

March 2021

# ONcall

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## inside

### Collaboration works

Does your team work as a group of individuals or as a team that shares and values individual expertise? Collaborative work cultures have been shown to benefit all programs and operations. Read tips to help your school or district improve or start collaborative efforts.

### The mechanics of launching your e-newsletter

In this follow-up to last month's article, "Meet Your Communications Goals with an E-newsletter," read tips for finding an email platform, adapting a template and building an email list.

### Media tips for school board members

In the second year of this stressful pandemic, schools are in uncharted territory for operations. The growing demand for schools to reopen and the concern about staff safety may cause more criticism and finger pointing at the people in charge, including the school board. Read these tips for a refresher on messaging and unity for effective media relations.

### Trust and good communication starts with good leadership

District leadership sets the tone in the district. Good leadership creates a climate of trust, which is necessary for effective communications. Leaders may adopt more than one leadership style based on personal preference and the situational context. Read the characteristics of common leadership styles and get tips for cultivating new district leaders in your staff.

### Why be transparent?

Trust is the foundation for community support, and transparency is the basis for trust. Your audiences can handle bad news if they feel that they are part of an open and honest communication process from the start. Learn why honesty is the best policy for building trust and preventing misinformation.

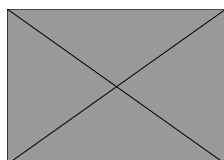
### INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Reading tips for remote learning

Remote learning can be hard for many kids, especially the young ones, and everyone wants them to have good learning experiences. These reading tips can help parents help their children with reading practice. When students succeed, public perception of schools is higher. .

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## Collaboration works

The pandemic has created overwhelming challenges for schools — how to safely return to in-person learning, how to protect students and staff from COVID-19 and how to effectively meet the needs of all students. Schools and school boards can more effectively handle these challenges if they create a collaborative communication culture. Research shows that collaboration between district leaders, unions, associations and school boards results in “gains in student achievement, improved school climate, increases in teacher retention, and both principals and association representatives being seen as stronger resources by educators in their school.” [www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/case-collaboration-clear](http://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/case-collaboration-clear)

### What does collaboration look like in practice?

Some schools have excellent collaborative systems within a culture of collaboration. For schools that need to improve their collaboration efforts, or even build a collaborative system from scratch, there are many resources and models that can help.

Many school districts have found success using a policy governance approach. Policy governance is an idea developed in the 1970s by John Carver ([www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm](http://www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm)). The approach defines roles for leadership and encourages boards to look at the big picture. “The board sets the ‘ends,’ or outcomes it expects, while the superintendent and central office manage the daily operations needed to get there. Board meetings are focused on progress toward those ends; board members are there to quiz the superintendent about what needs to happen if metrics are moving in the wrong direction.” [www.edweek.org/leadership/building-better-school-boards-3-strategies-for-district-leaders/2020/11](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/building-better-school-boards-3-strategies-for-district-leaders/2020/11)

Creating clear roles creates an ideal atmosphere for trust and collaboration. Collaboration is even more important during a crisis when the community is looking for district staff, school boards and school leadership to be united in their mission to advocate for students. The National Education Association (NEA) developed a resource guide ([www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/covid](http://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/covid)) with concrete action items to help schools and school boards collaborate effectively during a crisis.

### The following steps can help districts and schools start or improve collaborative efforts:

**Listen.** How is the pandemic impacting staff members, leaders and stakeholders? What challenges are they facing?

**Form teams.** Form teams with diverse, ready-to-collaborate stakeholders and identify shared areas of focus. What are the common priorities? Is everyone sharing solutions?

**Create shared goals.** Define and document shared goals and objectives. What do you have in common? A shared goal puts a team in the right frame of mind to work together.

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**Communicate.** It's important to keep your stakeholders informed. Determine how and when you will communicate about initiatives or projects. Being transparent and open builds trust with the community. Use various channels (social media, email, video, website updates, etc.) to broaden your reach.

For more information, download the NEA's 10-Step Quick-Start Guide to Collaborating Effectively in a Crisis: <https://bit.ly/3arB1A5>

### **How can a team work collaboratively while complying with social distancing guidelines?**

The challenges schools and school boards face implementing ever-changing COVID-19 health and safety protocols, complying with state and federal guidelines and planning for the full return to in-person instruction is more difficult without face-to-face meetings. Conflicts due to miscommunications are more likely to occur using asynchronous communication like email. Not having face-to-face meetings makes collaboration more difficult, but it is possible with these tips:

- Over-communicate
- Give permission to be human
- Hold regular check-ins
- Be open and direct
- Make meetings matter

See the full list here: <https://builtin.com/remote-work/remote-collaboration-tips>

### **Use technology tools**

The following tools can make remote work easier:

**Use video chat.** Regular communication is more important when teams are working remotely. Connect with members at regular intervals to keep the lines of communication open. Email is fine for discussing topics that don't need discussion. Video chat should be encouraged for most conversations. Video is more engaging than email or an audio call, and non-verbal cues and expressions reduce miscommunications that can happen in an email. Screensharing is also helpful when you want to share your work. Use the chat functions or the survey tools to further engage participants and foster open discussion.

**Use collaborative tools.** Google Drive or Microsoft One Drive are useful platforms for working on shared documents. Working on a goal-setting document together allows for greater input from team members. Editing a document in real time also mimics the nature of a normal workplace team meeting. You can even chat in real time without leaving the document. Learn how to use google chat here: [www.lifewire.com/chat-in-google-docs-4844376](http://www.lifewire.com/chat-in-google-docs-4844376)

### **More resources**

"4 Guiding Questions for Effective Remote Collaboration"  
[www.edutopia.org/article/4-guiding-questions-effective-remote-collaboration](http://www.edutopia.org/article/4-guiding-questions-effective-remote-collaboration)

"Best online collaboration software of 2021"  
[www.techradar.com/best/best-online-collaboration-tools](http://www.techradar.com/best/best-online-collaboration-tools)

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## The mechanics of launching your e-newsletter

Last month's issue included an article with tips for effective e-newsletters by the Bend-La Pine School District in Oregon. In "Meet your communications goals with an e-newsletter," the district shared an account of how the district uses their award-winning electronic publications to increase engagement for their targeted audiences, and why it is an important tool.

It was the "how" and "why" of digital news from an editorial content perspective. They shared how to create readable, engaging content for each of their audiences as part of their strategic communications goals. This is essential — publications are only effective if the members of your audience read them.

### You can (and should) have social media *and* e-news

If your district doesn't send e-newsletters, it might be time to look into starting one. Taking your news directly to your community, without the high cost of printing and mailing, is a great way to control your messages and build a relationship with stakeholders. An argument could be made that social media accomplishes the same goals, but there are good reasons for using both tools.

An e-newsletter can complement your social media without adding a whole new workload. You can repurpose content for social media channels, and vice versa. And you can ensure that you are communicating directly with your audience. Social media is a great tool, but you can't be sure you are reaching all of the people you need to reach.

Another benefit of adding e-news to your outreach is building a distribution list of people who are asking to receive district news — both the supporters and the curious followers. This list will be an asset that you can use when you need to build support for initiatives such as bond measures. Establishing regular communication will build trust that can help you when you need support.

### Best practices to help develop and distribute an e-newsletter

Starting a new electronic newsletter is a fairly simple process based on the same communications principles you would use for any new communication tool — consistency, brand alignment, targeting, etc.

Here are tips for launching an e-newsletter — from choosing an email marketing app to planning content to building an email newsletter list.

### Email platforms

Email marketing systems make this process fairly simple. Most have a wide variety of

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templates and allow you to customize for your brand. You can build a list and adapt a template in the same platform with help from built-in tutorials. Costs vary, starting at free for smaller lists and increasing as your list grows. Built-in list management will provide analytics for new subscribers, open rates and undeliverable addresses. Most systems also offer a range of other features, including landing pages, sign-up forms and survey options.

There are many options to choose from. Some of the well-known services include MailChimp ([www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)), Emma ([www.myemma.com](http://www.myemma.com)) and Constant Contact ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)). A web search of providers will yield lists of recommended sites and a comparison of features.

### **Editorial planning**

Last month's article included content guidance, such as tone, headlines, photos and more. As with any other communication tactic, it's important to keep your audience in mind. Know who you are talking to and customize for them. Are you sharing regular updates with staff? Are you talking to kindergarten parents? Are you updating subscribers who signed up to get school board notes after board meetings?

Also, consider when you are sending it. It may not matter when you push send — research has found that readers will go back to your message when they have time — but it is good practice to send at the same time each week. You can train your subscribers to know when to expect to hear from you. Try to stick to a regular distribution schedule.

### **Add accessibility**

Website accessibility requirements also apply to your email newsletter. Be sure to add features that help people with disabilities access and interact with your content. Recommended best practices include descriptive subject lines that are brief and convey an accurate idea of the content. Incidentally, this practice will increase overall reader engagement.

Use page elements like tables and headers for subscribers who use page readers and color contrast for those with color blindness. Add alt text for images. Consider producing a plain text version as well, which improves accessibility for people using text readers. Many email programs will offer a plain text feature that can be used with your formatted version.

### **Make it easy to sign up and unsubscribe**

After you plan your design and content, you need subscribers. You already have a natural audience of staff, parents and community members, but there are rules for sending unsolicited email, also known as spam or a cold email. The best practice for your relationship-building goals is to reach out to your audiences and offer them the opportunity to subscribe. Ask them to opt-in via a link to a form where they can include optional contact information and mark their specific areas of interest.

You can also send an introductory email that includes a clear opt-out option, such as an unsubscribe link or an email for an opt-out request. The ability to opt-out or unsubscribe is important, and those addresses must be removed from your list in a timely manner.

Continue building your email list by adding a sign-up form, box or pop-up to your website. The email program you are using should have an easy code generator for websites. Schools can include information in parent newsletters and registration materials. Educational partners

could share information through their channels, and you may also want to consider a Facebook ad with a sign-up link.

List management is a continuous process for any subscription-based publication, but it will be a useful resource for helping you understand and reach your followers.

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*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*

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# ONcall

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## Media tips for school board members

Some school boards are in the hot seat right now because of the strain of COVID-related school closures and disagreements over whether and when schools should fully reopen. And other issues, like strong opinions about renaming schools and disruptions to athletic programs. It's a tough time to hold a school board seat in some communities.

School board members have signed up for a difficult potion. They should be feeling a tremendous amount of gratitude and respect from their community for volunteering their time for an unpaid but impactful job with the very best intentions.

School board members walk a careful line communicating about district operations and issues. They are caught between the expectations of constituents and the media, who expect elected officials to demand district accountability and the administration, which expects them to be on the district team.

How can they balance all of the expectations of this role when they are approached for media interviews? Here is a refresher of tips to help guide responses during these challenging times.

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### Be tough but respectful.

News shows often resemble daytime talk-show drama. Heated discussions become arguments on a frequent basis. It could be tempting for a board member to take a cue from this media climate, but it isn't helpful, and it sets a negative tone. Name-calling and questioning of your opponent's motives are not helpful for the students, staff or patrons in your district. Avoid zingers and sharp sound bites. It may feel good to say, but it will make you look petty and small in print.

Board members set the tone for how the media and the community talk about the district. The whole community will benefit if the district is held in high regard during even the hardest debates. The goal for board members should be to remain respectful while still fulfilling their role in supervising the administration.

Respectful responses are not the same as being soft on issues. A misguided board member might think that taking a verbally rougher approach will prove they do not rubber-stamp everything the district staff recommends.

The key is to question data, decisions and processes. Those are fair game. But board members should avoid questioning the integrity or competence of their colleagues and district staff unless they are truly addressing a crisis of trust. Integrity and competence should not be questioned casually during other business. Those traits should only be questioned as part of a purposeful process and, likely, only in executive session. Ongoing, unofficial public questioning of integrity and competence only undermines the effectiveness of everyone involved with the district.

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Even the toughest board members are generally very supportive of the district. But too often, the wrong choice of words can unintentionally convey a lack of trust in the motives or effectiveness of staff. A careful board member can be tough as nails without ever making staff or other board members feel defensive or insulted.

### **Debate the issues, do not attack people.**

When ideas are questioned, decisions are stronger. A robust debate of the issues is productive. When people are attacked, good decisions become almost impossible, and support for the district is eroded. The benefit of a healthy debate is in airing a variety of perspectives. Decisions are better when board members consider input from many sources.

Diversity of opinion cannot be punished when it occurs, or it will go underground. Board members who feel unsafe sharing their opinions in public may start sharing them in the parking lot, the grocery checkout line or letters to the editor. And when the staff feel attacked, employees will withhold valuable input just to avoid being embarrassed. Question the issues, but do not insult the people to whom you are asking the questions.

### **It's not you, it's me.**

The best way to keep the focus on the issues is for board members to communicate about themselves, not their colleagues or staff. For instance, one should say, "I am not sure I understand" rather than "you are not making sense." Use "I" statements. Say, "I need a little more data before I can decide," rather than "You did not provide us with enough information." Pointing out someone else's deficiency or misstep creates an atmosphere of defensiveness and hostility. Pointing out one's own deficiencies invites others to help.

If board members have not had enough time to review his packet of materials, they could say they were not able to read the materials until this afternoon, and they need more time." This is more effective than accusing district staff of incompetence by saying, "Staff didn't send out the materials until just before the meeting." There may need to be a private discussion with staff about getting materials out earlier, but that shouldn't happen in a public forum, which could undermine the reputation of district staff.

### **Be careful with your quotes.**

Media thrive on conflict, and that is fine as long as the conflict is between ideas, not between the board and staff. The news media are under no obligation to make sure you do not impugn staff or other board members. A critical quote can make a more compelling headline.

A media tactic is to quote someone on the other side of the issue and ask you to comment by offering a question with a personal angle, such as, "Don't you think the superintendent is being a little short-sighted by suggesting this?" or "Does it seem like the people on the other side of this issue are being a bit selfish?" Of course, the reporter is hoping you will answer in a way that emphasizes interpersonal conflict. Remember to stay focused on the issues, not the opponents. In fact, a good reminder to yourself can be part of the quote: I like to stay focused on issues, not personalities, so I will say this..."

Another tactic is to set up a virtual confrontation by asking, "What would you say to the people who are critical of your position?" This approach simulates a confrontation with someone who isn't even there. If you take the bait, it can amplify any conflict and minimize cooperation. Redirect back to your position and away from a conflict by saying, "My position is that I favor this idea because..."

**Take your time to think about your response.**

Media Tips for the  
Board

March 2020  
Page 3

Most board members are volunteers, so they have jobs and lives outside of the board room. Chances are that sooner or later, they will get a media call at home or work.

When you are surprised by a media call, take a breath, ask what they need to discuss with you and offer to call them back within 30 minutes. Reporters cannot expect you to be ready immediately to discuss board issues when you are in work or family mode. Before calling back, talk to the district administration and other board members to see if they have gotten similar questions. It is good to have a unified message or at least a coordinated approach to offering separate opinions.

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*Contributed by Jay Remy, communications consultant*

March 2020

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## Trust and good communication starts with good leadership

While there may be no “I” in TEAM, the truth is that effective leadership is a big part of what makes a team successful and ensures that your audience will hear and believe what you say. Knowing how to motivate, support and encourage your staff is a big part of what separates a good leader from a bad one, and that depends a lot on your leadership style... or styles!

Good leaders have more than one leadership style in their toolkit. There are times when decisions need to be made by committee, and there are times when the decision needs to be made by you and you alone. Part of being a good leader is learning which opportunity calls for each response.

### Laissez-faire, aka “Just leave it on my desk”

A laissez-faire leader doesn’t supervise employees directly or provide regular feedback. While this may appear to be avoiding leadership altogether, it can actually be a very useful technique when people you are leading are highly experienced. It can also be helpful when you are assessing your staff. A new superintendent in a school district might choose to employ this leadership style at first, in order not to step on toes while learning the skills and abilities of highly experienced staff.

This leadership style isn’t for everyone, though. It depends on a crew of self-starters, and not every employee falls into that category.

### Autocratic, or top-down leadership

Making decisions alone without the input of others is the defining characteristic of the autocratic leadership style. While no one challenges the decisions of autocratic leaders, that shouldn’t lead one to believe this style is more effective. But its association with some famous dictatorships also shouldn’t lead you to avoid it completely. An autocratic leadership style can be beneficial for employees who require close supervision, or who have yet to learn all the ins and outs of their positions while still being required to perform at a high level.

This style can also be necessary when coming into a leadership role that was previously occupied by an autocrat. Your employees may be out of practice with volunteering their opinions and making decisions on their own, needing you to step in with more authority. The key is moderation. Left unchecked, an autocratic leader can prompt high turnover and low morale, destroying a school from within. When a leader consistently chooses their own advice over the advice of others, it kills creative problem solving and team cohesiveness.

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## Participative leadership

Participative leadership values the input of team members and staff, while the responsibility of making the final decision rests with the leader. Participative leadership boosts employee morale because employees make contributions to the decision-making process. It causes them to feel as if their opinions matter.

When a district needs to make changes within the organization, the participative leadership style helps employees accept changes easily because they play a role in the process. ***This is important for new leadership to note, because one of the biggest leadership mistakes is choosing autocracy as the best way to quickly make big changes.*** Instituting big changes without community support is a great way to see those changes fail, costing not only time but relationship capital, making the next changes even more difficult.

The weak spot with the participative model is when decisions need to be made in a short time frame. However, if you have a finely developed participative leadership style, you will earn the trust of your employees, making infrequent autocratic decisions more acceptable at face value.

## Transactional leadership

This can be a good technique to use in concert with the participatory style. Once everyone agrees on a goal, and the steps that need to be taken to achieve it, rewards can be set into place for participation. This is especially helpful if the goal that was agreed on through a participative process was not as enthusiastically supported as the administration might like. Adding a transactional step to it can help to “sweeten the pot.”

For example, the district decides to make a big push to increase reading skills, which means each school needs to make a push for kids to read more at home. Seventy percent of the teachers were on board — the rest of them like the idea in theory but are already chafing from having to factor recent additional state requirements into their already overtaxed schedule.

In this case, the school principal might choose to add a transactional aspect to the new challenge: The class that reads the most books gets a pizza party! Or, in a worldwide pandemic, a Zoom dance party! The party reward takes some of the pressure off the teachers by creating an additional incentive for the students.

## Transformational, i.e. “Let’s put it all together” leadership

Transformational leadership is about change. In this style, a leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group.

Transformational leaders focus on the big picture within an organization and delegate smaller tasks to the team to accomplish goals. This style of leadership is the most demanding of its leaders — you have to be in constant communication with staff, aware of the district’s goals and each employee’s personal career goals as well, and where exactly your staff is in the strategic plan. That’s a lot to remember!

An administrator who wants to make a big transformation needs to gather input on the problem and potential solutions via the **participative** style. When employees have the skills and the resources and show they are on-track, the administrator can use the **laissez-faire** style of leadership with those staff members, giving them a chance to focus more attention on employees that need more support, possibly with a more **autocratic** style.

When the participative process results in goals that not everyone is on board with, a **transactional** leadership style can help push the team over the line into success.

### **What about cultivating new leaders?**

The more people you have who are dreaming the same dreams you have, and attempting to achieve the same goals, the more effective your own leadership can be. While everyone is a potential leader, there are certain people, and certain occasions, when people are primed for leadership growth.

**New staff.** When a new staff member joins your administration, they are uniquely positioned to take on your goals as their own. An orientation is the best way to get your new employee or volunteer on board quickly. If new people are left to sink or swim when they first begin, you have a recipe for a resentful staff. People want to feel like they are doing a good job and fitting in with expectations. If leadership is seen as what is expected of them, and they are properly oriented towards the goals of the district and their department, they will rise to the occasion.

**Currently frustrated staff.** People equally primed for leadership are those who are most unhappy with their current situation. A teacher who has begged for new textbooks to no avail will be honored to be invited to be on the research committee for new curriculum, in addition to being a great asset to that group. While you may be hesitant to attempt to bring aboard your biggest detractors, they are an overlooked resource that can become your greatest allies.

As a leader, you set the tone. Your attitude trickles down. If you seek out the best opportunities for your team, your schools, and your students, that attitude will rub off on your staff, creating a positive environment for everyone they meet.

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*Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, Los Angeles-based freelance writer and communications consultant*

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## Why be transparent?

Strong relationships between schools and their communities are built on trust, and transparency is the key to creating that trust.

It's not enough to just disseminate the information you want stakeholders to know. Schools need to open the curtains as they deliberate policies and decide important issues. This allows the public to see and understand what goes into the decisions they make.

Most districts do not deliberately hide or cover up information, but they may not share some things they don't think would be relevant or of interest. Sometimes they try to oversimplify or exclude materials because they believe they're just too complicated for the public to easily understand. The public, however, wants to decide for themselves.

You run a risk of misinformation by not being forthright in the first place. When community members hear about a decision and don't understand why it was made, they often start speculating and may even assume ill intentions when there were none. It's better to be transparent from the start.

## What does transparency look like?

**Remove the mystery.** Be forthright with minutes and background materials from school board, budget committee and board-appointed committee meetings. Share materials that shed light on the discussions and planning that go into important decisions. Don't just tell people the decision was made. Tell them *why* it was made and make the background information accessible.

**Simplify the information.** Budgets and COVID metrics are just two examples of highly complicated topics, so make them as easy as possible for the layperson to understand. With budgets, provide a written summary with an overview of the budget and highlight significant changes and the reasons why. With things like COVID metrics, don't just summarize what's happening. Share the metrics and other data to allow your stakeholders to have a solid grasp of what's going on.

**Make documents easy to find.** Make your district website the place where all important district information is housed — your district goals, strategic plan, budget, calendars, curriculum standards, etc. Use the same design format for each section so followers know where to look to find important dates, meeting minutes, etc.

**Provide facts and data.** Don't expect people to take your word for it. Give them the data to support the positions you take. For example, don't just talk about your crowded classrooms. List the capacity of each school and the number of students actually enrolled. Don't just give an overall number of your budget shortfall. Post the entire budget, allowing

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those who want to take the time to review it to see that certain revenues are down, causing the deficit.

**Give information in a way that people care about.** Instead of presenting just the facts ma'am, like in Dragnet, offer stories that provide a look at the impact of district decisions. For example, if a school board authorizes a school-based health center, feature interviews with students who will benefit and how they feel about it. Create videos, and include stories in the district newsletter.

**Have two-way discussions with community members.** Invite parents and others to be part of advisory committees or take part in informal sessions where you ask for opinions about a topic. Describe the issue you're facing and how you propose to address it. Seek their ideas and really listen to what they have to say. You might hear perspectives you had not even considered. Whenever feasible, incorporate their ideas into your solution.

**Transparency extends to dealing with the media.** Often, districts try to avoid publicizing bad news and hope the media doesn't hear about it. But in this highly connected era, secrets don't remain secret for long. There are just too many outlets for sharing information, from email to social media to local gathering holes. The best policy is always to get in front of a situation, good or bad, and be the one to tell your own story.

### **You don't have to share some things**

Of course, being transparent doesn't mean that you share absolutely everything. Obviously, there are personnel issues, medical situations and security issues that must remain confidential by law. Know what you legally can and cannot share.

Creating a culture of transparency starts at the top. Your superintendent and district leaders need to be open to new ideas and encourage dialogue with staff. They need to provide regular opportunities for stakeholder engagement, from serving on committees to volunteering to attend information meetings. They need to be open and straightforward in sharing information. They need to truly listen to what people have to say. When leaders exhibit this kind of transparency, it encourages other staff to do the same.

Trust isn't built overnight, but it's worth the effort to gain it. When stakeholders feel good about their district and believe you are being upfront in sharing news (both good and bad), they are more apt to give you grace when things go wrong. They will also applaud you when things are good.

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*Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant*

## For Families



# Helping Your Child Learn to Read



**March  
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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.

Reading is a fundamental skill for children. Young students learn to read in the early grades, and then they read to learn in every grade after that.

Reading is essential for learning, and it is a good predictor of future success in school. Research shows that students who don't meet grade-level standards by third grade risk continuing to fall behind and become at-risk for not graduating.

*"Reading proficiency by third grade is the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success. Yet every year, more than 80 percent of low-income children miss this crucial milestone" <http://bit.ly/39sRPqZ>*

### Reading tips for remote learning

Learning to read can be a challenge for some students, and it is even more difficult in a remote environment. Fortunately, there are many ways parents can help young children learn to read and older children improve their reading skills.

Effective reading practice focuses on vocabulary, print motivation (building an interest in reading activities), print awareness, storytelling and narrative skills, knowledge of letters, and phonics.

Opportunities for reading are all around us. Parents can find practical ways to reinforce reading skills during daily tasks, such as shopping, news consumption and navigation during travel.

The Northwest Evaluation Association's list of general reading and writing improvement strategies provides a list of tips to help parents help their children become confident readers. Parents can select two or three of these strategies to use all year long:

#### General strategies:

- Read to your child. Have your child read to you if possible.
- Model good reading habits by reading in front of your child.
- Visit the public library frequently. Join summer reading programs.
- Have your child write the menu for dinner.
- Have your child locate letters and words on food containers.
- Have your child help write a shopping list and check off items as you shop.
- When traveling, write words in a grid and have your child color in the boxes as they see the words on signs.

#### Vocabulary

- Notice street and store signs and talk about what they say and mean.
- Have regular conversations with your child. Vary your vocabulary.

- Talk about the people you see and the types of jobs they have.
- Talk about the colors and shapes of things you see.
- Provide word searches or crossword puzzles. Find printable puzzles online.
- Read a challenging book aloud to your child to provide exposure to higher-level words.
- Label objects around the house with sticky notes.
- Describe objects using a simile or metaphor (e.g., the car is as red as an apple, or the clouds are like cotton balls).

### **Word study**

- Practice synonyms and antonyms by saying a word and having your child say a word that means the same or the opposite.
- Say a letter and have your child name the letter that comes just before that letter. Have your child name an animal or food that begins with that letter.
- Circle words in a newspaper or magazine that start with the same letter or are in the same word family (e.g., words ending with -ing or -unk). Color the consonants blue and vowels red.
- Practice writing spelling words in shaving cream or pudding smeared on a plate.

### **Comprehension**

- Use audiobooks to follow along with text as you read.
- Read newspaper articles with your child and discuss events in the news.
- After watching a movie, have your child retell the movie from beginning to end in the correct order with details.
- When reading together, after each paragraph ask the child ‘wh’ questions (Who? What? Where? When? Why?) to see if they understand.

### **Writing**

- Encourage your child to keep a journal (for travel, family events or feelings).
- Encourage letter writing, pen pals, and thank-you notes.
- Have your child write a conversation using correct punctuation. The conversation could be between favorite TV characters, characters in a book or members of their family.
- Encourage students to write to their Congressperson to ask for information or share their views. Their office staff will often respond to letters that request information or ask questions.

*Read more at <http://bit.ly/3iVZRLY>.*

### **Additional resources**

There are many resources online to help your child her reading abilities. Search terms such as, “tips for parents to help kids read,” yield many pages of resources. Below are a few examples:

- **Pay-based activities that build reading readiness, Edutopia**

*<http://edut.to/3csCto6>*

- **11 ways parents can help their children read, Reading Rockets**

*<http://bit.ly/2YBVug5>*

- **Ten things to help your struggling reader, The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity**

*<http://bit.ly/2NGSkoR>*