What’s in this issue...

How to showcase the full range of your district’s programming
Schools do so much more than teach. All of these “extras,” including student and family support, community programs and extracurricular activities, contribute to student success. Does your community know about them? Read how to share your stories and increase understanding and support for all the work your district does.

Tip sheet for summer PR work
Summer is not a break for all staff. For communications staff, it is a valuable opportunity to catch up on work, update materials and assess the communications plan. After taking some time to catch your breath, use this quieter, slower time to do some housekeeping and prepare for the coming year.

Sample graduation speech
This sample speech can be used as a model speech to help you write your own commencement address for your graduation ceremony.

Teach your students civics by bringing candidates into the classroom
Election season is a great time to reinforce messages about civic engagement and community involvement by inviting candidates into schools to share their views. Read suggestions for planning a successful candidate visit to your classroom, school or district.

Insights: Play is the work of kids
Child’s play is much more serious and essential than it looks. According to child development experts, it’s the work kids need to do to explore, learn and develop both emotionally and socially. Read about why play is necessary and find resources to help your children with this important work.
SHOWCASE THE FULL RANGE OF YOUR DISTRICT’S PROGRAMMING

We all know that today’s schools do so much more than teach students how to read and write. While providing a solid foundation in the core academic subjects will always be central to what we do, it is only one part of the story. However, many people in our communities — including many parents — have no idea of all the services, programs, and supports that our schools offer. As we work to communicate more effectively with our communities, it can help to take some time to highlight some of these “extras” and paint a more holistic picture of our schools and district.

What to highlight

Every district has programs, services, or student supports that are not widely understood or are not receiving the recognition they deserve. Creating a list of these programs or services will give you a rich pool of potential stories to draw from as you work to round out the picture of what your district does. While each district’s list will be unique, here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Extra-curricular programs:
  o Do you have an amazing choir or drama program?
  o Have you added a new sports offering?
  o What unusual student clubs do you have?

- Extended day or out-of-school programs:
  o Do you offer a before or after-school program?
  o Do you have summer school programs or programs to help students transition from one grade range to another?
  o Do you offer preschool?

- Student supports:
  o What support services are available for students with disabilities or medically fragile students?
  o What counseling and college preparation services do you offer? Do you have a mentorship or buddy system in place that students can participate in?

- College preparation:
  o What AP and college credit classes do you offer?
  o What are your relationships with nearby community colleges?
  o Do students participate in internships or job shadows organized by your schools?
• Family supports:
  o Do you have parent education or language classes available to parents?
  o How can parents get involved in and volunteer with your schools?
  o Do you have an active PTA or PTO and how can parents get involved?

• Community programs:
  o Do you open part of your school (gym, computer lab, etc.) to community members?
  o What school events are open to community members and how can they find out about them?
  o How do your students get out in the community (service learning projects, field trips, etc.)?
  o What are your key community partnerships and how do they support your schools?

How to share your stories

You can share these stories through any of your regular communications channels. Here are a few ideas:

  o Set up a recurring feature that highlights these lesser known programs, services, or supports. This feature could be on your website (home page or somewhere else easily accessible) or in a monthly newsletter.

  o Feature these stories in social media. Brief program highlights are perfect for social media. “Did you know…”

  o Create a calendar of events and opportunities for engagement that is easily accessible on your website.

  o Showcase bigger stories in traditional media. If you have a program, partnership, or service that isn’t as talked about as it should be and there is something new, exciting, or timely to share, consider doing a press release or pitching it directly to your local education reporter. Reporters generally have limited time to find stories and are often grateful for story ideas, especially if you can connect them with students, educators, or partners connected to the topic.

  o Keep it short and pack a punch. Include an interesting fact or statistic. People don’t need to know every detail about a program, but they might be interested in learning the number of students taking internships each year or the percentage of students who receive support for specialized learning needs. Whenever possible, provide links to where people can learn more.

  o Why this is important

  o There tend to be a few educational topics that get the vast majority of media coverage and public debate — testing, graduation rates, school safety, and high school sports, among others. Helping to widen the conversation and paint a more complete picture of our schools and educational system can help to increase community connection with and support for schools. Whether you are trying to pass a bond, improve community
relations, or better connect with your families, introducing stakeholders to the wide range of important work going on in your schools can be critical.

- While much of your communications focus and energy will likely remain unchanged, it is worth looking for those untold stories, those educational “extras.” For while they may not be on the radar for many of our families and community members, it is often these “extras” that make all the difference for our kids. And as we ask for public support for our schools, it is important to make sure people understand the incredibly rich patchwork of services, programs, and supports that our schools offer.

Contributed by Crystal Greene, communications consultant

TIP SHEET FOR SUMMER PR WORK

Those lazy, hazy days of summer are fast approaching, when school is out, and the pace slows for a few months. The temptation is to take a long, deep breath and savor the quieter days without students and staff.

While it’s fine to enjoy a little downtime, smart PR professionals will take advantage of the more relaxed pace to regroup, recharge and get a jump start on the coming school year.

Reflect on the past year and identify areas to improve

These slower days provide an opportunity to look back over the past year and objectively assess how different strategies worked and whether major projects had the desired impact. That’s a luxury that you typically don’t have during the rush of the school year. Invite co-workers and other key players to weigh in and incorporate their feedback into planning for the new year.
Renew your networks

Taking time away from the office to network with other PR professionals can be difficult during the school year, but it’s important to nurture those connections. Meet for coffee or lunch with PR colleagues in neighboring districts at least monthly during the summer. Pick their brains about projects you are considering that they have done successfully in their districts. Share resources.

Work on professional growth

Summer is a great time to advance your own education. Consider becoming accredited in public relations and earning an APR designation, demonstrating competency in the knowledge and skills required to practice public relations effectively. Consider taking a professional development course, either online or in a group setting. Read a good book on communications. Attend conferences, such as the annual conference of National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), where you can learn new ideas and talk with fellow professionals about current issues.

Set goals

Identify the areas you want to concentrate on during the coming year and set specific goals to achieve the desired outcome. It’s not enough to just say you want to implement a parent engagement program, for example. Specify how you plan to engage the parents, how many parents you want to engage and how you will measure success.

Check out new products and resources

It can be tough during the hustle/bustle of the school year to find time to research and try new products. Schedule demonstrations of different products that might help you become more efficient and effective, such as online parent engagement tools, new web options and new graphic design software.

Update your web pages

Maintaining your district web pages is an ongoing task, but you can take advantage of summer’s slower pace to review your web pages and update them for the coming year. Upload your district and school calendars, update any board or committee member names, remove outdated information. Update policies and handbooks, post school supply lists and other back to school information.

Plan and schedule events for the coming year

Parents and staff appreciate knowing as far in advance as possible of any meetings they must or want to attend, so they can get the dates on their personal calendars. Schedule School Board, Parent Club and other regularly-occurring meetings for the entire year and post on the district website. Set dates for special events, so you can include an accurate calendar for the year in back-to-school packets.

Update photos

Summer is a great time to update your photo library with current photos of all schools, principals and district office administrators. It’s also smart to review artwork, such as images of school mascots, and update if needed.
Create brochures for each school

In this era where students and parents have many choices for schools — from neighborhood schools to charters to web academies — schools need to market themselves. Every school should have a professional-looking brochure that highlights programs, student achievement, parent involvement and the unique personality of their school. This can be a major project, especially in districts with multiple schools, so summer is an ideal time to tackle it.

Plan for “Back-to-School” activities

Get a head start on back to school planning, and draft “Welcome Back” letters to staff and parents. Create a video or PowerPoint presentation highlighting new staff to show at staff in-service. Finalize parent-student handbooks and other publications, so they are available at student registration.

Get organized

De-clutter your office and get organized. Sort through the stacks of papers and materials that have accumulated, file the good stuff, and recycle the rest. Clean out and organize your computer files and label appropriately, so it’s easier to find documents when you need them. By keeping organized, you will save time looking for things and will have more time to focus on important tasks.

Think Positively

One of the nicest things about working in education is that you get a fresh start every school year. Start the new year with energy and a positive attitude and be an inspiration for those around you.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant

Graduation, the most important rite of passage for most teens, is a chance to celebrate student accomplishments and inspire them for the next phase of life. For students, the graduation ceremony is a blur of activity, and most will not remember details well later. A good approach then is to leave them with a few moving thoughts to reflect upon, some warm feelings about their school past, and some excitement about their life after graduation.

Typical graduation speakers include the school principal, who has watched students grow during their high school experience and local school board members. They have a chance to remind students of their shared experiences and leave them with fond feelings that can follow them for decades after they leave high school.
A graduation speech from school dignitaries should not seek to achieve the immediate gratification of respect and admiration by the whole student body but rather a warm and fuzzy feeling about the school and the high school experience. As Maya Angelou said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

If, however, you can share wisdom that offers universal life lessons, then students would be lucky to hear it. You may even want to add it to the graduation program. For ideas and inspiration, check out The Best Commencement Speeches, Ever, compiled by npr.org (https://apps.npr.org/commencement). They have handpicked commencement addresses going back to 1774. The database is searchable by name, school, date or themes, which include embrace failure, remember history, work hard, be kind, change the world, balance, and dream.

**Sample graduation speech**

If you find yourself in need of more guidance to help you shape the right speech for this year’s ceremony, the following sample speech might help. It can be used “as is” or modified to reflect your style and district.

*Thank you, (Name of person who introduced you).*

*(Thank other appropriate presenters and dignitaries.)*

**Graduating seniors ... parents ... teachers ... administrators ... special guests ... as a member of the (district name) School Board I would like to welcome each of you here this evening to celebrate the graduation of the (insert High School) class of 2018.**

*You are here to stand for recognition of your efforts and your achievements. You deserve to be praised for perseverance, hard work and dedication. You have worked hard to meet our expectations for academics and social responsibility. We honor your efforts and hope that you will remember that the work you did was also for yourself and your future.*

*As you go forth, try to remember that your actions should help you reach life goals for continued learning, personal growth, stability, and community. You are an important part of your community — whichever community you find yourself in. You will enjoy the privileges that come from being a part of the larger social circle of community, and you will meet the obligations to contribute to the people around you.*

*There are many here who have made it possible for these young people to graduate this evening. I would like to start by introducing some of these people who are present on stage and who have had a positive influence on this district. (Name appropriate presenters and dignitaries.)*

*There is another group of individuals who cannot go unrecognized. Our teachers have had a great impact on these students. This team of educators spent many hours nurturing, guiding and interacting with students. They have also spent hours preparing lessons and providing instruction for our students during and outside of class.*
Our support staff, secretaries, custodians, and educational assistants also play a significant role in students’ education. I have a great amount of respect for all these groups and the work they do to make our students successful. Many of them have spent four years with these students. I would like to ask the teachers and support staff of (High School name) to please stand and be recognized.

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this important ceremony. Participation in this momentous occasion is one of the most pleasant and satisfying parts of being a (school board member, principal).

(pause)

Seniors, as you reflect on your high school experience and look toward exciting futures, I want to remind you of some simple lessons you were taught in kindergarten, the start of this educational journey. These lessons may be the most important lessons of your public school careers.

Robert Fulghum, a Seattle author, wrote a book several years ago entitled “All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.” I’d like to read an excerpt from that book.

“Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandbox at nursery school.

“These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don’t hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don’t take things that aren’t yours. Say you’re sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

“Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

“Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup – they all die. So do we.

“And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK. Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and sane living.

“Think of what a better world it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about 3 o’clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own messes. And it is still
true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.”

(pause)

It is my privilege to accept officially this graduating class and, through that action, to signify that these young people in the (school name) High School Class of 2012 have fulfilled the requirements of the state of (state name) and of the (district name) School District.

On behalf of the (district name, school board), I again congratulate you for your achievements and wish you success. May you always remember the lessons you were taught in kindergarten and continue to learn and grow throughout your life.

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant

TEACH YOUR STUDENTS CIVICS BY BRINGING CANDIDATES INTO THE CLASSROOM

This year’s election season provides an opportunity for schools to combine civics lessons with community involvement.

School classes can serve as venues for a variety of candidate appearances. The key is to plan well, involve students in that planning, and not promote one candidate or political party over another.

For more than two decades, I organized and led our newspaper editorial board interviews with political candidates. We held many of the sessions at area schools, including those with gubernatorial candidates. Almost all of them went well.

Schools also can host public candidate forums or class visits by political figures. Students and school districts benefit from having the politicians hear first-hand from students.

Well-prepared students ask good questions. They don’t pull punches. Student mental health, family homelessness, and inadequate textbooks were among the issues raised by high schoolers when my state’s governor visited their school this year.
A school district also can benefit from the potential public exposure involving politicians’ visits — as long as the visits are handled in a nonpartisan way.

However, news coverage is not guaranteed. Depending on your community and your local news media, the presence of politicians and candidates may or may not interest the media. (I live in a state capital, and in a state where public officials are considered highly accessible, so a school appearance by the governor or U.S. senator, let alone our town’s mayor, is no big deal.)

Thus the primary goal always must be to provide a beneficial, educational civics-learning experience for students. Publicity is a bonus.

**How to arrange visits**

Here are some tips, starting with editorial boards.

Editorials present the institutional viewpoint of a newspaper; the editorial board is responsible for determining the editorial topics and often the content. During election season, many editorial boards conduct endorsement interviews with political candidates, and then publish recommendations to voters about who stands out. Endorsement interviews are akin to job interviews, as editorial board members probe the candidates’ qualifications.

Some editorial boards stream the interviews live online and/or post videos afterward.

The editorial board subsequently meets privately to discuss whom to endorse. That distinction is important because it does not involve the school.

Some newspapers prefer to hold candidate forums but not publish endorsement editorials. Schools can be good sites for news media or nonpartisan civic groups to hold such forums.

In fact, a small-scale forum or class event can be a good way to gain experience. Work with your government, civics or journalism teachers to host a newspaper editorial board for a class discussion on a particular issue. Or do the same with a civic group.

Events rarely go perfectly, so the more experience you have, the more you’ll be able to adjust on the fly.

**Choose the right situation**

In presidential election years, the national contenders sometimes use school assemblies as platforms for campaign rallies. Be leery of those, unless every major candidate is given the same opportunity.

Just as schools should not be promoting any particular religious viewpoint, they should guard against promoting any one political viewpoint. It would be fine to have speakers representing several world religions (and none), just as it is to have speakers who represent the political continuum.

My newspaper editorial board interviewed all the major candidates for the same office at the same time. For the November general election, we might interview the Democratic and Republican candidates for governor in front of students in their high school auditorium. Or we would interview legislative candidates whose districts included the high school.
Primary elections can be trickier because a school should show no preference to any political party, even if that party dominates the state.

However, in my state, many local offices – including school boards – are nonpartisan, as are some statewide offices. Thus, those candidates could speak at schools, without allegations of partisanship, as long as all candidates were treated equally.

**Things to keep in mind**

Here are suggestions for how schools can effectively and appropriately host political candidates:

- The political races must be ones that include topics of interest to the students, which will vary with the school or community. Generally, the best races are those with strong connections to education, such as governor, state school superintendent, school board or legislature. But, for example, if county-provided mental health care or homelessness is a hot topic among students, county commission candidates might be of interest.

- Get started early. Some candidates plan their schedules months in advance. But be flexible. Newspaper editorial boards tend to be composed of last-minute people, so be gracious if an editorial page editor calls up and says, “Hey, we were wondering whether we could hold editorial board endorsement interviews at your school next week.”

- Know and understand the editorial board’s ground rules. I wanted candidates to feel they were listened to and were treated fairly, regardless of whether they later received our newspaper’s endorsement. During the interview session, we asked the same or similar questions of each candidate, we had time limits for their responses, and we rotated the order in which they answered questions.

- Have a civil discussion. Prior to the meeting, as well as at the beginning, I explained to the participants that we were interested in the candidates — their ideas, their experiences and their qualifications — but not what they thought of their opponents. I only held sessions at schools if I thought the race involved candidates who would act civilly, including treating the students with respect.

- The audience should be appropriate to the size of the room. A big auditorium with 25 students creates a bad vibe, whereas a classroom with 25 students is fine. In any case, ensure plenty of students will participate. I sought to arrange sessions that complemented what civics or government classes were studying at the time.

- Alert the organizers to potential disruptions. For example, one school had a variety of bell schedules, so bells would ring in the middle of our meeting.

- Work with the organizers to include written student questions. They can be submitted ahead of time. Or have a system for unobtrusively collecting questions during the session, but make sure students know how to participate.

- Unusual questions are OK; they break candidates’ reliance on preplanned answers and provide clues into their personalities. For example, “What was the most valuable lesson you learned in your first job?” Or “How would you compare yourself with today’s high
school students?" Skip the rude or truly irrelevant questions, such as, “Do you favor boxers or briefs?” (which also is sexist) or “If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be?”

- Provide water for the participants.

- Ahead of time, ask whether photos or videos will be taken, so you can ensure any student permissions are taken care of.

- Ask about microphone requirements and the desired room arrangements, and make sure you can accommodate them. At some sessions, we had candidates use lecterns. At others, we used tables. I always checked the arrangements in advance.

- So that you’re not caught in an awkward situation, be clear on whether other news media are welcome. I don’t think schools should favor one media outlet over another, so we never barred other media from sitting in and videoing our editorial board interviews in schools. Meetings at our newspaper office were off-limits to anyone other than the candidates and editorial board members.

- These are not campaign rallies. Emphasize treating everyone with respect, listening attentively and quietly (written questions are encouraged), and applauding only at the conclusion.

- **Never surprise your school administration. Keep them in the loop.**

If you’re hosting a candidate forum on your own, instead of with an editorial board or civic group, consider having students coordinate and conduct it. Just make sure everyone involved knows the ground rules. Roleplay potential scenarios ahead of time.

Through the years, I held editorial boards at high schools, community colleges, universities, law schools and elsewhere. Not surprisingly, I tended to go back to the places and people who were easiest and nicest to work with. And I made sure our newspaper publicly thanked them.

*Contributed by Dick Hughes, communications consultant. If you have questions about how to arrange editorial board visits to your school, contact your local newspaper. Or feel free to contact Hughes at TheHughesisms@Gmail.com, Facebook.com/Hughesisms or @DickHughes on Twitter.*
PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS TO PLAY

It is important that we provide time to play, encourage imagination and allow social opportunities with peers.

This encouragement helps students understand the need to enjoy fun activities — while learning and as a break from taxing school activities and chores. Not only does play help develop important traits for success throughout life, it also offers a chance to de-stress and increase productivity at challenging tasks.

**Kids don’t outgrow the need to play as they grow older, but they play differently. And they still need to have opportunities for play.**

Psychologist David Elkind, who wrote *The Power of Play*, defines play as a child “having choice in her pursuits, self-directing her learning and exploration, engaging in imaginative creation, and doing all these things in a non-stressed state of interest and joy.” [http://time.com/3726098/learning-through-play-teenagers-education/](http://time.com/3726098/learning-through-play-teenagers-education/)

Teen play helps reduce anxiety and relieve stress and helps students master skills that bring them a sense of fun and joy. Also known as leisure or hobbies, it lets them pursue activities that they want to explore. Art, music, team sports and video games are all examples of play that provide similar benefits to teens as early play does for younger children. These leisure activities and hobbies can help teens narrow their interest for possible career pursuits and build strong social connections with peers.

Play is the way to explore, learn, and develop healthy both emotionally and socially.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, there are 10 essential things to know about play:

1. **Children learn through their play.**
2. **Play is healthy.**
3. **Play reduces stress.**
4. **Play is more than meets the eye.**
   Play is both simple and complex. There are many types of play: symbolic, sociodramatic,
functional, and games with rules—to name just a few. Researchers study play’s many aspects: how children learn through play, how outdoor play impacts children’s health, the effects of screen time on play, the need for recess in the school day.

5. Make time for play.
6. Play and learning go together.
They are intertwined. Think about them as a science lecture with a lab.
7. Play outside.
8. There’s a lot to learn about play.
Some suggested resources include are listed here: www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/play
9. Trust your own instincts.
10. Play is a child’s context for learning.
Play provides rich learning opportunities and leads to children’s success and higher self-esteem.
www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/10-things-every-parent-play

How do they play?

Play evolves as children age, and it is important for healthy development.

Unoccupied play: Important exploratory play that looks like random movements.
Solitary or independent play: Children, especially very young children, are learning to entertain themselves.
Onlooker play: Observing other children playing while learning social rules and new vocabulary.
Parallel play: Children having fun near each other rather than with each other.
Associative play: Playing independently while engaging with other children.
Cooperative play: As children age, they begin using their social skills through group play.
Other types of cooperative play:
Fantasy play is pretending.
Competitive play is following rules and taking turns.
Physical play is strengthening fine and gross motor skills.
Constructive play is building things.
Symbolic play is self-expression or exploration, such as singing and art.
www.verywellfamily.com/types-of-play-2764587