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PRincipal Communicator

Concise, practical public relations help for school leaders

Leading Off

Leading for Equity in Your School



By Catherine Carbone Rogers, chief communications officer, Highline Public Schools

As a principal, you have a unique opportunity to build a culture of equity in your school. Everything you say about students, families and staff signals how your school values diversity, inclusion and equity. Your actions can lead the way to creating a more equitable learning environment, where *all* students are set up to succeed.

In the following article, Catherine Carbone Rogers, chief communications officer of Highline Public Schools, Burien, Wash., highlights eight ways you can promote a culture of equity in your schools.

Those suggestions are (1) speak so everyone can understand, (2) make sure everyone is represented—respectfully, (3) watch your language, (4) speak up for the underrepresented, (5) engage diverse communities, (6) develop an equity lens, (7) bring your staff along and (8) keep learning.

[Read the article.](#)

Parent Communications

Communicating “Must-Know” Information to Parents



When conveying “must-know” information to parents, effective school leaders utilize the fine art of “deliberate repetition.” This is a case where how often you say something is as important as what you say. No matter how critical your message is to your school community, never assume every parent reads it the first time, understands it or cares about the message.



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When getting “must-know” information to parents say it accurately, clearly, in many ways, and often.

Here are some tactics to share pertinent information to your students’ families:

- Send announcements home with elementary school students. Secondary school students aren’t always reliable couriers. It may be helpful to alert students that this message is of special importance, so it doesn’t get lost in overstuffed backpacks.
- Include the message in the school newsletter.
- Put the information on the school website.
- If the message is important enough, mail a personal letter to every parent.
- Record the information on the school’s voicemail system.
- Send a mass text message or email out to your school community.

Source: *How to Say the Right Thing Every Time*

Staff Communication

Intentional Listening: The Foundation for Dynamic Success

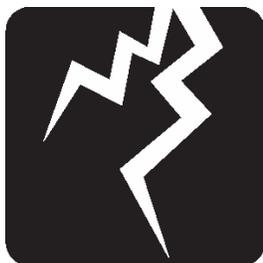


Building relationships with your staff through intentional listening is vital for long-term success. This means listening with empathy and the intention to use what is learned to improve your school.

To be an effective listener, you need to plan systematic methods to listen to your staff throughout the year. Those methods include:

- Prepare a formal survey to understand their viewpoint of the learning environment in your schools.
- Conduct a series of focus groups so that you will better understand the issues identified by your staff.
- Hold a forum to allow staff to address concerns.
- Form staff committees to draft a plan to address concerns.

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

*Crisis Communication***The Crisis is Over... Now What?**

A natural reaction after a school crisis is to take a collective sigh of relief and focus on returning to the normal daily life of your school.

Recovery from the school crisis may seem like an end, but it is also a beginning.

Experience is the best teacher. After the crisis is over, it's beneficial to evaluate each incident, response and management procedure. Knowing what worked and what could have been done better will help refine the crisis management and communication plans, to make them more effective in the future.

A crisis management review, should include the following:

- An analysis of *why* the crisis occurred. Could something have been done to prevent it?
- An evaluation of *how* the crisis was handled. Convene your school's crisis management team members to debrief and evaluate every action taken, including communication messages and response steps. It is important to learn from both successes and mistakes.
- An examination of similar scenarios. What different steps could be taken in a similar situation in the future?

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

*Customer Service***Setting the Tone: Educational First Impressions**

First impressions of your school have a major impact on how you and your staff are perceived by students, their families and the community. There are a variety of ways that as principal, you can design aspects of your school for first impressions, so they make a positive impact. Two examples include with school signage and administrative office spaces.

School Signage

School signage can warn visitors or welcome them. When signs lead with the word "No" — such as in "no loitering" — there's a perception of a culture of no at the school before visitors even interact

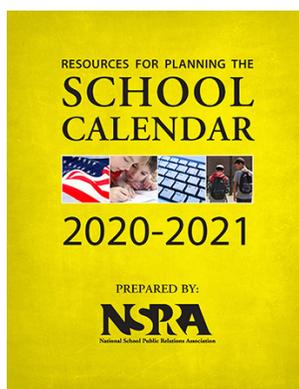
with anyone who works or learns at the school.

Signage should include messages that are attached to your school's mission and vision. Think about your school's logos, fonts and symbols; you should have a coherent design strategy and color palette associated with those signs.

Administrative Office Spaces

Make sure your office spaces are clean and tidy. Have staff greet visitors warmly and ask how they can help. This type of first contact when arriving at a school can empower visitors, set a positive tone and bring comfort to those who are entering the school with stress and anxiety.

Source: Dillon, Robert (2020, Jan. 14) [*"Educational First Impressions" SmartBrief.*](#)



Resources for Planning the School Calendar 2020–2021

Keep track of important dates, holidays, accomplishments and historical events with [NSPRA's Resources for Planning the School Calendar 2020–2021](#). School leaders use this resource to develop their school calendars and for planning public relations efforts highlighting special meaningful months, weeks and birthdays of historical figures throughout the year.

[Buy your copy today!](#)



"Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them."

—John C. Maxwell

"To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart."

—Eleanor Roosevelt

“Don’t tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results.”

—George Patton

“Motivation comes from working on things we care about. It also comes from working with people we care about.”

—Sheryl Sandberg

Days to Celebrate



- **March 1–31:**

Music in Our Schools Month

Learn more on the [National Association for Music Education website](#).

- **March 1–31:**

National Nutrition Month

An annual nutrition education and information campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. It focuses on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. [Learn more](#).

- **March 1–7:**

National School Social Work Week

A week to honor school social workers and highlight the important work that they do to meet students’ social, emotional, physical and environmental needs. [Learn more](#).

- **March 2:**

NEA’s Read Across America Day

[Click here to access](#) a promotional toolkit and ideas on how to celebrate this day.

- **March 2–6:**

National School Breakfast Week

The [#NSBW2020](#) theme is “School Breakfast: Out of this World.” [More information can be found here](#).

- **March 8:**

Daylights Savings Time Starts

- **March 19:**

First Day of Spring

- **March 22:**

World Water Day

[Learn more on the United Nations website](#).

Good Stuff





The Pledge for Public Schools

Celebrate Public Schools Week this month on Feb. 24–28. It's a national celebration to highlight the great things happening in our nation's public schools as well as to bring attention to the critical issues facing our schools, students and educators. This initiative shows the strength and potential of public schools in a democratic society.

[Watch and then share this video](#) of Learning First Alliance (LFA) leaders adding their voices to support public schools and taking the Pledge for Public Schools. NSPRA is a proud member of LFA.

[Learn more and take the pledge.](#) Urge others in your school community to do the same.

PR Tips



Inclusive School Environments: Supporting Transgender and Non-Gender Conforming Students

Transgender and non-gender conforming students are part of the diverse community that makes up your school. Respecting all students is an important part of ensuring a respectful, inclusive environment. Here are some tips to help you and your staff support these students.

- Develop a process for communicating with appropriate staff when a student makes a name change or a change to the use of pronouns.
- Consider staff development on the topic so staff and faculty who interact with students can ask questions and feel supported as they learn about a topic they may be unfamiliar with. This ensures building-level administrators are on the same page.
- Resist the temptation to select the traditional "one boy" and "one girl" for student awards or recognition.
- Consider language choice in standard documents such as supply lists or school handbooks to ensure it's gender inclusive.
- If a student transfers schools, implement a process that protects student confidentiality, but ensures records are transferred in their entirety, so support personnel at a student's new building are aware of their specific needs.

Source: NSPRA's *Gold Mine*

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