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ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Tips for schools: A pandemic twist on the teacher-feature

The pandemic has created new challenges to connecting with perhaps the most influential person your child has outside of the home — their teacher. Even if you have been communicating online more with teachers, it builds trust to get to know them personally. Learning starts with good relationships, which require trust and communication.

The About Us page is one of the most visited areas of most websites. Visitors like to know who people are. This is also true for schools. Teacher profiles are an important part of your school websites and make nice posts on social media. In addition to a staff directory, consider adding individual profiles to your page. They can do double duty by adding them to individual teacher class pages and as special features on school newsletters.

Sharing appropriate details about staff keeps the personal outreach fresh. The idea can also spark creativity — Embed links to fun photos or videos in the questions. The nice thing about the “teacher feature” is you do it once and, unless something major happens, you can leave it be, or push it out since these features are general enough to be relevant any time.

The following list of questions have been published before in this publication — they are standard prompts that work. Or, you can “seasonalize” them with questions pertaining to seasons, celebrations or top issues. Customize if you have the time. This is an investment in creating a comfortable, welcoming climate, which should yield better trust among your school community.

Below is a mock example, so you can see how simple the answers can be. Have fun — you don’t have to answer them all; the point is to share your inspiration. Everyone has a story locked inside.

Name: Michael Sean Garcia

Years I’ve been teaching: 15, and I hope many more!

Where I grew up: New Mexico, on a horse ranch, but we moved into town later when we had to sell and mom needed to find work.

Have your hobbies changed during the pandemic: Just a little, but I’m actually hiking more! And reading even more books with my kids; -- and raising a puppy.

Career background (college, degrees, specialty, where I’ve taught): Master’s in Teaching, Willamette University, 1986. Started with Gervais SD in 1988.

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Favorite foods during the pandemic: I experiment with stews and soups, so we can all cut vegetables together. Oh, and pancakes of course.

Something funny I may have done as a child: I buried my little sister's Barbie doll in the back yard, but at the time that wasn't funny, so I dug it up and gave it back as a birthday present.

My favorite saying or quote these days: Wash your hands, wear your mask, I love you.

Book(s) on my nightstand: "CHASER: Unlocking the Genius of a dog who knows 1,000 words"

Why I love teaching, even now: I am truly inspired, and in awe, of the kids I get to teach every day, because they're early adopters! Masks are no problem, but when they are, we just deal with it. So, while it's hard ... very very hard ... my commitment is to keep them safe now, not just to teach. I want them to be resilient because this is their world now.

Something people would be surprised to know about me: I dropped out of high school because I needed a job to support my mom and little sisters when dad died. But I came back and graduated. Oh, and my mom grew up in Ireland.

One special moment I saw, participated in, or helped create, that "made it all worthwhile" during the pandemic (Hint: Doesn't have to be a big thing....maybe the fact that one of your students got into the college they wanted)

I caught one of my students helping another student wash his hands and adjust his mask. I overheard another child say, "I hope we can get the vaccine soon."

Something I've learned in the pandemic: I have to admit, I get very angry, so I've learned how to share my feelings in a positive way with my kids at home, and at school. I talk through what made me mad, aloud, and then tell myself how I plan to fix it. This works even with forgetting to pick up the milk! Don't just blow up. Children learn from how you express and resolve frustration — and they never forget. It becomes embedded in their experience, whether they know it or not.

Maximizing yearbook interviews

At the secondary level, many yearbook staff also include teacher interviews, which can be published in newsletters and on social media as well. It is a great way to get more mileage from your repurposed content. Using this content is an efficient way to access already-approved teacher details for other purposes, and it is an excellent way to showcase student work.

Talk to your yearbook teachers about accessing this information — or suggesting this content if they don't already include it. There are a number of great resources online that provide additional suggested questions.

Yearbook vendor TreeRing is a helpful resource for student-produce content. A good list of sample questions is from their blog post, 48 Questions Guaranteed to Get Teachers to Open Up During Yearbook Interviews: <https://blog.treering.com/48-yearbook-questions-guaranteed-to-get-teachers-to-open-up-during-interviews>

Sample questions fall within the following topics:

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- About life outside of school
- About school life
- About the students
- Along the lines of a specific article or theme
- About Nothing—Just for Kicks (or Mods)

This project is a great way to showcase great staff, be visible on your sites and provide a reintroduction to students, parents and colleagues.

Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former communications director for Oregon School Boards Association; internal communications specialist for Salem Health and board chair for EAGLE Charter School in Salem, Ore.