What’s in this issue…

ARE YOU SOCIAL? TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE
Everyone is on social media — almost everyone. If you are still holding out and don’t interact online, read some tips to help get started and find resources to improve your reach and engagement. TIPS ON FACEBOOK.

ENGAGING SENIORS/BABY BOOMERS
During the busy school year, it is easy to think that your parents are your main audience, but it is equally important to reach people who are outside of your school doors. Seniors are a key demographic who can help share information, volunteer in your building and support your bond measures. CONNECTING WITH BABY BOOMERS.

IF YOU AREN’T DOING ANY PUBLIC SPEAKING, WHY NOT?
Speaking in public is one of the most feared activities for a majority of people. It is also one of the best ways to share your knowledge and get noticed for advancement. Read tips for overcoming anxiety and increasing your success at work. PRACTICE. PRACTICE.

LEVERAGING PETS IN SCHOOL TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, PART ONE
Finding new ways to attract positive attention to your district is not always easy. If your schools have projects that include pets in the classroom, you can boost interest in your programs. Make sure you are using these opportunities to share great news about staff and classroom instruction. PROS/CONS.

WHAT IS NEWS?
If your schools aren’t sharing information about programs and activities because they aren’t “newsworthy,” this tip sheet will help them understand what to share, how to share it and who to share it with. SIGNIFICANCE.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: TEST TIPS
Raising kids is hard. There isn’t just one way to be a good parent, but there is a wealth of advice by child experts online. Read tips to avoid the most common mistakes for your tween and teen, and learn general tips to help you be successful. STANDARD TESTING.
ARE YOU SOCIAL? TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

By now, almost everyone has a Facebook page. The company estimates its average daily active users at 1.37 billion and its monthly active users at 2.07 billion. Facebook may seem old-school, especially to teens and young adults, but it’s still the king of the internet, and it’s growing. From 2014-16, the number of users grew by 13.2 percent. www.statisticbrain.com/facebook-statistics

Social media in general, and Facebook in particular, are great ways to reach your audiences. You can post globally or target to parents, business owners, older voters, or residents of a geographic area.

Facebook is too big to ignore – and the number of users indicates that ignoring it would be a challenge. But make sure you are getting the greatest benefit from your social media efforts. These tips can help you improve your social presence, so you can be seen and heard by more people in your community.

Your official district or school page

Your first priority should be to set up your official district page that represents the district and official district activity and messages. Facebook pages are for organizations, companies and
businesses. They are always attached to the personal profile of an individual, who is the page administrator.

Facebook also calls them “fan pages.” Administrators are similar to the president of the fan club.

“Businesses, organizations and public figures can connect with their customers or fans on Facebook by creating a Facebook Page. Anyone with a Facebook account can create a Page or help manage one, as long as they have a role on the Page. People who like a Page can get updates about the Page, such as posts, photos or videos, in their News Feed.”
http://bit.ly/2CjE5Ma

After you establish your own page, you can consider separate pages for your schools – or you can simply post all school news on your district page. An advantage to having separate school pages is that you can avoid the unofficial pages that will inevitably pop up, and you can share school news from the school pages to the district page, increasing the reach of your posts.

A counter-argument to several pages within your school district is that they dilute your engagement. A single district page can help establish a consistent brand, build district-wide pride, result in larger community engagement in one place, and ensure consistent communication by your district about your schools. Read more arguments in support of a one-page approach at www.socialschool4edu.com/one-district-wide-facebook-page.

Unofficial pages

Pages are great ways to interact with your community. Having an official page also ensures that you are controlling your reputation, images and messages. If you don’t set up a page, you will likely still be represented by an “unofficial page” that was created by someone without authorization or through check-ins by Facebook users who visit your schools. If this is the case for you, you can claim the page or merge it with your official page. For easy guidelines on how to do this, see a tip sheet from the Nebraska Cooperative Development Center:
What can I do about unofficial school Facebook pages?

These other pages on Facebook look like they are official. It is confusing for Facebook users. And viewers have no idea who created them or who is currently running them. There are basically two types of pages that require different strategies to remove them or claim them.

1. Facebook created an unofficial page because people on Facebook have shown an interest in your school by checking in. Some pages have the option to claim the page officially.

2. Another person created a page that represents your school. In this case, the best tactic is to try to find the person who started it. It may have been started by a teacher or supportive parent. If that fails, post a message on the page.

If you are unable to claim the page or find a contact for a page, focus on promoting your official page. Post the URL on your website, mention it in all external communications. Try to increase traffic and engagement to your real page.

And finally, you can report the page to Facebook. If the page is the result of check-ins, especially by teens, you may discover inappropriate content that may prompt some action by Facebook.

www.socialschool4edu.com/unofficial-school-facebook-pages

Set up your page

Your district needs an official page, not a profile. Pages require affiliation to a profile. Profiles must have recognizable names and specified genders. If you aren’t an active Facebook user but you want to establish an organizational page or you want to maintain a low-visibility personal profile, you can attach a page to a profile with high privacy settings. If you try to set up a business page as a profile, Facebook may delete it.

The main differences between pages and profiles:

- On a profile, someone is your “friend.” On a page, someone is your “fan.”
- With a profile, you can send messages to one or more friends that go directly to their inbox on Facebook. As a page, you can’t do this – you can only send updates, which are
not as widely distributed.

- Pages and Profiles can both post status updates, links, photos, etc. that appear in their fans’/friends’ news feeds.
- Pages cannot “add” people as friends. However, your fans can suggest your page to their own friends to become a fan.
  

Setting up a page is not difficult. Facebook walks you through the prompts. Go to www.facebook.com/pages/create. Select organization, choose education or school as a category, and follow the prompts. Be sure to include photos to identify your district and engage your fans.

“Photos are the most engaging type of content on Facebook, with a whopping 87% interaction rate from fans. No other post type received more than a 4% interaction rate.”

http://bit.ly/2lREFug. Photos should be a regular part of every post for this reason.

Get on board

If you aren’t already on the Facebook bandwagon, you should be. Your public expects to find you on social media. If they don’t find you officially, chances are good that they will find you unofficially.

Facebook sometimes changes its policies and practices for sharing your content. Do an occasional web search for the latest tips and best practices for getting noticed and engaging with the current algorithms. With billions of users on the platform, you may have to work a little harder to be seen by your community.

Resources from SocialSchool4Edu.com

SocialSchool4Edu provides social media management services for schools with tips and resources on their blog: www.socialschool4edu.com/category/all-2/.

- Basic Grammar and Style for Social Media
  www.socialschool4edu.com/basic-grammar-style-social-media/

- What to Post When You’re Short on Content
  www.socialschool4edu.com/post-youre-short-content/
• Are Your Facebook Posts Reaching Fewer People? This Tip Will Help
  www.socialschool4edu.com/engagement-rating/

• 7 Mistakes You’re STILL Making with Social Media – (And Easy Ways to Fix Them!)
  www.socialschool4edu.com/7-mistakes-youre-still-making-social-media/

• Are Your Facebook Posts Reaching Fewer People? This Tip Will Help!
  www.socialschool4edu.com/engagement-rating/

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant

HOW SENIORS AND “BABY BOOMERS” CAN CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT SUCCESS

To communicate effectively, it’s always important to keep your audience in mind. This can help
you target your messages, strategies and communications channels. But what about the people who don’t think they are part of your audience? What about the community member with no kids in school who isn’t particularly engaged in public education? How do you connect with these hard-to-reach constituents? This article will focus on strategies to engage with one key, hard-to-reach community group – retirees.

Why retirees?

Seniors and retirees have a great deal to offer to our schools. With flexible schedules and time on their hands, many can be excellent volunteers, student mentors or tutors. Many retirees are coming out of long careers in a wide range of fields. They have a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can help support students on their path toward college and careers. Retirees are also an important voting block and can be critical to bond elections or fundraising efforts.

But before they can contribute to your school, they have to become engaged. Here are a few tips to get you started:

Building bridges

Many of our audiences have a built-in reason to care about our work. They have, are, or teach students in our schools. We can often communicate more easily with parents, teachers, and students because of that established relationship. With retirees, or others not directly connected to our schools, we need to take a little more time to build those bridges.

Finding areas of connection can be very helpful in this process. Some ways to connect include:

Connecting through grandchildren – Seniors with grandchildren in your school are a good place to start. They already have a personal and emotional connection to the education of their grandkids. Therefore, they should be invested in the success of your school.

Engagement strategies include a Grandparent’s Day event or a special quarterly grandparent’s newsletter with highlights about the school and ways to get involved.

Connecting through service – Many seniors and retirees like to give back to their community through volunteerism. Connecting with service organizations can be a wonderful way to make contact with volunteer-oriented retirees.

Engagement strategies include presentations to service organizations with invitations to join a school volunteer project, mentor students, or help at an event.

Connecting through careers – Some people may not think of volunteering in a school but are passionate about a specific topic of expertise.
Engagement strategies include inviting retirees to speak to classes about their careers, serve as a program advisor, present at a career day, or mentor a student interested in that field.

**Connecting through culture or faith** – Culturally specific organizations or faith communities can also be a wonderful way to connect to retirees and seniors.

Engagement strategies include providing area churches and community organizations with information about your school, programs and services and sharing easy ways people can support your work.

Most schools already have a core group of dedicated retirees and seniors who volunteer and participate in school activities. These people can be a wonderful resource to you in developing your outreach strategy. Consider inviting a small group of currently dedicated seniors to participate in a focus group or serve on an Elders Advisory Council. Elder advisors can provide valuable insights on how they consume information and their preferences around communications and outreach. They can also help identify current barriers to information sharing and engagement. These individuals can help you develop a strategy to more effectively connect with and utilize your retiree community.

**Communications vs. engagement**

As you work to reach out to seniors in your community, it’s important to determine what your goals are. Are you looking to increase channels for communications and information sharing? Ways to achieve this can include increased exposure in local papers, increasing the number of seniors receiving your newsletters and updates, or sending an annual school letter out to all community members. Are you hoping to boost volunteerism and engagement in school activities? Strategies here include recruiting more retirees to serve as volunteers or mentors, starting an Elder’s Advisory Council, or encouraging already engaged seniors to bring a few friends to your next community event.

Getting people into your school to see your programs firsthand can be an important communications and engagement tool. Creating events specifically targeted at retirees and seniors can help start building those relationships.

Some ideas include:

- Grandparent’s Day event
- Senior lunches or dinners at school
- Senior School Showcase – a school tour with program demonstrations
- A holiday bazaar or other community event with special events/deals/activities for seniors
- Senior/retiree focused work party/volunteer day
Messaging: You are valued and needed

Once you have established a connection, communicating with seniors and retirees is not that much different than communicating with any other audience. Effective messages will appeal to something they value and make an emotional connection. If you are asking for some type of engagement – volunteering, donating, supporting a bond – stress how important their support is. People like to feel needed.

What impact will their engagement make in the lives of your students and your community as a whole? How can they make a positive impact? If you have a communication specifically for seniors, consider including a quote from a currently engaged retiree or senior. You could also include a statistic about the number of retirees/seniors who volunteer or donate to your school and the positive impact that engagement is having. Honor and thank people for the contributions they have made to their community throughout their careers and encourage continued engagement to support the next generation.

Resources

How Boomers Can Contribute to Student Success

Contributed by Crystal Greene, communications consultant

IF YOU AREN’T DOING ANY PUBLIC SPEAKING, WHY NOT?

“What an amazing educator. Everyone give her a hand … and now she’s going to come up here and say a few words.” If nothing strikes fear into your heart like the thought of having the full attention of an entire room of people focused on what you’re about to say, you’re not alone.

According to a 2011 survey (Social Fears and Social Phobia in the United States: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication), a fear of public speaking affects about 20 percent of the population, with half of those people having an actual phobia, ‘glossophobia’, meaning they can become physically debilitated by even the thought of public speaking, experiencing nausea, panic attacks and extreme anxiety.
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2262178/?tool=pubmed

There are many psychologists who specialize in helping people overcome social anxieties such as glossophobia, and if you fall in that 10 percent of people who have it, it’s worth investigating your options. For the rest of us who suffer from a simple fear of public speaking or just your standard nose-wrinkling avoidance, there are good reasons to “buck up” and try to get over it.

Gina Patterson, Executive Director Virginia School Boards Association (800) 446-8722 gina@vsba.org
Public speaking is a rocket to success

Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on whether you have the phobia, public speaking can have an outsized effect on your career. Speaking in public is a leadership quality, and directors and managers looking to promote their employees are looking for indicators just like those.

It’s an odd quirk of human nature that we tend to imbue the person standing up in front of us with outsized qualities and abilities. We subconsciously accept that “the group” has selected the person on the stage as the smartest/wisest/strongest of us, and so we give them our attention.

Think of the times you’ve gone to conferences where people line up afterward to get a few moments one on one with the speaker. Yes, their presence on the stage is merited by their credentials, but seeing a person up in front of a crowd also goes to some of our primal and instinctual need to recognize a group leader.

This particular oddity of human nature is something you can work to your advantage because opportunities to speak in public can be created if you’re looking for them.

Since only a small amount of your peers are likely to love public speaking and seek out those opportunities, that leaves an opening for you to show you’re ready and willing to take on those leadership roles.

Why are people so afraid?

Nobody wants to stand up in front of a room full of people and have their mind go utterly blank. But the truth is that most people don’t even notice when you pause for too long, or say ‘um’ a couple of times.

Fear of making a fool of yourself is really a fear of being ostracized from the group. It goes to the core of what makes us human, and what helped us survive as early hunter-gatherers, when humans were neither the strongest nor the fastest predators on the planet.

“Failure to be a part of the social group, getting kicked out, probably spelled doom for early humans. Anything that threatens our status in our social group, like the threat of ostracism, feels like a very great risk to us.” www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-real-story-risk/201211/the-thing-we-fear-more-death

Unfortunately, public speaking is an unavoidable fact of life. And more than that, it’s an opportunity to stand out from the crowd in a positive way.
OK, so what do I do about it?

More than anything else, practice. Some people get nervous over the thought of making a phone call, others do fine with the phone but balk at speaking to large groups. Nothing helps more than simply making more phone calls and speaking to more groups.

Here are some quick pointers on how to speak effectively:

- **Understand your objective.** Why are you communicating with these people at this time?
- **Understand your audience.** Who are you communicating with and what do they need to know?
- **Plan what you want to say.** Don’t memorize the whole speech, but know the bullet points you want to hit.
- **Choose your words and body language.** Knowing your audience means you’ll know what kind of language is going to inspire them.
- **Watch/listen to your audience.** Rustling and fidgeting tells you it’s time to speed up or move on. In a one-on-one conversation, eye contact is key.
- **Seek feedback.** Ask your audience how you did, and check to see if they understood your key points.

When you’re ready to move onto larger groups, start with making a short announcement to a small group of friends and family, then graduate yourself to larger groups. Toastmasters International (www.toastmasters.org) can be particularly helpful – it’s a social group that focuses specifically on public speaking, giving members an opportunity to practice talking in front of a like-minded group of people focused on growing the same skill.

On that day of your speaking engagement, it can help to get your blood moving. According to Michael Hopkins, a graduate student at Dartmouth’s Neurobiology of Learning and Memory Laboratory, “the positive stress of exercise prepares cells and structures and pathways within the brain so that they’re more equipped to handle stress in other forms.”


Rather than use the morning of your big presentation to ruminate and freak yourself out, spend at least a half hour working out. Whether you go for a brisk walk, do Crossfit, or take a Zumba class, the release of serotonin (aka the “happy hormone”) that results from exercise will flood you with positive feelings for your presentation.

Learning to impart information to a group with authority and humor is a valuable skill. Public speaking can be rewarding on its own, but it can also reveal opportunities for advancement and connections that you wouldn’t otherwise have access to. Whether you have a fear, a phobia, or just a general avoidance of public speaking, it is well worth pushing through and reaping the bounty on the other side.

*Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, freelance writer and communications consultant, Los Angeles, Calif.*
Practice transitioning from a transcript to your memory.

Take your time.

Don't apologize at the start of your speech.

Use notes sparingly.

Release nervous energy with controlled breathing and lay off the coffee.

Play to your strengths.

Know your audience.
LEVERAGING PETS IN SCHOOL TO YOUR ADVANTAGE, PART ONE

Given the choice of a cute kitten video or your quarterly message from the superintendent, where do most web clickers go?

Point taken.

In our pet-centric society, animals have a way of eliciting a positive emotional reaction – the very reaction you want for your schools. A recent study shows that 15 brands that regularly feature animals in their Instagram ads have significantly higher engagement – between 68 percent and 295 percent – compared with those that don’t use any animal images.

Why not harness this power to boost your own social media engagement? If you have a “pets in the classroom” project, check the level of online hits or engagement. They may have caused a spike, especially with a prominent pet-with-student photo to click on.

In Part 1 of this topic, read about the educational value of pets in schools, with new research. Part 2 next month will include some creative, successful examples that improve education and boost public support through stronger social media engagement.

Start in an open forum

First, start by weighing all concerns and creating a forum for all voices. Do you have a pet policy? Revisit it. How do you handle service animals? What about allergies and hygiene standards? Do you have a “teacher champion” who would jump at the chance to work with the local humane society to adopt a classroom pet for all the right reasons – teaching responsibility, compassion, science, you name it – and not get too distracted? A pet could enhance learning.
**Why have classroom pets?**

The American Humane Association’s Pets in the Classroom study, conducted through the Pet Care Trust, surveyed nearly 1,200 teachers to learn that teachers believe classroom pets have real educational, leadership and character-building value. Having a class pet can teach children important values like compassion, empathy, respect, and responsibility for other living things, as well as give them much-needed leadership skills and stress relief.

**Expect challenges**

Certain challenges remain, according to the study’s findings, like teaching children to cope with pet loss, the cost of ownership for teachers, and responsibility for the animal when school is not in session. The study’s objective is to advance the research of Pet Care Trust’s Pets in the Classroom program, which provides grants to Pre-K through eighth grade educators to adopt and provide ongoing care for small animals in their classrooms. The full report is available online at www.americanhumane.org/pets-in-classroom-study.

**Benefits fall into many areas**

General findings show that teachers value the benefits of classroom pets around six objectives:

- To teach children responsibility and leadership via animal care.
- To teach children compassion, empathy and respect for all living things, including animals, humans, nature, and the world we share.
- To enhance and enrich a variety of traditional academic lessons, from science to language arts.
- To provide an avenue for relaxation when children are stressed or when their behavior is unstable and/or challenging to manage, for both typically developing children and those with special needs.
- To help students feel comfortable and engaged in the classroom and with their peers, so that the school environment is more conducive to quality learning, growth, and social connections.
- To expose students to new experiences and opportunities, particularly for those who do not have pets of their own, which may translate to a decrease in unfounded fears and biases among children.

**Challenges are fewer**

According to survey and interview participants, the primary challenges of having a classroom pet included:
• Spending out-of-pocket money to care for the pet, both on a daily and long-term basis.
• Assuming responsibility of pet care and/or other accommodations when school is not in session.
• Ensuring safe, productive, and educational interactions between the students and the pet(s).
• Managing and coping with pet loss for students and themselves.

“Phase I of this groundbreaking study confirms our long-held belief in the inherent value of classrooms having a pet,” said Dr. Robin Ganzert, American Humane Association president and CEO. “We hope through this study to examine and measure the degree to which these animals can help develop young people’s academic growth and social and leadership skills, as well as instill in them the vital value of compassion.”

“The Phase I study results confirm what we have been hearing from teachers since day one – classroom pets do make a difference,” said Steve King, Pet Care Trust director. “We are delighted to have awarded more than 56,000 grants, bringing a pet into the lives of more than two million children. And we are committed to doubling that number within the next few years.”

Other research echoes findings

A review of other research published last fall (http://bit.ly/2m0Jbqy) shows that with the right safeguards, animals can benefit children by reducing stress and anxiety and improving social interaction, motivation and learning. This applies to both children with and without learning disabilities.

Research done by the WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the US National Institutes of Health, revealed that animals can have an indirect effect on learning by directly affecting motivation, engagement, self-regulation and human social interaction.

“Animals could be the ultimate cure for back-to-school blues,” said study author Dr. Nancy Gee, Professor of Psychology at SUNY, Fredonia & WALTHAM Human Animal Interaction Research Manager. “Research suggests that animals in the classroom could improve children’s attitudes to school.”

WALTHAM’s key benefits with dogs

• Children are more likely to follow instructions, maintain focus and perform certain tasks requiring motor-skills (e.g. completing an obstacle course) faster in the presence of a dog.
• Children performed some cognitive (e.g. recognition memory) tasks better when accompanied by a dog.
• The presence of a dog in the classroom can improve children’s attitude toward school and
helps them learn responsibility, respect and empathy.

- Dogs in the classroom can reduce emotional outbursts, aggression and other disruptive behaviors while improving communication between teachers and students.

**Coming in Part 2:** Creative ideas and how classroom pets can boost your social media presence and increase stakeholder support.

*Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former communications director for the Oregon School Boards Association and board member of the Willamette Humane Society.*

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**WHAT IS NEWS? UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOLS**

It seems like a simple question: “What is news?”

Yet journalists, not to mention scholars, have argued that question for generations. Countless reams of paper and bytes of computer breath have been sacrificed in search of the answer. The debate probably stretches back to the ancient Greeks. I hear Archimedes didn’t get a lot of press for discovering how to calculate pi.

Unlike math, “news” is subjective. Don’t take it personally when someone reacts to your well-honed article or press release with, “That’s not news!”

**Who is the audience?**

Here is a useful definition with which to start: News is what the audiences – readers, listeners, viewers – consider as news.

As a communicator, what you consider as news is irrelevant unless the desired audience also thinks it is news. If you’re pitching a story to a local media outlet, that audience might be a news editor, reporter or blogger. If you’re writing for a newsletter, the audience is the newsletter readers. If you’re posting a training video, the audience is the people who should embrace that training.
Here’s an example: The fact that four of your staff members completed the 26.2-mile Ugly Winter Weather Marathon might be newsworthy for your school or district newsletter but not for local television unless there was something newsworthy – there’s that word again – about the quartet.

In defining news, the first question becomes, “Who is the audience?” The next question is, “Would they consider this newsworthy?” Internally, of course, there is another question, “Why should we distribute this information?”

**What is outside the ordinary?**

OK, let’s get back to the four teachers completing the marathon. Good for them, but boring to anyone who doesn’t know them. However, what if they had collected 12,867 discarded drink cans during their training runs? Or their math or physics students had calculated their training methods and paces as a class project, and had coached them during the marathon? Or they were wearing performance gear being developed or tested by a career-technical education class at their school?

**When did it happen and when are you sharing the news?**

Each of these possibilities brings a human-interest element – something outside the ordinary. However, race day would be too late to pitch the story idea to a media outlet. The media often schedule their reporter/photographer assignments well in advance. Besides, the better story is what happened leading up to the marathon. Journalists would want to photograph and interview the students and teachers during the training runs, or while picking up cans. The journalists’ story might be completed before the marathon or it might be capped with the four’s finish.

Too often, I’ve seen press releases touting students’ or staffs’ completed projects. By then, it’s too late to draw much interest from a media outlet. The media need interviews and high-quality photos as the project is underway. Unless there is a way for the district to spin the story forward, it’s usually worthless to send a press release in September highlighting what teachers did during their summer “vacation.” The story needed to be told, or at least started, during the summer.

I shake my head at organizations that issue press releases saying, “We recently completed our clothing drive and collected ….” Immediacy matters. If a fundraising drive ends on Friday, a press release about the projected totals should be issued on Friday. Each day of delay undercuts the immediacy.

Tip: You can always issue a follow-up press release later. In the meantime, be conservative. It’s good news when a fundraising drive collects more than previously announced. It’s very bad news if revised figures go the other way.
To recap our discussion so far, we’ve established that human interest, unusualness/oddity, and immediacy or timeliness can be qualities of news.

**Why should your audience care?**

There’s one quality that always should be considered: impact or relevance. Reporters want to know, and ask themselves, “Why should the reader (or listener or viewer) care?”

Sometimes the answer is obvious. Parents care when new principals are announced because they want to know about who’s in charge at their children’s schools. In contrast, few people care about the appointment of an assistant district superintendent for secondary education, unless that’s been a problem area for the district. The press release or story must make clear – in plain talk, not boastful language – how and why this appointment will affect students, parents and other district staff members.

And people really, really care about things that affect their family, such as a later or earlier start time for the school day. Or a reminder that schools will be closed Friday for an in-service day.

**Another tip: A lot of items that someone considers newsworthy are not.** Sometimes the best option is to cheerfully write and send that press release anyway instead of trying to convince the person otherwise.

**Are you sharing information for the public interest?**

That leads to another news quality for school districts: public interest. Even if few people might be interested, the district has a responsibility to issue a press release announcing that an assistant superintendent has been hired, or the district has sold its construction bonds at a favorable rate. Such items belong on the public record, even if they merit only a paragraph or two in the local newspaper.

Another news quality is conflict – not that a school wants to promote conflict in its press releases. But news is storytelling, and conflict is part of the human story. A school district might want to announce that a long-running conflict – such as the site for a new school, or its name – has been resolved. Or schools might want to announce a challenge, such as competing with each other on a staff blood drive or student can-and-bottle collection or most internships developed with local businesses.

**Are you using storytelling themes to gauge interest?**

Other potential qualities of news include entertainment, humor, celebrity status or prominence, and tragedy.

It has been said that there are only six or seven overarching themes throughout literature. If you
can tap into one of those universal themes – such as achievement against great odds, or failure and redemption – you might have something newsworthy. But let the story tell itself. Don’t embellish or hype it. Editors are turned off by press releases that promise a “great story idea” or “great photo opportunity.” Let the editor decide whether it could be great.

And don’t overlook significance, which is related to impact and relevance. For example, I’ve recently heard from banks and credit card companies that were excited to announce their new websites. Unless their previous websites were dreadful and created problems for me, I don’t care. To them, the improvements are significant. But to the target audience – consumers like me – the changes are of marginal significance.

If a credit card company announced it was canceling local residents’ debts, that would be significant.

And newsworthy.


Spring testing is around the corner. Although opinions vary about standardized tests, they are required in most districts and are an important part of the national Common Core initiative.

The value of standardized tests

Standardized tests can create a higher level of stress among students, teachers and parents, but districts use them to provide data to help schools and individual teachers and students improve.

In a Los Angeles Times commentary, “The Value of Standardized Tests,” the author suggests
that “Standardized testing...is the most accurate way California has to compare one school with another, one year with another, one teacher with another.”
(http://articles.latimes.com/2002/may/31/opinion/ed-schools31)

Test results are used to identify tools and strategies that are working – or are not. This is the reason students must do their best on test day. Students, and even teachers, who do not understand this may diminish the importance of the tests, resulting in mediocre efforts by students.

Test stress

Over the course of their school career, students take a lot of standardized tests. Too much pressure to perform can have an adverse effect on students and their test scores. This test-taking anxiety can have physiological reactions, such as rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, queasiness, dry mouth or perspiration. It can also cause psychological reactions, such as apprehension and self-doubt.

Helping students put the tests in perspective can minimize these symptoms. Experts suggest reminding students that the tests are a tool to show what you know, and they are only one test – there will be others. An end-of-test incentive may also help your child. Plan a reward like a movie, dining out or time with friends. (http://bit.ly/2zVIT6W)

Tips to help students before test day

Simple steps before test day can also be helpful for both performance and reducing anxiety:
• Minimize absences and don’t miss test day.
• Get a good night’s sleep before test day. Make sleep a priority by setting a reasonable bedtime and sticking to it.
• Eat a healthy breakfast. High-protein, low-sugar options are best for focus and concentration.
• Dress comfortably and in layers to avoid being too hot or too cold during the test.
• Arrive on time and prepared for the test. Start the day without stressful conflicts at home and leave early to avoid being rushed.
Strategies for students on test day

The key to a successful test experience is preparation. Students do best when they don’t rush and can really think about what they know and how to apply it – without stressing too much about what they don’t know. Remind them that the point of the test is to measure their knowledge, not point out their areas of weakness. A deep breath during stressful questions can help put the tests back into context.

There are a number of test-taking strategies that will help ensure the best possible test performance for students. Share these strategies with your child to help them do their best during the test:

- Review the whole test before you begin to determine how many questions there are on each section. Then budget your time accordingly so that you have enough time on the questions that might require more time to complete.
- Listen closely to the teacher’s instructions.
- Read any written instructions very carefully. Never assume that you know what they say.
- Answer every question. Unless there is a penalty for wrong answers, it can’t hurt to guess.
- Identify key words and underline them. This will help you focus on the most important aspects of the question.
- Rephrase difficult questions. It may help you to understand a question if you rewrite it in your own words, but be careful not to change the meaning of the question.
- Use all of the time that you are given. If you finish early, use that time to go over your answers.
- Read each question carefully. Many wrong responses occur because students fail to read the entire question. Often, wrong responses are written with that in mind.
- Try to come up with the answer on your own before reading the possible answers. Then check to see if your response is among the possible answers.
- Eliminate any answers that you know are wrong.
- Read all choices before choosing your final answer.
- Don’t change your initial answer unless you have a very good reason. Studies suggest that most of the time, your first choice is correct.
• Don’t get stuck on one question. Skip the question, mark it with an “X,” and come back to it later. Be sure to leave that line unbooked on your answer sheet until you come back to it.

• Use a ruler or folded piece of colored paper to guide you as you bubble in your responses. Students often miss questions because they did not bubble their response on the correct line.

• Keep a positive attitude throughout the whole test, and try to stay calm. If you start to feel nervous, take a few deep breaths to relax.

http://bit.ly/2CmMr9b