WHAT’S IN THIS ISSUE...

Communicating through video.
Part two in our series on using video to reach your audience includes information on why video is an essential tool, and how to get started as a district video producer.

The important relationship between superintendents and communications staff.
Developing an effective relationship with your superintendent is the first step in creating an effective communications program. Get tips from a veteran school PR consultant and National Superintendent of the Year Matt Utterback.

Tips for editors.
Your role as an editor can be a quick verification of facts to ensure accuracy or a more lengthy review for clarity. Your goal is to publish consistently good writing that is clear and error free. Use these tips to help you be an effective editor and writing coach.

Use an editorial calendar to plan your content and reach your audience.
Fans and followers are hard to attract and can be even harder to keep. The content you produce doesn’t hold attention for long. Use an editorial calendar to produce content more efficiently to reach more people.

Why and how to form your facilities task force
Funding facility improvements requires intensive research of needs and broad input from your community. Forming a facilities task force is a critical first step in the process to develop a capital improvement proposal for a bond election. Build your committee based on a common understanding of your purpose and timeline.

Insights for Parents: Student motivation
How do we get students to work hard and do their best? Research shows that positive – intrinsic – motivators, such as curiosity and natural interest, drive kids to want to do better. Read tips for increasing student interest and building intrinsic motivation.
Communicating through video: Creating connection and impact in external communications

This is the second in a two-part series on using video to communicate with your various audiences and stakeholders. Last month, the focus was on using video to communicate internally. This article focuses on using video to enhance your external communications.

Feel the power

As described last month, video is a powerful tool for engaging stakeholders. It can quickly and effectively share information, personalize and humanize your message, and create an emotional connection with the viewer. This last point is critically important. Few other communications media can make people feel something as strongly as video can. Let this emotional power work to your benefit.

As you plan out your video, think not only about what information you want viewers to take away from the video, but also about how you want them to feel. By connecting emotionally with your viewer, you increase the likelihood that they will remember the content of the video and have a positive association with your school or district. Videos that have emotional impact are also much more likely to be shared via social media or other avenues.

Why video? It’s all about the kids

One way to connect emotionally with your viewer is to keep students front and center. Our schools are all about our students. Unfortunately, what people often hear about are budgets, test scores, rankings, closures, or challenges faced by our schools. By bringing it back to the kids and letting them be the focus of the video, we remind viewers what our schools are really about and why it’s all important. Here are a few ways to feature students in an external video (with parental permission, of course):
Feature student voice: Letting students speak for themselves can be incredibly powerful. Students have a clarity and honesty that translates very well to video. Whether you are talking about the impact of a bond measure, the opening or closing of a school, or the launching of a new program or initiative, consider having students share their views, in their own words.

Feature teacher voice: Teachers love to talk about their students. Give voice to their passion, enthusiasm, and caring. Let them show you the innovative or creative ways they are instilling a love of learning in students. Provide an opportunity for them to share what they love about teaching in your school or district.

Highlight a personal success story: Trying to make a broader point with a video? Try going hyper local before you go more general. Pick a student story that illustrates your broader theme or a kid that has benefited from a program or approach. Feature interviews with the student, parents, teachers or others directly connected to the story. Keep it emotionally-driven and personal for greatest impact.

Show students actively engaged in learning: Certain learning activities really lend themselves to video. Capturing students engaged in active, creative, innovative learning makes great stock footage for any number of topics.

Highlight the diversity of your schools: Our students come from many cultural, economic, and racial backgrounds. Make sure to feature that rich diversity in your videos. You can have English Learner students say a single word like hello or welcome in their first language or have students say a few things about what they love about their family’s culture or traditions. This can be a powerful tool to create a welcoming and inclusive environment in your district.

Getting seen: How to feature videos externally

As with internal videos, the external uses for video communication are limited only by your creativity and time. Below are a few ideas.

Providing an overview of your district or school: A short video can be a wonderful way to introduce people to your school or district. You can feature such a video on your website or use it at community events to set the tone and provide common grounding about what
you are all about. You can also use it internally in new employee orientation as discussed in last month’s article. Overview videos should focus on students, your district’s vision, mission, and key goals, and anything that really sets you apart. This is your opportunity to market yourself to people who may not be familiar with what you do every day.

**Celebrating success at the student, program, school, or district level:** Whether you are using video to tell about a student’s personal triumphs over adversity or highlighting a school’s increased graduation rate or innovative STEM program, video is an excellent way to showcase and celebrate achievements.

**Sharing critical information:** People generally retain information better from videos or other dynamic mediums than from static printed materials. Whether you’re making the case for an upcoming bond, explaining a change in curriculum or program, or discussing a boundary change, video can be a valuable tool to help get the information out more broadly in a simplified, digestible manner. Utilize graphics and other tools to make complex topics more accessible.

**Leadership messages:** Leadership messages don’t just have to be for internal audiences. Consider having a welcome video on your website from your superintendent, principal, or board members. These short messages help to humanize leadership and provide parents and community members with a sense of who is leading their schools and what really drives those individuals.

**Recruitment:** A video can be a wonderful recruitment tool. A short video highlighting your district and featuring teacher reflections about why they love to work there can be hugely impactful. As with most videos, let teacher and student voices shine here. Showcase what makes your district special and unique.

**Staff profiles:** In addition to having videos featuring your leadership, your website can feature short videos on teachers or other key staff. Allow teachers to share what drives them, their hobbies, why they teacher, etc.
Producing a strong video

As with internal staff videos, keep some of the basics in mind:

1. **Be creative** – You truly are only limited by your own creativity. There are millions of examples of short videos online. Look around and see if there are impactful techniques or approaches you might want to try out.

2. **Don’t overscript it** – Let students, teachers, or leadership share what excites them. Take the best. Leave the rest.

3. **Keep it short and sweet** – Less is often more with video. Keep it short and sweet. Five minutes or less is generally best. Two minutes or less is even better.

4. **Have fun** – If videos aren’t fun, people won’t watch or share them. There is little worse than a boring video. Have some fun in making the video. Include people in the process who enjoy it and can add their own passion and creativity.

5. **Use emotional drivers** – Let your video be emotionally driven rather than informationally driven.

6. **Have a clear message** – Be clear about what you want people to take away from your video. If it doesn’t contribute to your central message, cut it out.

7. **Keep it kid-centered** – Our schools are all about the kids. Make sure that comes through loud and clear in your videos.

Resources


How to Create an Educational Promo Video for Your School [http://boldcontentvideo.com/2015/03/06/create-educational-promo-video-school/](http://boldcontentvideo.com/2015/03/06/create-educational-promo-video-school/)

The important relationship between superintendents and communications staff

The size of a communications team can vary from a multi-person staff headed by a communications director to communications being simply one of the many duties of the superintendent’s assistant. However, more and more leadership teams are realizing that in today’s competitive era of charter, magnet and private schools, a district must be able to effectively communicate its strengths to be more successful. That means more communication.

“In the century we live in, I think that education organizations need to look to our business colleagues, particularly in the area of marketing,” observed Matt Utterback, Superintendent of the North Clackamas School District, Oregon. Utterback was recently honored as this year’s National Superintendent of the Year. “Public education is becoming more competitive and our communications department needs to be focused on telling our stories and doing it through a marketing lens.”

Everyone knows how to communicate, don’t they?

Alas, the field of communications itself suffers from poor marketing! J. Marie Riche, founder and principal consultant at Ideal Communications, has observed that superintendents often don’t
understand exactly how the communications staff can be effective in achieving the goals of the district. “I am often a guest lecturer at the Superintendent Candidate Certificate Program, and that day I spend with them is often their one day spent solely on communications! Part of the problem is that superintendents may not, through their training, understand the importance of it and don’t know how to turn it from a personal skill into an organizational tool.”

Often, superintendents have risen through their field on the merits of their own communication abilities. This career success can make it difficult to recognize that good communication is obviously highly important in every facet of district life, but it should not be confused with Communications, with a capital “C.”

“There’s kind of an old PR saw – ‘Everyone thinks they understand schools because they went to school’ – and it applies to PR as well,” Riche notes. “Everyone communicates, so they think they understand the communications function.”

It’s a two-way street!

Riche points out that the misunderstandings go both ways. “I also often see PR people who do not fully understand the pressure of the superintendency.” You may have the most attentive and communications-focused leadership team on earth, but the superintendent has a lot of different pressures and considerations with each decision he or she makes, pressures of which the communications staff may be unaware. It is very possible that despite a communications director’s suggestion to go in a certain direction, the superintendent may choose to do exactly the opposite.

“I’ve seen PR people take things personally when they should not,” says Riche. “Painting with a broad brush, I would say that the one weakness I come across the most with my PR colleagues is that they take things personally in ways that are not helpful professionally.”

It’s easy to feel like your advice has been disregarded, but “once our feelings are hurt, we become less effective at giving advice next time,” says Riche. She has two pieces of advice for when you run across this situation:
1. Don’t take it personally!
2. As quickly as possible, move on and get strategic again.
   Even if your professional feelings were hurt for good reason.

“The faster you can get your head back in the game, the better. If you can take another look at your strategy, and you still feel your strategy is good, then you have to depersonalize it,” Riche suggests. “It’s important for the good of the team to figure out quickly how to advocate for your position without sounding pouty.”

Clearly, hurt feelings and missed opportunities are a result of misunderstandings. So how can we bridge this divide?

**A seat at the table**

In school districts large enough to have a dedicated communications/PR person, it is critical to have a strong relationship between the leadership team and the PR person. The communications staff needs to be well-informed and acting in lockstep with the superintendent and the leadership team, and that can only come from being fully informed.

“The PR person needs to be at the table for cabinet-level discussions, even if they are only at the coordinator level and everyone in the cabinet is at the director or executive director level,” said Riche. “They should ideally attend the majority of the cabinet discussions, even if organizationally there should be some topics that they might not normally be privy too.”

For districts with a part-time communications director, or staff that have multiple roles, a daily or at least weekly meeting with the superintendent is critical. Having everyone on the same page can mean that when a communications staff member sees an opportunity to build a relationship or a resource that the leadership staff has on the agenda, she can seize it, and move the whole team forward.
What does a successful team look like?

“When you have a really well-staffed and high-functioning communications department, they are doing regular internal check-ins about how they are doing on the steps of their strategic plan. They are attending some of the community meetings and acting as almost a facilitator to those meetings, following up with action items,” said Riche. “It’s a robust, back-and-forth engagement – reporting on it, tracking it and keeping projects moving.

Last November, the North Clackamas School District put up a $500 million capital construction bond for a vote. “We spent the two and a half years before the bond constantly telling our story,” explained Superintendent Utterback.

Before starting the campaign, the district had done a survey and found that the community didn’t have very positive feelings towards the local schools. There was simply no way they would ever pass that bond, especially in Oregon where bonds are a challenge to pass. The leadership team realized the community had very little knowledge of what their schools were up to.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for community members to be unaware of what’s happening in the school district. Around 60 percent of people in every community has no association with its schools because they simply don’t have any children in the school system. But these are the same community members who are asked to vote on the schools’ behalf.

“We used website, social media, advertisements in the newspaper and table tents at the mall,” said Utterback. “The communications department also utilized me as a superintendent.” Over the course of the community engagement program, Utterback gave more than 200 presentations to the community.

“Every PTA, every community organization, every school staff, and in some cases I visited them twice.” In each of his presentations he celebrated the district’s successes and laid out the plan for what they wanted to achieve in the future. As the district saw improvements in student data, attendance rates, and grades, Utterback and the
communications staff used that information to win over the community. “Over the course of two years, a lot of our community saw me one-to-three times and each time they saw this improvement in the story and they made connections with me. Suddenly the district wasn’t this bureaucratic monster.”

When their survey showed the community approval rating was at 80-90 percent, they put the capital bond on the ballot. “It passed in November with 63 percent,” said Utterback. “That is the highest or tied for highest ever in the state.”

Whether your district has a small communications staff or a large one, your goals are the same: successful students. Ultimately, North Clackamas’s investment in communications paid off in a big way for their district.

By following their communications plan, they were able to make the successes of their students and district self-reinforcing. The more positive news they had to report, the more community support they received, which paved the way for even more opportunities for their students.

*Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, Los Angeles-based freelance writer and communications consultant*

**TIPS FOR EDITORS: WHERE DO YOU START EDITING?**

A good editing process starts with a look at the calendar or clock. How much time do you have for the editing?

Triage your time. The less time you have, the more you should focus on the most-essential aspect of editing: double-checking for accuracy.

For example, seconds matter, not just minutes, when you’re writing or editing an urgent social media post or announcement about a security lockdown at a school. Urgency trumps perfection in grammar. You can, and should, come back to add details and fix any glitches in your original post.
The ADCs of writing

But for most writing, I teach the ADC hierarchy: accuracy, deadline, and clarity. Being accurate is No. 1, followed by meeting your deadline. Only then comes clarity of the writing. That is why it is important to build your editing timeframe with sufficient time to work on the clarity and purpose of the writing.

Where to start editing? By not editing. Avoid the temptation to jump into the weeds and starting “fixing” every little thing. Try to read the piece for content without making any changes. By doing so, you’re more likely to catch holes and major problems. Jot notes about what you find, instead of relying on your memory.

If you can, print the writing. Even though we strive for paperless offices, editing by hand is more accurate and effective than editing on a computer.

As you move through the writing, think about the writer’s frailties. Look for them. For example, I often stumble on days and dates. I use calendars and sticky notes to help me, but I still ask my editors – we all need editors – to double-check any references to days, dates or time zones.

In the same vein, I’ve supervised writers who were prone to misusing certain homonyms, such as “breaks” and “brakes,” or “its” and “it’s.” Other writers, including one of my bosses, frequently misspelled names; I made it a point to look up each person’s name and recheck it against a verified source.

As you consider the clarity of the writing, remember the first rule of editing: Do no harm.

Early in my career, I had a penchant for taking a piece of writing that was 90 percent good and doing so much rewriting that it became 85 percent good, then 80 percent, then …

Over-editing can cause as much, or more, harm as under-editing. For every change you make, you should have a purpose that is more than your own idiosyncrasies.

One of my grad school professors banned any form of “it” in students’ writing. As a graduate school course, it was a useful lesson, despite
my colleagues’ grouching. “It” and other pronouns can be unclear. Even more important, the ban was a realistic lesson in learning to follow the boss’ rules even when those rules are illogical. But try not to be one of those bosses, or editors.

With that in mind, here are techniques for improving clarity:

**Subject, verb, object:**
Encourage writers to use what writing coach Roy Peter Clark calls “right-branching” sentences. This sentence is an example of a right-branching sentence because it starts with the main thought. In contrast to the preceding sentence, this is a left-branching sentence, because it starts with an introductory phrase. Right-branching sentences are easier to understand than left-branching sentences.

However, be wary of rewriting too many sentences during editing; it’s too easy for the editor to introduce errors. And understand the different between writing errors and style differences. It’s not wrong just because you wouldn’t write it that way.

**Never assume:** If something seems unclear, check with the writer about what he or she meant, rather than assuming. It is better to leave an unclear passage as is than to make the wrong assumption and introduce an error.

**Prune:** Look for unnecessary words and redundancies.

**Conciseness improves clarity:** The more complicated the subject matter, the shorter the sentences should be. For example, one short thought per sentence is a good rule when describing something technical, such as providing operating instructions for a laptop.

**Five common errors to watch for**

1. Remember that “it’s” is the contraction for “it is” and “its” is the possessive form of “it.”
2. Don’t use apostrophes to form plurals, unless it’s the plural of a single letter or number, such as the Oakland A’s. The plural of Smith is Smiths (not Smith’s), the plural of Ramirez is Ramirezes (not Ramirez’), and the plural of Hughes is Hugheses (not Hughes’).

3. “There’s” means “there is,” so only use that contraction with a single item.

   Incorrect: There’s several days set aside for grading.
   Correct: There’s one day set aside for grading.

   Furthermore, “there’s,” “there is,” and “there are” are dead construction, so avoid them when possible.

   Better: One day is set aside for grading.

   Similarly, avoid excess words such as “a total of.”

   “Seventeen students will take the test” is better than “A total of 17 students … .”

4. Clauses that can stand alone as sentences cannot be connected by a comma. They must be joined by a semicolon or a word such as “and” or “but.” Or they can be separated.

   Incorrect: This essay is helpful, it will help me edit faster.
   Correct: This essay is helpful; it will help me edit faster.

   Or, this essay is helpful, and it will help me edit faster.

5. Periods and commas are the only punctuation marks that always go inside the quotation marks.

   Incorrect: The class is reading “For Whom the Bell Tolls”.
   Correct: The class is reading “For Whom the Bell Tolls.”
Incorrect: “My son enjoyed watching ‘Frozen’”, she said.
Correct: “My son enjoyed watching ‘Frozen,’” she said.

Final tips
When you make changes, always read the changes aloud s-l-o-w-l-y to catch any typos or other errors you might have introduced. And if you can, read the entire piece aloud slowly.

Remember, do no more editing than is necessary. The better you’ve trained people on writing, the less editing you need to do.

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DO YOU REALLY KNOW YOUR
Target Audience?

USE AN EDITORIAL CALENDAR TO PLAN YOUR
CONTENT AND REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

Attracting a follower, or even a view, can be a challenge. Fans can be fickle. Despite your hard work creating a social post, video or infographic, content has a short shelf life. Content is often seen and then forgotten. Consider these stats by Content Marketing Institute:
“The average half-life of content on Twitter is less than three hours. On Facebook, five hours will give you 75% of all the views you will get. An average article reaches just about everyone it’s going to reach in 37 days. 
http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2017/04/difference-content-content-marketing/

There is a lot of noise fighting for audience attention, and, collectively, our attention spans are getting shorter:

“According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, at the U.S. National Library of Medicine, the average attention span of a human being has dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013. This is one second less than the attention span of a goldfish. That’s right, goldfish have an attention span of 9 seconds – 1 second more than you and I.”
http://bit.ly/2pcKeY1

This makes the effort to keep our audiences informed about operations and programs in general and initiatives in particular much more challenging. To catch the brief attention of viewers who are also engaging with content from so many other sources, we need to churn out more content.

The struggle to engage people with more content – news stories, photos, videos and social posts – is real. Most of us are already stretched to the limit. We probably can’t add more to our busy task list without letting something else go. The key, then, is to simplify the way we produce content. We may be able to do a bit more if we can find a way to do it faster.
Understand your audience

The first step in creating the best content for your audience is to understand your audience. Your community may be different than neighboring communities, and your parent audiences may differ in information preferences from your community audiences.

Try a lot of different kinds of content and pay attention to how you are reaching them. If you conduct a community survey, be sure to ask how they prefer to get their information. You may be surprised that people prefer email news over social posts, or newspaper articles as a primary source of information.

Your editorial calendar is your guide to what and when to post

Teach people to watch for your news by distributing it regularly and consistently. One way to do this effectively is by keeping an editorial calendar. It can be very simple – a spreadsheet, a calendar app, a task list with dates – but it should help you keep track of the events that pop up and those that come around every year.

Key questions that will help you build your calendar:

- Who are you creating the content for?
- Why is it important?
- Who will produce it?
- What do you want your audience to get from the information?
Calendar tools

The actual calendar shouldn’t be complicated. Spend your time on the content and the messages. Use a simple spreadsheet in Excel, or a shareable Google Sheets file. This template by Content Marketing Institute is a good tool to start with: http://bit.ly/2p6F7bR. To use, go to File>Download As.

There are also project management, task list and tracking apps that may help you if you prefer mobile tools or have a team to manage. Try Trello, CoSchedule or Evernote. Google calendar also has shareable features and task lists.

However you build your calendar, be sure to include the basics: date, topic, author (if other than you), school or district contact, audience, material production timeline and status. Separate each item on this list into a separate category for easier searching later. You may want to know when you published that web story about a program at Your Town Middle School. Make it easy to find with a search feature built in.

Remember, you don’t have to build everything from scratch. Be sure to review your calendar occasionally to see which topics and content can be repurposed for repeated use, especially the events that happen in each school year.

The power of pictures

Everyone knows that pictures are powerful ways to get noticed. According to a Content Marketing Institute article, “Content with images gets 94% more views than content sans images. It doesn’t matter what industry, topic, niche, or specialty, images matter. Content with visual imagery also gets more social shares.” http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/11/visual-content-strategy/
This isn’t new information. Images have always been a better way to get noticed. They open to the door to the information you want people to see.

Is it better to include a poor quality photo than no photo? Maybe. Any photo may be better than nothing, but why take that chance? You don’t need a professional DSLR. Camera quality on most phones today is excellent. Combined with any of the free photo editing apps, there really is no excuse for terrible photos.

If you are looking for new photo apps for your mobile phone, the following are helpful and easy to use:

**Snapseed**: Snapseed was recently acquired by Google. It has filters, editing tools and the ability to share to social sites or download. *Available on Android or IOS, Free*

**Adobe Photoshop Express**: If you like Adobe tools, this app should be familiar. It’s a scaled-down version for quick mobile edits. *Available on Android or IOS, Free*

**TouchRetouch**: Try this app when you want to fix imperfections or eliminate elements in your photo entirely. *Available on Android or IOS, $1.99*

**PicLab**: This app is helpful for adding text to images. You can also create photo collages and add filters. *Available on Android or IOS, Free*

*Contributed by: Marcia Latta, communications consultant*
WHY AND HOW TO FORM YOUR FACILITIES TASK FORCE

Thinking about a construction bond election for a new school or to expand an existing one?

Long before you ever start sketching designs, pull together a facilities task force. That’s a critical first step in determining whether a new building is even needed or if there are other options. At election time, the recommendations of your facilities task force will carry considerable weight with voters and may be a major factor in the success of your bond.

The job of a facilities task force is to involve community members in the planning, construction, maintenance, and monitoring processes of your school district and to make recommendations to the school board. Their input will help you make a thoughtful and informed decision about how to address your facility needs.

And, just as important, the task force members become knowledgeable – and often passionate – about the district’s needs and become some of your best advocates if you do decide to proceed with a bond.

Who should be on the task force?

The task force should include 20-40 members with diverse backgrounds and expertise. Ideally it will include at least one or two parents, perhaps a student or two, staff members and a mix of citizen volunteers and local government staff. It’s helpful if some members have expertise in construction, maintenance and similar fields.

While guiding such a large committee can be challenging, it is worth the effort. Having so many different perspectives and areas of expertise will help you think through multiple options and also become aware of any concerns the community may have around facilities issues. In the end, you’ll develop a better bond proposal.

It’s important to believe – and to convey to task force members – that their mission is not to just rubber stamp whatever course of action the
district wants to take. Rather, this group has the important job of studying the issues in depth, looking at different options and ideas, and making recommendations.

The facilities task force should convene at least a year before you’re ready to go out for a bond. In some districts, the task force may meet once or twice a month over the course of 12-18 months to glean all the information to make the best recommendation. That’s a long time, but think of it as an investment in developing knowledgeable members who will make solid recommendations.

Some of the meetings may be spent on field trips, visiting various schools to observe firsthand and better understand the issues. Some meetings may involve presentations from architects and other experts who can offer background and information about particular situations. Other meetings may involve discussions over best practices or coming up with innovative solutions.

**Start with the mission**

Before beginning their work, the facilities task force needs to know why they are convening and the scope of their work:

- Are all schools in the district over capacity and class sizes too high?
- Do only one or two schools face overcrowding?
- Is your district considering adding preschool classes at elementary schools but doesn’t currently have room?

In each case, the role of your facilities task force will be to study the issue, review existing facilities and propose possible solutions. With help from district experts, it may be able to put dollar amounts on proposals before sending recommendations to the school board.

The scope of work should go beyond just recommending whether to build a new school. For instance, if your district is overcrowded, the charge should be to look beyond the current enrollment needs to what the future might hold.
Some things to consider:

- What does the community want in terms of school facilities?
- How do current spaces and technology support instructional strategies and desired educational outcomes?
- How do current facilities compare with those of similar or neighboring districts?
- What are the costs of building new versus repairing and maintaining or adding onto existing structures?
- How do the current attendance boundaries affect educational programs?
- What is the projected enrollment information by school over the next five or 10 years?
- What is the district doing to ensure equity across the district?

It’s smart to invite the media to attend facilities task force meetings. Through their coverage of the meetings, they can help the public understand the challenges the district is facing – whether overcrowding or dilapidated buildings – and feel the urgency of taking action. That kickstarts your information campaign and is a huge step in winning any bond measure.

While the official kick off to a bond campaign happens when the school board votes to go out for an election, the work really begins with the start of the facilities task force. The work done by this group lays the groundwork and begins the conversation with your community.

*Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant*
WHY ARE SOME KIDS DRIVEN TO DO THEIR BEST WHILE OTHER KIDS ARE EASILY SATISFIED WITH “GOOD ENOUGH”? HOW DO WE GET THE “GOOD ENOUGH” KIDS TO WORK MORE AND TRY HARDER?

It’s tempting to think that kids are born with or raised to either have an internal need to strive or a temperament that allows them to be comfortable with mediocrity. If that were true, we could let go of the constant battle to motivate unwilling children. But research suggests that motivation is individual and changeable. The following tips are from the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching (https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/).

The carrot or the stick: Extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation
Behavioral researchers have found student-driven motivation or rewards-based motivation has a more longer-lasting effect on children. They respond more positively to incentives than punishments.

Intrinsic motivation: Positive motivators are intrinsic – the carrot. They are the motivators that drive kids to want to do better, such as curiosity or natural interest.

“Intrinsic motivation can be long-lasting and self-sustaining. Efforts to build this kind of motivation are also typically efforts at promoting student learning. Such efforts often focus on the subject rather than rewards or punishments…On the other hand, efforts at fostering intrinsic motivation can be slow to affect behavior and
can require special and lengthy preparation. Students are individuals, so a variety of approaches may be needed to motivate different students.

**Extrinsic motivation:** Negative motivators, or consequences of failure, are extrinsic – the stick. This could mean an actual consequence, such as a loss of privileges or failure to achieve a reward, such as a scholarship or application acceptance.

“Extrinsic motivators more readily produce behavior changes and typically involve relatively little effort or preparation…On the other hand, extrinsic motivators can often distract students from learning the subject at hand. It can be challenging to devise appropriate rewards and punishments for student behaviors. Often, one needs to escalate the rewards and punishments over time to maintain a certain effect level. Also, extrinsic motivators typically do not work over the long term. Once the rewards or punishments are removed, students lose their motivation.

**Helping students build intrinsic motivation**
Children have different levels of motivation based on different learning styles. Deep learners want to master a subject and are easily motivated; strategic learners are motivated by rewards and want to compete against others or achieve recognition; surface learners are motivated by a desire to avoid failure and do the minimum to avoid the risk of falling short. Knowing your child’s motivational style is helpful in building intrinsic motivation.

Children must develop motivational skills for activities they want to do and for those they must do. Although ideal activities are those they choose themselves, sometimes they just need to do the things they are told to do.
To increase student interest in subject matter, help children find appealing areas of interest. These teacher tips can also help parents discuss school work with a reluctant child:

**Novelty:** I haven’t seen anything like it.
**Utility:** This topic has important ideas you will use again later in the lesson.
**Applicability:** Notice how relevant this is to the topic?
**Surprise:** This lesson has many uses, and you haven’t even seen them all.
**Feedback:** Read this to see if you really understood the previous lesson.
**Closure:** This is where you see what we’ve learned come together in a final lesson.

### Strategies to motivate children

**Become a role model for student interest.** Let your child see you pursuing your interests. Show energy, enthusiasm and passion for your activities and interests.

**Get to know your child’s interests.** Pay attention to what your child is telling you they are interested in. If they want to play bass in a rock band, they may be considerably less enthusiastic about concert piano lessons.

**Use examples to make your point.** If you make a decision about your child’s activities, explain how and why it will help them expand their skills for their area of interest. This opportunity to learn to play piano will help them understand music theory and will help them be a better bass player. And all bands need keyboard players, too.

**Use a variety of active learning activities.** Encourage active learning that lets children work through a problem to discover the
answer and lesson on their own. Allow collaboration if possible to build teamwork skills.

**Set realistic goals.** Be reasonable about how fast they should progress and how much time they should commit to. Encourage them to set their own goals. If the expectations are unreasonable, you risk a rebellion and loss of interest in the activity.

**Be free with praise and constructive with criticism.** Do not criticize the individual, but make comments that would help them improve. Be nonjudgmental and offer suggestions to improve.

**Let students control their education.** Allow your child to pursue their interests and take responsibility for the outcome. If they perform poorly, stress the connection between effort and outcome. Let them know that their achievement is within their control.  
https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/