate all life milestones that staff want to honor.

**Top-to-bottom planning:** Most people will rightly tell you to put the most important news at the top, which is a guideline we follow. However, we also suggest that newsletter planners place their most popular item at the bottom of every issue. For us, that means running our staff milestones at the bottom of each issue. It is wildly popular, so we ensure most folks will at least scroll through all of our stories and read headlines before they can see the cute babies.

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**Fun factor:** Staff members need to celebrate, and they need to be goofy. Every year, we share Halloween costumes, crazy hair days, lip sync competitions and all of the funny content our schools create.

**Tone matters:** Our tone for staff is friendly, open, caring and fun. We use bad puns for silly items and conversational language throughout. We find authentic ways to serve as cheerleaders for our staff.

### **External tips**

**News quick hits:** Keep news items to the top and make them as short and direct as possible. No platitudes, just straight news.

**Headlines and cutlines matter:** Many readers will only look at the headlines and captions, so make them count. Put key information or takeaways in these spots.

**Pictures with a purpose:** Be thoughtful about who is featured in your photographs and videos. Make sure to represent the diversity of your student and family population. We try to showcase a range of age, gender, race, ethnicity and ability. We also try to highlight students with divergent interests: robotics, art, farming, athletics, volunteerism, activism, etc. Over time, these images and features create a narrative about who we are.

**Our stories showcase our values:** Just as with photos, the type of programs, students and staff members who are highlighted create a narrative. We think about our mission statement and how we can tell stories to showcase those values.

**Make adjustments:** This spring, when the pandemic first hit and our schools closed for in-person learning, our families wanted to hear more from us. We started sending a newsletter every week. After about a month, we heard that our families felt inundated with too much information, so we scaled back to once a month. We can be flexible to meet the needs of our families.

Ultimately, a good newsletter can help keep internal and external audiences informed and can showcase our values.

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*Contributed by Julianne Repman, Director of Communication and Safety, and Alandra Johnson, communications specialist, Bend-La Pine Schools*

*Bend-La Pine Schools received the award for the best electronic newsletter in the country at the National Association of Government Communicators awards show in 2020. The submission was recognized as a family spotlight:*

*In January 2019, we launched our first ever e-newsletter for Bend-La Pine Schools' more than 17,000 families (in English and Spanish). Our district was beginning several new initiatives, including a boundary change and new school start times, and we wanted to ensure as many families as possible received consistent information about these efforts. With 33 schools and two charters, our goal was also to provide a clear brand identity and cohesive messaging around values as well as key initiatives. Every month, our open rate is fairly consistent, within a range of 42 to 55 percent, which is well above the industry average of about 15%. <https://bit.ly/3rTkOv>*

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## Treating staff with extra care and kindness

At the risk of stating the obvious: It was a difficult year. Everyone has dealt with stress this year because of the pandemic. Massive stress from personal tragedy to prolonged lower-level stress from changes to routines, work and daily life have affected almost everyone.

At its most extreme, the mental health impact is akin to PTSD, according to crisis experts. Crisis experts have outlined the elements of the preconditions of trauma that are the result of long-term stress. Understanding these effects can help reduce the impact on individuals.

### Preconditions for trauma

“According to Bessel van der Kolk, a pre-eminent trauma researcher, there are seven elements of traumatic situations that greatly increase the likelihood of people developing post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. These elements are called “preconditions for trauma.” For many people, during this current crisis, some, if not all, of the following elements, or preconditions, may be present:

- Lack of predictability
- Immobility
- Loss of connection
- Numbing out and spacing out
- Loss of sense of time and sequence
- Loss of safety
- Loss of sense of purpose

There are specific things people can do to eliminate these elements or decrease their impact.” Most of these interventions involve changing our routines or setting up new systems. A schedule, more exercise and greater awareness and intention will help. Read more: <https://builtbycommunity.org/reducing-preconditions-of-trauma/>

### Supporting your staff during the crisis

School staff, like many workers, have adapted to rapid changes to working conditions. They are managing new instructional practices with new tools, ongoing concerns about students, responding to worried parents, and massive uncertainty. To state the obvious again: It is stressful. Even worse, it is prolonged stress, which can be physically and emotionally unhealthy.

It is possible to avoid long-term effects — the preconditions of trauma — through awareness and a conscious effort to counter them, similar to strategies for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for students. *For more tips, read [Teacher Interrupted: Leaning into Social-Emotional Learning Amid the Covid-19 Crisis](http://bit.ly/3hD5uyd): <http://bit.ly/3hD5uyd>.*

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School leaders should provide essential support for this difficult time. According to professors at the Child Study Center at Yale School of Medicine, “school leadership matters in supporting educator well-being. In one of our studies (currently under peer-review), district support for educator well-being was associated with lower levels of educator burnout and self-judgment during distance learning. Another study found positive correlations between educators’ feelings of emotional safety and school principals’ effective handling of their own emotions in these times of high stress. And yet another study found that leader support of educator well-being was associated with educators feeling appreciated, connected and valued.” <http://bit.ly/3b5EkyA>

### **Tips for remote staff appreciation**

Connecting virtually with staff requires more effort than face-to-face interaction, but it is a valuable way to check in and reassure staff members that they are appreciated.

#### **Schedule time to speak directly to each staff member via a virtual meeting platform.**

It will be nice for them to see their leader “in person,” and non-verbal communication is an important part of any conversation. Allow teachers an opportunity to share their frustrations and concerns, and then help them brainstorm solutions.

**Support collaboration among staff.** Encourage staff to schedule virtual meetings or set up a shared Google doc for comments, concerns and advice.

**Include shout-outs at staff meetings.** Be sure to celebrate and highlight successes and positive news. It isn’t all bad; make sure to encourage staff to look for the good things as they deal with the challenges of the current reality.

**Allow time for sharing fun things.** Leave time in staff meetings or schedule a weekly check-in to report on personal hobbies, share photos of family and friends, set up workout challenges or throw a virtual party. Connecting with colleagues allows bonding and builds rapport.

### **Coping skills for educators**

School staff can and should take charge of their own well-being. Learning the skills to manage our own responses is the most effective approach to stress reduction. All of the changes from the pandemic are outside of our control; what we can control, however, is how we respond.

This strategy sounds easy, but it is a learned skill. Yale is offering a 10-hour online course called “Managing Emotions During Stressful and Uncertain Times,” available for free on the online learning platform Coursera: <http://bit.ly/3b5EkyA>.

The course was developed for Connecticut educators in collaboration with state leaders, union officials and education organizations, and it has a 99% positive rating from participants. The SEL emphasis has an added benefit of helping educators expand their understanding of how to manage emotions, which could inform their instructional content and delivery as well.

### **Emotions matter**

In the unlikely event that your staff members seem unaffected by stress, school leaders still have an obligation to care about their emotional health. Stress, anxiety and burnout were already on the rise before this crisis. School administrators with well-developed emotional skills are a protective factor for teachers’ emotional health. The Coursera class is for school leaders, too.

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence outlines five reasons educators' emotions are directly related to their instructional effectiveness:

**Emotions matter for attention, memory, and learning.** Positive emotions promote greater engagement. Negative emotions, especially when prolonged, disrupt concentration and interfere with thinking. Chronic stress can result in the release of stress hormones like cortisol, which impacts brain functioning and memory, diminishing our ability to be effective educators and undermining student learning.

**Emotions matter for decision making.** When we're overwhelmed, scared and stressed, good decision-making is impacted. Pleasant emotions can enhance mental flexibility and creativity and adaptability.

**Emotions matter for relationships.** Our feelings are conveyed in our expressions and demeanor, which can allow us to connect with or alienate others. Our students and their parents can read these signals in facial expressions, body language and vocal tone, which could contribute to a negative learning experience. Positive signals are especially important for successful distance learning.

**Emotions matter for health and well-being.** Our emotions are tied to physical and mental health. Negative emotions can result in higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, which can cause weight gain and depression. Positive emotional responses may be tied to protective health benefits.

**Emotions matter for performance.** Chronic stress affects motivation and engagement, leading to burnout, which affects relationships with students, job performance and retention. Burnout can have a tremendous impact on student achievement and the school environment.  
<http://bit.ly/3hEVRIP>

## Resources

### **Pre-conditions for Trauma during Covid Pandemic**

<https://ruthmccconnell.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Grief-and-Covid-19.pdf>

### **Reducing Preconditions of Trauma during Covid-19**

<https://builtbycommunity.org/reducing-preconditions-of-trauma/>

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*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*

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## Your annual report is a report card for your community

Cutbacks in education funding and changes to communication methods and channels have pared back traditional communications. If it doesn't directly contribute to student learning, it probably isn't part of current practices. Additionally, communications have changed significantly in style, technology tools and substance.

What hasn't changed is the value of informing taxpayers — your stakeholders — about how their tax dollars are spent and the results you are achieving. The how has changed, but not the why. It is still incredibly important to share information about your progress, operations and programs in a transparent, consistent manner.

One way to do that is to publish and distribute an annual report. A well-written and designed annual report can help you demonstrate student and staff accomplishments, explain the district's financial situation, and assure taxpayers their tax dollars are being well spent.

A modern annual report doesn't have to be 20 pages of financial statements and lengthy school/department reports. A well-designed, well-written two- or four-page printed or electronic format with photos is all you need. Before you dismiss this classic but effective publication, consider the following things your communities and your taxpayers need to know:

**Focus on accomplishments.** The most important part of your district's annual report is the description of your accomplishments. Taxpayers want to know what you did and, more importantly, why you did it as well as the results you are getting that support your mission and student achievement. Don't assume that readers will automatically understand how your activities help you achieve your mission. Clearly connect the dots for them.

**Make the financial section clear and concise.** Clearly explain where revenue comes from and how funds are spent. Be sure to include district cost-saving measures. Use pie charts, bar graphs, and other visuals that let readers see the spending picture for taxpayer dollars. Using visuals helps readers understand the big picture and financial trends. A short narrative description is also essential, explaining in plain English what the numbers mean.

**Photos are essential.** Research shows that readers generally fall into three categories: the 30-second readers who will see your publication on its way to the recycling bin; the three-minute readers who will skim it, stopping primarily to read headlines and photo captions; and the 30-minute readers, those few who will read it all. Since most of the people reading your annual report are in the 30-second and three-minute categories, use photos to show them what you've been doing.

Use your phone for quick pictures and make sure the electronic photos have a high resolution

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for print quality. It's also fine to use stock photos if necessary. Search for free stock photos on sites such as [www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com) or [www.pexels.com](http://www.pexels.com).

## Annual Reports

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**Write captions that tell your story.** Photos get readers' attention, so make sure you tell your stories with your captions. Don't just state what's in the photo. Connect the photo to an accomplishment. If people read or scan nothing but the captions in your annual report, they should still get a sense of the work you did last year and your results.

**Include personal profiles in the annual report.** Taxpayers will be more impressed with real stories about real people than general summaries or statistics. Explain what you have accomplished overall, and then humanize your statistics with some personal profiles. Highlight how a program or initiative helped a specific student, teacher, classroom or school. Share a story from a board member, principal, teacher, parent or student that shows how that individual made a positive difference or how a particular initiative enabled her to be more effective or learn more.

**Distribute the annual report at the most opportune time for your district.** An annual report is, by definition, a once-a-year report to your community about their investment in their schools. If publishing an annual report at the end of the school year in May or June is too difficult, pick another time of year. Consider publishing it in August or September as a way to start off the school year. Remind parents and taxpayers of your success in providing the best possible education for their children. Or publish it mid-year as a reminder of the strides the district is making in achieving its mission and goals.

**Use multiple media to distribute the annual report.** An annual report does not need to be mailed to every postal patron in your district. Consider using all the media at your disposal for distribution, making sure to reach as many people as possible.

- Send copies to staff electronically or printed and distributed through the district's internal mail system.
- Send copies to parents electronically or with students. Distribute it at any and all parent meetings.
- Post the annual report on the district's website with links to the report on all the school/department pages. Reach out to the city, chamber of commerce or other community partners for permission to post a link on their websites.
- Mail or email copies to your identified key community members.
- Get a mailing list from your local elections office for voters who are age 55 and older and voted in the last four elections in your district. Mail copies of the annual report to them. These patrons are likely your 30-minute readers, and they will vote on any school measures that appear on the ballot. They need to be informed.
- Put printed copies in all school offices, at all school reception desks, the public library, local banks or in other public places where community members are likely to pick it up.
- Develop a PowerPoint presentation or short speech and volunteer to speak at as many community groups as possible. Take printed copies of the annual report for handouts.

### **Examples of award-winning annual reports:**

Get ideas for effective annual reports from National School Public Relations Association award winners. The following earned awards of excellence in 2020 for annual report submissions:

#### **Capital Region BOCES, Albany, N.Y.**

2018-19 Annual Report

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

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Annual Reports

**Fort Worth (Texas) ISD**

Listen, Learn and Lead/Fort Worth ISD 2018-19 Annual Report

<https://bit.ly/37Gp9bR>

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**Texas Association of School Boards, Austin, Texas**

Measures of Success, TASB 2019 Annual Report

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

**See more examples on the NSPRA website:** [www.nspira.org/publications-digital-media-award-winners-2020#Annual\\_Report](http://www.nspira.org/publications-digital-media-award-winners-2020#Annual_Report)

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*Contributed by Jeanne Magner, communications consultant*



# Being Good Digital Citizens



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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.

Today's students are known as digital natives — born after the widespread adoption of digital technology, starting in the 1990s. Many people assume that these digital natives are born with a complete understanding of technology and how to use all tech skillfully.

Assuming that students are completely competent users of all of the evolving technology tools and systems is a mistake. Many students have high levels of competency at using digital apps on their phones, but that doesn't always translate to skillful usage of the wide range of computer applications. That requires exposure to a variety of technology tools and regular practice. Technology is still a learned skill.

It also doesn't mean they have the good judgment for social media interaction. Just because they know how to use the tool, does not mean they know how to use it appropriately.

### **Responsible social media use**

Almost all students use social media. A survey by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry found that 90% of teens ages 13-17 have used social media, and 75% have at least one active profile. <http://bit.ly/2L3QvkO>

It's not surprising to find that teens are socially active online. The surprising part, for them at least, is the controversy they create with impulsive or ignorant posts.

Many students have lost job offers and college acceptances over posts with racist and sexist comments and photos of illegal activities, such as drinking. They may regret the immature or unwise post, but they still face long-term consequences because the internet keeps a permanent record.

### **Being a good digital citizen**

Social media isn't going away, and it has benefits for social connection, networking, online learning, and more. But it also poses risks to children through cyberbullying, self-esteem issues and safety.

Parents should understand the risks and take charge of their children's online presence to help them be responsible. Start with digital citizenship lessons. Digital Citizenship is the practice of using the internet and technology safely, respectfully and responsibly. Smart Social is a good source of internet safety tips for parents. They offer a plan for parents to help their children become good digital citizens.

### **Privacy recommendations**

Students should begin their online presence with full privacy settings and gradually expand their public presence:

Ages 0-13 – Should have an entirely private online presence. *This is a legal requirement through the Children’s Online Privacy and Protection Act (COPPA), which protects the private, identifying information about children under 13.*

Ages 14-15 – Start having a family discussion regarding what should be public

Age 15 – Consider posting some positive images and volunteer photos on social media

Age 17 – Colleges should be able to find a positive online footprint for your student

### **Discuss online content with your child**

- **Parents:** Go through all of your child’s past social media images.
- Delete inappropriate images or posts that may not represent your child’s current maturity level.
  
- **Teens (with parents permission):** Consider creating a LinkedIn and YouTube account under your real name. These will positively impact your digital footprint.
- On your YouTube and LinkedIn accounts, add links to websites where your achievements are featured, such as a school website, or team sports website.
- List school, hobbies, awards and sports accomplishments in your account descriptions.
- Highlight volunteer and extracurricular activities.

Before posting anything online, ask yourself:

- Will this post help (or hurt) my chances of my dream college accepting me to my dream major?
- How would I feel if this post was shown publicly to my peers, neighbors, or to my relatives?

Keeping your own child safe is only part of digital citizenship. It is equally important for students to treat others with respect online and to stay safe.

Schools are also reinforcing these messages and have additional opportunities for safety lessons related to online activities in remote learning.

Reminders include zero tolerance for cyberbullying, personal information and password safety, treat your classmates and teacher with respect, show up prepared to learn and do your own assignments. See sample digital citizenship poster from Salem-Keizer Public Schools: <https://leslie.salkeiz.k12.or.us/digital-citizenship-document>

### **Common Sense Media tips for parents**

It is difficult to keep up with fast-changing technology. Common Sense Media is a useful site for parents, covering updates and issues in media and technology.

[www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)

**Digital citizenship topics:** [www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/digital-citizenship](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/digital-citizenship)