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Concise, practical public relations help for school leaders

Leading Off

Relationship Building: The Key to Effective Leadership and Team Culture



By **Dr. Karen Gaborik**, 2018–19 Superintendent to Watch, Fairbanks (Alaska) North Star Borough School District

For a decade, Dr. Karen Gaborik, superintendent of Fairbanks (Alaska) North Star Borough School District, served as assistant principal and principal of Lathrop High School.

As a high school principal, she quickly learned that the adults drive school culture. A toxic student environment is the result of a toxic staff environment, and conversely a thriving student environment is a reflection of a staff that functions as a productive team. She focused on building healthy teams of school administrators, department leaders and cross-functional groups.

In the following article, Dr. Gaborik discusses how principals can develop productive, functional teams in their school with limited time constraints. She describes three things she does at every meeting in her district that form the underpinnings of team culture. They are:

1. Eliminate sit-and-get large group settings. Arrange staff into pre-determined small groups based on grade level, content areas, departments or cross-functional teams.
2. Begin every meeting with each person in those small groups sharing, "What I brought into the room with me."
3. Close every meeting with A Moment of Gratitude.

These small, easy-to-implement strategies can profoundly impact how your teams function. They create space for empathy, human connection and relationships. [Read the article.](#)

Best PD Activities

Activities to Involve Senior Citizens in Your Schools



The most direct way to engage support for your school is to involve people. One group in your community is senior citizens, who can provide wonderful insights to students about their lives and may also have grandchildren in your schools. Here are a few ways your schools can involve senior citizens throughout the year:

- Distribute Golden Passes that give senior citizens free admittance to school events (e.g. athletic contests, concerts and drama performances).
- Encourage senior citizens to teach mini-lessons about a hobby, trip or a historic event they experienced.
- Establish a pen-pal relationship with students and senior citizens.
- Establish service projects that students can conduct at senior centers (e.g., delivering care packages, decorating during holidays and visiting seniors on Grandparents Day).

Source: *Principals in the Public*

Customer Service

Key Questions to Ask in Student Focus Groups



Students are the primary customers in your schools. Focus groups are one method of research to help you learn about students' opinions, attitudes, values and beliefs around your school. Asking good questions is a fundamental skill in drawing out quality information from the focus group participants. Many focus groups use a trained facilitator who takes notes in the sessions and writes follow-up reports.

Here are some questions you can use to begin the conversation with students about their perceptions of school climate.

1. **Tell me something about your school.** Imagine a situation where someone is new to the school and you are asked to be a friend and help him or her on the first day. What would you say about the school?
2. **How can your teachers help you learn more and be a better student?** (*Probes:* Do you think your teachers expect you to do hard work? Do they know that you can be successful? How can your school help other students learn more and be better students?)

3. **Do the people who work at the school care about you?** How do you know? What do

3. **Do the people who work at the school care about you?** How do you know? What do they do that shows they care? (*Probes:* Who do you depend on to help you to be successful in school? Who is proud of the good things you do?)
4. **Talk about school and how safe it is to be here.** This includes in the classroom, the hallway, the bathroom, the bus, the cafeteria and playground. (Note: For those students who answer “not safe,” ask additional questions like what makes them unsafe. Ask students for their ideas for making school safer.)

Source: *Politics of Authentic Engagement*

Marketing and Branding

Making the Most of Your School Website’s Main Content Pages



In many ways, building a website is like a construction project. Before construction begins, you need to make certain strategic decisions and then layout a blueprint of what you want to achieve. When designing your school website, it’s important to consider three elements: content, layout and navigation.

The main content pages located on your school’s homepage are prominent areas for visitors to begin navigating through your website. Examples of main content pages for schools include *A Letter from the Principal*, *School Information*, *Parents Page*, *Faculty/Staff Information* and *School News*.

If you have trouble deciding how to set up your main content pages, draw an organizational chart to determine the content pages and how to arrange them on your website. Try to organize the content into five to seven main content areas with two to three layers of subcategories. That way, you won’t have too many pages with a skeletal amount of information or too few pages with a copious amount of content.

Source: *How to Market Your School*

Going Social

School Social Media Champions Enhance Students’ Families’ Engagement



Parent and guardian engagement with your schools is key to helping students thrive. Parents and guardians want to have quality conversations with their children about their school day. Yet, typically when students are asked, “What did you do in school today?” their responses are vague.



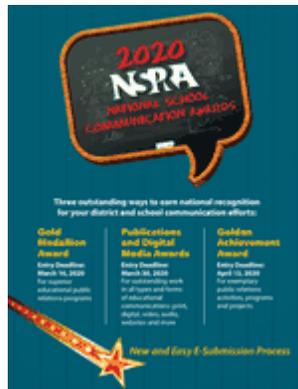
Social media provides a student's family with the opportunity to ask more targeted questions about their child's experience at school. Through these channels, families can learn more about how to support their children and stay apprised of school activities, emergency situations and other news from the district.

By assigning staff members to be social media champions for your school, you can create a network of leaders who will help model the use of social media in their classrooms and through school-wide activities.

These champions are part encourager and part innovator to their colleagues. Principals should bring this group together a couple times a year to share ideas and troubleshoot challenges related to enhancing the engagement of students, parents and guardians through social media.

Social media champions can also encourage and support their colleagues in utilizing social media to connect more with their students. Using hashtags that incorporate your school's name and words such as "proud," "success" or "family" can help students' families to become engaged with school activities on social media in a positive way.

Source: [Collier County Public Schools Communications Guide](#), from NSPRA's [Gold Mine](#)



NSPRA's 2020 National School Communication Awards Contest Open!

For more than 50 years, public relations professionals and education leaders have earned national recognition from NSPRA for their communication programs, campaigns and products.

Seize your opportunity to join them by entering your school PR best for consideration in any or all three awards programs:

- **[Gold Medallion Award](#)** — This top award honors superior school public relations/communications programs, projects and campaigns.
Entry Deadline: March 16, 2020
- **[Publications and Digital Media Awards](#)** — Recognizes outstanding work in a variety of print and digital media forms

print and digital media forms.

Entry Deadline: March 30, 2020

- **Golden Achievement Award** — Recognizes exemplary public relations activities, programs, projects and campaigns.

Entry Deadline: April 13, 2020

New: 2020 NSPRA Online Awards Submission System

This year, all entries will be submitted digitally through our new online awards submission system. Submit your applications at the following website: nspra.org/award-apply.

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

Find more information on the [NSPRA website](#) or in the [awards brochure](#) (PDF).

For further information, contact Tommy Jones, senior manager, at tjones@nspra.org or 301-519-0496.



“Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment, until it becomes a memory.”

—Dr. Seuss

“It is better to believe than to disbelieve; in so doing you bring everything to the realm of possibility.”

—Albert Einstein

“It is very important to know who you are. To make decisions. To show who you are.”

—Malala Yousafzai

“Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know.”

—Jim Rohn

Days to Celebrate



- **April 1–30:**
National Poetry Month

[Learn how you can participate and celebrate this month, which was founded by the Academy of](#)

[Learn now you can participate](#) and celebrate this month, which was founded by the Academy of American Poets in 1996.

- **April 1–30:**

- **School Library Month**

- The American Association of School Librarians' celebration of school librarians and libraries. [Learn more.](#)

- **April 1–30:**

- **World Autism Month**

- This month increases global understanding and acceptance of people with autism. [Learn more.](#)

- **April 2:**

- **International Children's Book Day**

- Celebrated on Hans Christian Andersen's birthday, [this day is celebrated](#) to inspire a love of reading and to call attention to children's books.

- **April 6–10:**

- **National Assistant Principals Week**

- NASSP, NAESP and AFSA sponsor this week to honor and recognize the contributions of assistant principals to the success of students in schools across the United States. [Find activity ideas and a social media toolkit.](#)

- **April 7:**

- **World Health Day**

- [Read more on the World Health Organization website.](#)

- **April 8–9:**

- **Passover**

- **April 12:**

- **Easter**

- **April 19–25:**

- **National School Leadership Week**

- An annual theme-based week dedicated to recognizing and supporting the vital role of student leaders. [Learn more.](#)

- **April 22:**

- **Administrative Professionals 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.



Practical Guidelines to Write Honest, Helpful Recommendations

Writing references and recommendations for colleagues and employees is tough, especially as the leader of your school. Here are some practical guidelines that make it possible to write honest, helpful recommendations.

- Stick to the facts. Include only information that is observed, documented or a matter of public record.
- Don't go into the employee's personal problems or medical history. Likewise don't share confidential reviews or letters of reprimand.
- Consult legal counsel if you have questions.
- Be descriptive and choose words carefully. Avoid superlatives.
- If you want to promote the employee you are recommending, cite any awards or honors received, win-loss records or any documented achievements.
- Don't put anything in writing that you wouldn't say to the person's face.
- Don't be intentionally vague. Statements such as "I can't recommend this employee too highly" lend themselves to varied interpretation.

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



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Crisis Resources

The spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an ongoing issue for public health officials, but it also presents operational and communication challenges for school systems. NSPRA has compiled helpful tips, member examples, news items and other documents to assist members in communicating about Coronavirus-related preparation steps and emergencies. Our [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Crisis](https://www.nspra.org/sites/default/files/newsletter/principal_communicator/principal-communicator-2020-03.html)

[Resources](#) Webpage is a dynamic resource that we will continue updating on an ongoing basis.

NSPRA members, visit the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Crisis Resources](#) webpage to view samples shared by association members and then join the conversation about this topic happening online in [NSPRA Connect](#). Resources for school systems from representatives of the health industry, government organizations and news outlets are available to the public [on our website](#).

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