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PRincipal Communicator

Concise, practical public relations help for school leaders

Leading Off

Calming the Tempest of Leadership Transition: Communication Strategies for the New Principal



By **Erica Chandler, APR**, director of communications for Affton School District in St. Louis, Mo.

New school years. New schedules. New students. And now, new ways of delivering instruction. No matter the season, schools are facing continuous change.

Opening lines of communication and engaging staff, students, parents and the community is essential for a successful outcome during any time of transition, but especially when a school welcomes a new principal... or when a principal finds a new school to call home.

In Missouri, the Affton School District intentionally provides opportunities for stakeholder input. Most recently, the district did so while welcoming Dr. Deann Myers as principal of its high school.

This article outlines components of the district's interview process, along with Dr. Myers' perspective as she transitioned from applicant to interviewee to new principal. These components are also applicable for when principals hire staff for their buildings.

[Read the full article.](#)

Crisis Communications

Communicating During a Crisis Through Technology



If an essential element exists in today's approach to crisis communication — in addition to clear, accurate and consistent messages — it is the need for rapid delivery of critical information to large numbers of people. Technology can help principals and their schools enhance their crisis communication and allow schools to communicate verbally, visually and in written form.

allow schools to communicate verbally, visually and in written form instantaneously.

Below are a few ways to utilize technology to communicate in a crisis.

- **Websites** — an ideal way to get your side of the story across quickly and effectively. School websites continue the dialogue that begins with other media, reiterate key messages to online audiences, and provide a forum for consistent messages over the duration of the crisis and recovery period.
- **Video** — Principals, staff and students can use videos to generate content to help the school community feel good about their schools and staff even in difficult times.
- **Social Media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram)** — Social media allows you to provide real-time updates to stakeholders from your official pages. With the COVID-19 outbreak, where there are prolonged school closures, this is also an opportunity for posting original and shared content about staff [handing out free meals](#) to families (and [singing about it](#)) or [cleaning schools](#); [music lessons](#), [performances](#) and [daily inspiration](#) continuing at home; hashtag themes for [at-home student learning](#) and [virtual spirit weeks](#); teachers offering [social-emotional support tips](#), [activities](#) and [read-alouds](#); and [administrators' video messages to students](#).
- **Email Broadcasts** — an excellent tool for communicating information to large groups.
- **Text or Voice Messaging systems** — a great way to reach stakeholders immediately through mass messaging.
- **Hotlines or Emergency Voice Bulletin Boards** — allow parents to access important information by calling the school and navigating the phone menu. Principals can post a brief statement about an emergency and what the school is doing, directing callers to other resources such as the website for detailed information.

Source: *The Complete Crisis Communication Management Manual for Schools, 4th edition*

Going Social

Virtual Read-Aloud Sessions Amid Prolonged School Closures



During the prolonged school closures stemming from the COVID-19 outbreak, Jennifer Hesse, an elementary school principal in Redmond (Ore.) School District has found a way to connect with her students each evening through her Instagram page (see [her Instagram Post](#) about this activity).

Before schools closed in that district in mid-March, Principal Hesse decided to bring the classroom to students' homes in a fun way. She spent \$200 at

Barnes and Noble on books, which she will donate to the school's library when schools reopen. She uses these books to host [read-aloud sessions](#) on Instagram Live every night at 7 p.m. until students are allowed to go back to school. These live sessions occur on [Principal Hesse's Instagram page](#).

Tip: If following this model, be sure your selected authors have granted permission for online reading of their copyrighted works. The *School Library Journal* has shared a [list of publishers who are temporarily altering their usage policies during the COVID-19 crisis](#).

Staff Communications

Set Communication Expectations for Your Staff



When it comes to internal communication, a solid communication infrastructure that ensures timely and consistent information delivery is vital.

Without clear expectations and a process for internal communication, your school's administrators don't know when, how and what to communicate and who is responsible for ensuring messages are delivered.

Communication guidelines and protocols that could be implemented in your school include:

- Specify who is responsible for communicating certain types of messages and information and to whom.
- Outline procedures for how and when important information should be shared with staff and others.
- Provide media guidelines that outline the kind of communication issues that are appropriately handled at the school level.
- Clearly define the role of each administrator in a crisis or other critical communication scenario.

Source: *Making Communication Work for You and Your Schools*

Customer Service

Telephone Etiquette: Did You Have Them at Hello?



It's important that you and your staff have customer service guidelines in place for your school, especially when the physical school buildings are closed and work is done remotely.



When speaking on the phone, use active listening. Focus on what the speaker is saying instead of thinking of a response to what is being said. When working remotely, check your voicemail regularly to ensure you haven't missed any calls.

During a phone conversation:

- Greet the caller and identify yourself and the school/location.
- Smile, breathe and speak clearly and calmly.
- Project a tone that is attentive and respectful.
- When taking messages, read back what you have written to make sure the message is correct.
- Listen carefully so you understand exactly what the call is about.

Source: *NSPRA's Gold Mine* [[Agents of Happiness](#) (PDF)] — A publication with customer service tips and guidelines for employees of the Berea City (Ohio) School District.]



Deadlines Extended: Publications and Digital Media Awards and Golden Achievement Awards

In recognition of the challenges now facing school communicators, NSPRA has extended the deadlines for our 2020 National School Communication Awards.

For an opportunity to earn national recognition for your communication programs, campaigns and products, enter your school PR best for consideration in these awards programs:

- [Publications and Digital Media Awards](#) — Recognizes outstanding work in a variety of print and digital media forms.
NEW Entry Deadline: April 13, 2020

[Golden Achievement Award](#)

Recognizes exceptional public relations activities

- **[Golden Achievement Award](#)** — recognizes exemplary public relations activities, programs, projects and campaigns.

NEW Entry Deadline: April 27, 2020

New: 2020 NSPRA Online Awards Submission System

This year, you can submit your application in a quick, easy, electronic process. Submit your applications today: nspra.org/award-apply.

Videos on the [log-in process](#) and [application submission process](#) are available to help you use this system.

Find more information on the [NSPRA website](#) or in the [print awards brochure](#) (PDF). For further information, contact Tommy Jones, senior manager, at tjones@nspra.org or call 301-519-0496.



NSPRA's *The Complete Crisis Communication Management Manual, 4th Edition*

NSPRA's *The Complete Crisis Communication Management Manual, 4th Edition*, includes guidance on crisis communication, using social media in an emergency, safe school assessments, and security audits. It provides updated information about school safety conditions, the Incident Command System, drills and exercises, and student reunification. It is written by Rick Kaufman, APR, along with additional advice by NSPRA members with experience in many situations.

This manual is available as a CD or a downloadable Zip file. Either option contains a PDF and MS Word version of the manual. [Order today](#).



"Everyone can rise above their circumstances and achieve success if they are dedicated to and passionate about what they do."

—Mother Teresa

"You will either step forward into growth, or you will step backward into safety."

—Abraham Maslow

"The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you."

—B.B. King

"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities."

—Maya Angelou

Days to Celebrate



- **May 1–31:**
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
 The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the generations of Asian and Pacific Islanders who have enriched America's history and are instrumental in its future success. [Learn more.](#)
- **May 1–31:**
Better Hearing and Speech Month
 This month is sponsored by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The month provides an opportunity to raise awareness about communication disorders. The theme for 2020 is "Communication at Work." [Learn more.](#)
- **May 1:**
8th Annual School Lunch Hero Day
 A chance to recognize the hardworking school nutrition professionals in your school cafeterias and the difference they make in children's lives. [Celebrate with the School Nutrition Association.](#)
- **May 3:**
World Press Freedom Day
[Learn more about this day](#) on the United Nations' website.
- **May 4–8:**
National Teacher Appreciation Week
 Access the [Teacher Appreciation Toolkit](#) from the National PTA, and be sure to [#ThankATeacher](#) on social media.
- **May 6:**
National School Nurse Day
 This event helps to foster a better understanding of the role of school nurses. It is celebrated the Wednesday of National Nurse Week, which is May 6–12 every year. [Read more](#) on the National Association of School Nurses website.
- **May 10:**
Mother's Day
- **May 10–16:**
Food Allergy Awareness Week

Food Allergy Awareness Week

Sponsored by the Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) organization. [Learn more.](#)

- **May 25:**
Memorial Day



Now It's Your Turn: Share Your Stories, Successes and Lessons Learned

In *PRincipal Communicator's* digital format, you can share your building-level engagement and communication success stories at all levels. Tell us what works for engaging parents, community leaders, staff and students for the betterment of your schools. Send us your best elementary, middle and high school examples as videos, tip sheets, articles, etc. to editorial@nspra.org.



School PR Tips for Working Remotely in the Midst of the COVID-19 Crisis

As school closures spread across the nation, principals now find themselves working remotely or having to tell the stories of local schools with no one in the buildings. The following are some ideas for continuing to deliver effective communications for your school in a mostly virtual space.

- **Find creative, virtual ways to generate content when schools are closed.** Your buildings may have gone dark, but your social media doesn't have to be, because great things are still happening in your school community.
- **Keep connected as a school:** If staff are working remotely or on a rotating office schedule, don't lose your sense of camaraderie. Try daily or weekly virtual check-ins with a clear, purposeful agenda. Focus on items that require discussion; if things can be covered by email, cover them by email rather than in a meeting format.
- **Keep connected with your national and international colleagues.** Use [NSPRA Connect](#) to ask questions, find help, share ideas, brainstorm solutions and commiserate through this crisis with the largest community of school communicators in the United States and Canada.

Source: NSPRA's [COVID-19 Resources Page](#)



Videos of the Month — Principals Spread Joy During COVID-19 Related School Closures

Schools may be closed for COVID-19, but principals are making sure their students know they are thinking about and supporting them during this time.

In Traverse City, Mich., high school principal Michelle Floering stopped by the fast food drive-thru where one of her students, Kaitlyn, worked to let her know that she was the 2020 valedictorian. [Watch the video.](#)

In Randolph, N.J., elementary school principal Mario Rodas [made a music video](#) at the elementary school campus set to the song "All By Myself." He took a tour of the baseball field, looked longingly in the windows, played hop-scotch and wandered around the playground. [Watch the video.](#)

Thank you to **Edward Moore**, professor emeritus at Rowan University, N.J., for sharing these videos.

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