What’s in this issue…

Add infographics to your content toolbox. Do you use infographics? They are an effective, visually appealing way to tell a story, and they are easier to design than you may think. Read tips for creating good infographics with easy, accessible online tools.

Adding student work to your content strategy. Schools and districts regularly share information about students, but how often do they share news from students? There are benefits to incorporating student voices into your content strategy: students gain workplace skills and schools expand the content and reach of their communications. Consider ways to include these voices without creating a lot of extra work.

Improving your attendance rates. Students can’t learn if they don’t attend school. Absenteeism is a serious problem for schools around the country. This is a problem for the whole community to address. Read tips for reaching parents, community and business representatives to help them understand the importance of school attendance and reduce absentee rates.

Making budgets easier to understand. Budget season is around the corner. Be sure that your budget process is transparent and understandable by outlining the process, sharing information and speaking in plain language.

Your primer for PR consultants: When, why, and how, plus do’s and don’ts. Consultants can help with special projects, planning and strategy or an extra hand when staff have too much to do. Do you know what to look for in a consultant, when to hire one and how much to pay? These tips can help get the most out of consultants providing assistance on contract.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Digital Fluency. Kids and teens spend a lot of time online, but media consumption is not a skillset. Today’s youth need to be ready for tomorrow’s tech-based jobs. Read about digital fluency and how to learn tech skills to become digitally fluent content creators.
ADD INFOGRAPHICS TO YOUR CONTENT TOOLBOX

Infographics are not new. As media consumers, we frequently come across these visual data tools that break down technical or complex information into easy-to-understand content.

They are effective because people are visual learners. Images increase engagement and help people understand information, and infographics, specifically, help simplify concepts and tell stories.

**How to use infographics.** They can be an effective part of any content strategy for any internal or external audience at the district level. They can also be used by schools to share information with parents and by teachers for instruction.

They can accompany almost any information you need to share, from proposed budgets to annual reports, administrative cost ratios, student achievement gains and bond election facts. In some cases, they can replace the stories you write about these topics.

Post them online and include links in key communicator and staff emails. Have colorful copies available at board meetings, forums, news briefings, staff in-service sessions, or just about any gathering you organize. Turn them into large posters and display in lobbies and at meetings, receptions and even at sports, music and graduation events.

**What is an effective infographic?** According to Creative Blog Art and Design Inspiration, “The best infographics should tell the story of a piece of data in an entertaining and concise way. Infographics should spark interest in the data story, and allow people to understand it at a glance.” [http://bit.ly/2LQoVFf](http://bit.ly/2LQoVFf)

Visme ([www.visme.co](http://www.visme.co)), an infographics and presentation content maker, breaks down the fundamental elements of successful infographic design:

1. It should tell a story.
2. It should lead your eyes through the information.
3. It should be well-structured.
4. It should send a clear message.
5. It should be visually appealing.
6. It should be accurate and well-planned.

https://visme.co/blog/best-infographic-examples/

For inspiration, there are countless examples of effective infographics online. Search the web for specific ideas and check out these examples of effective designs:

**The 56 best infographics**  [www.creativebloq.com/graphic-design-tips/information-graphics-1232836](https://www.creativebloq.com/graphic-design-tips/information-graphics-1232836)

**101 of the Best Infographic Examples on 19 Different Subjects**  [https://visme.co/blog/best-infographic-examples/](https://visme.co/blog/best-infographic-examples/)


**Tips for making infographics.** If your communications plan does not include infographics, there are easy ways to build these visual files without having graphic design expertise. A good design is essential, but first, you must plan and organize the information.

For tips, refer to “How to Make an Infographic in 5 Steps (Beginner Guide)” by Venngage.com, an online infographic maker:

1. **Outline the goals of your infographic.** Define your goals. Why are you making this infographic and what are you trying to communicate? This should include a very specific solution to a communication goal for your specifically defined audience. See the question pyramid for more information to help you flesh out the burning problem, supporting questions and probing questions that will be the basis for your graphic.

2. **Collect data for your infographic.** Start with your own data (test scores, absentee rates, teacher education levels, etc.) and add supporting data through online searches of census data, Pew Research, Google Scholar, etc.

3. **Visualize the data for your infographic.** One strategy is to use the ICCORE method to determine the primary goals for your data: Inform, Compare, Change, Organize, Reveal relationships, or Explore. Visit the site for examples.

4. **Layout your infographic design.** Your design should have a natural information flow and a grid layout to add structure and balance. A grid is a predefined symmetrical layout of columns and rows. It is a standard structure in graphic design that provides an order and helps guide the reader through the design.

5. **Add style to your infographic design.** Pick fonts that are simple. As this is a visual summary, be sure to only include text that is necessary for understanding concepts and supplementing visuals. Don’t be afraid to use large headings and subheadings. In fact, be sure to use big fonts to call attention to your messages. Choose colors carefully, and follow the principles of good design: alignment, consistency, repetition, negative space and color.

[https://venngage.com/blog/how-to-make-an-infographic-in-5-steps](https://venngage.com/blog/how-to-make-an-infographic-in-5-steps)
Use templates and tools. You don’t have to be a professional graphic designer to make infographics. It helps to have an understanding of good design, but there are many free and fee-based tools and templates that will help you create a good data image.

If you are a design novice or lack the time to design from scratch, take a shortcut with an online infographic tool. Read reviews on Creative Bloq’s list of 19 incredible options. Here are the top five on the list:

1. **Piktochart**: Entry-level tool with customizable templates. [www.piktochart.com](http://www.piktochart.com)
2. **Biteable**: Free high-quality video infographics for social media. [www.biteable.com](http://www.biteable.com)
3. **Mural**: Fee-based interactive, collaborative design tool. [www.mural.co](http://www.mural.co)
4. **BeFunky**: Free customizable template library for exportable infographics. [www.befunky.com](http://www.befunky.com)
5. **Visme**: Free infographic maker with more than 100 free fonts, a large image and icon library and the ability to include video, audio and animations. [www.visme.co](http://www.visme.co)  [http://bit.ly/30KQVP2](http://bit.ly/30KQVP2)

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant

**ADDING STUDENT WORK TO YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY**

As you sketch your school communication strategies, consider how you can involve students’ work.

There are many benefits. Parents, taxpayers, and staff members learn from reading, seeing, and hearing first-hand student experiences. The process of creating these submissions enables students to broaden and apply their communication skills, and their storytelling can expand the content and reach of your communication channels. And they may stand a better chance of getting difficult messages across to parents and guardians, from guidance on why not to be a helicopter parent to why consistent school attendance matters so much. After all, youth are the experts on their lives.

For school communicators, there also are at least three self-serving — but very worthwhile — reasons to incorporate student submissions. One is that students bring energy, which can be a refreshing antidote to a draining day at the office. A second is that students always are doing something interesting, and often want to share their news, so there is no shortage of material. A third is the reality that the student becomes the teacher: working with students will improve your skills and understandings in unexpected ways.

You might start by brainstorming ways for student involvement. Think broadly. Consider:
The outlets: school district, individual schools, classrooms, parent/teacher/student groups, businesses, civic organizations, local governments, news media, and others. The methods: websites, social media, newsletters, meetings, public events, and others. The format: videos; essays, letters and other writings; soundtracks; photographs; computer programs; and in-person speeches and presentations. The student work: original content produced for your distribution; work done for a class or club project; or work put together with the help of a teacher, coach, club adviser or another adult.

Student content strategy. The options are so widespread that you could spend all your time curating student submissions. Instead, find opportunities that offer good returns on your time investment, add something new or different to your communications, and/or target a specific audience or need.

For example, student submissions can help get the school year off to a strong start for students and families. Pre-K and kindergarten students certainly will have different contributions in this regard than high school seniors, but all can be valuable to your audiences.

Because a new academic year can be scary, peer stories can help alleviate those fears. High school students could put together video interviews with students and/or staff on such topics as “What it’s like going to school here,” “How to make new friends in school,” or “What I wish I’d known on the first day of school (with answers).”

Young students could be asked to list words to describe their classroom or their school day. Their communications might be put together as a photograph, collage or composite video of interview snippets, which would entail help from staff. In any case, the project should start in the previous school year so it will be ready before the new year.

Tips for a productive student newsroom. Here are things to keep in mind, whether you are dealing directly with student submitters or working through district staff:

• Think about how you will solicit contributions, how you will graciously weed them out if there are too many, and how you will encourage more if there are too few.
• Tap into interests, such as a student’s desire to put together a regular sports podcast, a review of the week’s scientific advancements or a cooking show.
• Capitalize on already produced work, such as student radio, TV or newspaper stories that you can republish through your channels.
• Be clear, without going overboard, about what you’re seeking. Your role is to encourage opportunity, not throw up obstacles.
• Treat the students with the same respect and cordiality as you would anyone else. As much as possible, these presentations should be done from the students’ perspective. They need to be authentic, not perfect, so a light editing touch is preferable. On the other hand, the results should not embarrass or make fun of anyone.
• Have clear deadlines and, as necessary, check-ins with students. Help them learn and apply the stages of project development, such as through using Gantt charts or project management tools. What is important is that they get the work done in time for your use, so be willing to bend arbitrary deadlines as necessary, and permit them to develop better work habits over time. As with any project, build in time for things to go wrong.
• Listen for the students’ questions instead of making assumptions.
• Seek ideas from district staff about students who could contribute submissions — whether something prepared for you or something already done. (My first professionally published piece was a vocabulary essay written for my 10th grade English class that my teacher, Mrs. Abernethy, suggested I submit to the local newspaper as a letter to the editor.)
• Appreciate that everyone is overworked. Look for mutually beneficial opportunities to capitalize on what students, classes and clubs already are doing.
• Create templates so you don’t have to reinvent the relevant information each time.
• Only ask for as much as you can handle.
• Have fun. Keep brainstorming.

Contributed by Dick Hughes, communications consultant. Contact him at TheHughesisms@Gmail.com.

IMPROVING YOUR ATTENDANCE RATES

It’s a simple truth: students can’t learn if they’re not in school. Yet more than eight million students across the United States miss so many days of school each year that they are academically at risk.

It’s a serious problem, and no state is immune. Oregon and Washington, for example, both have rates of chronic absenteeism that rank among the highest in the nation. In 2015-16, about 23% of students in Oregon and 27% of students in Washington missed three weeks of school or more.

People sometimes blame negligent parents for not caring enough to make sure their children get to school, or older students choosing to skip school. But many times the absences are tied to health problems, such as asthma, diabetes and mental health issues, or family circumstances, such as lack of a car, the need for daycare for younger siblings or job instability.

Whatever the reason, absenteeism from school has serious consequences that can impact children’s future success. Did you know…

• Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year? Half the students who miss 2-4 days in September go on to miss nearly a month of school.
• Poor attendance can influence whether children read proficiently by the end of third grade or will be held back.

• By sixth grade, chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school.

Why should we care? While it’s easy to think chronic absenteeism is a parent problem or a school problem, it’s actually a community problem. It should matter to all of us whether the children in our community are in school and getting a good education.

Business leaders understand this and support efforts to keep students in school. They know that:

• Absenteeism contributes to high school dropout rates. If students aren’t in school, they’re not acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to compete in the modern workforce.

• School helps teach students the “soft skills” — such as punctuality, dependability and stick-to-itiveness — that are critical for success in the workplace.

• When children miss school, their parents often miss work in order to care for them. So employers have a real stake in reducing the number of days that children stay home.

Many states have started aggressive campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of regular school attendance and to reduce chronic absenteeism. The state departments of education list a variety of resources for both parents and educators on their websites. Another good source is Attendance Works, a state and national initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism. Its website, attendanceworks.org, offers strategies and tools for addressing chronic absenteeism. Among the resources listed is a parent engagement toolkit.

Strategies for reducing absences. By working together with parents, businesses and communities, schools can make a positive impact on reducing absenteeism and keeping students in school and learning. Here are a few ways educators can help prevent or reduce absences:

Make school a welcoming place. One of the best ways to combat absenteeism is to ensure that school is a place where students want to be. Assign staff members to stand in the entrance each morning to warmly greet students and their families and make them feel welcome. Plan fun and educational activities throughout the year that motivate students to come to school. Establish positive behavior expectations that encourage students to be kind and act appropriately. Implement anti-bullying strategies so that students feel safe and welcome.

Communicate attendance expectations. Reach out to families before the school year begins to stress the importance of regular attendance. Use your “welcome back” letters and social media to communicate about how important attendance is for student achievement. Emphasize why being on time and in school matters. Hang posters that illustrate the importance of regular attendance for student success.
Form an attendance team, and intervene early. An attendance team can play a critical role in helping schools reduce the number of student absences. Attendance should be monitored daily, and criteria set for when the attendance team is notified. For example, the criteria might be to notify the team if a student is absent more than two days in a row or a certain number of days in a quarter. With early intervention, the team can step in before attendance becomes a bigger issue, and meet with parents and offer additional resources if needed.

Celebrate successes. Set school goals for attendance, and then celebrate progress toward those goals throughout the year. Create ways to celebrate successes along the way, such as school assemblies or monthly pizza parties for the class that has the highest attendance. Offer individual rewards to students who meet attendance goals.

Don’t forget the parents. Parents want the best for their students, but sometimes they don’t understand the negative impact of too many student absences, especially in the early grades. Keep them informed about your attendance strategies and school goals, and offer resources to help them improve their child’s attendance.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant

Making budgets easier to understand

Budget season for next school year is around the corner, and now is a good time to prepare. School budgets are complicated, influenced by difficult-to-explain variables like federal and state mandates, and part of a long process that may seem daunting or inaccessible to members of the public.

Sharing information through existing communication channels is only effective if you can engage people enough to bring them along through the process. Generally, there is a lack of interest unless budget decisions threaten special interest projects for groups or constituencies.

Setting budgets is a key role for school boards. Your staff, parents and community may seem apathetic during the process, but you should continue efforts to educate and engage them, especially if there is a likelihood there will be complaints after it is adopted.

Outline the process. Be sure that the district calendar includes all budget meeting dates, locations and times. Make a note of meetings that will allow time for public input. Post it on your website and publish to your social media channels.

Include a budget section on your website that has a list of budget committee members, links to policy, key dates such as the adoption date, and links to past approved budgets. Summarize the
process in a handout of infographic with clear and simple charts and graphs or a divided dollar bill.

Use plain language that is easy to understand and explain references to factors that affect the district’s budget: program mandates, the status and amount of legislative appropriations and outside funds that are restricted, such as bond money for capital projects.

**Watch your language.** Information about budgets can get muddled by technical terms that can be confusing to people who don’t deal with government funding processes. These tips can help improve understanding of budget issues and terms:

Relate the school budget to a household budget. Discuss income (revenue), expenses (bills) and contingency funds (emergency fund) in terms that everyone can relate to.

Avoid acronyms. This is a good rule for educational operations and programs in general. If you work at the district office, you are fluent in educationalese; if not, you probably need a translator. Be aware of terms like APCs (associated payroll costs), FICA (Social Security), FTEs (full-time equivalents), etc.

Other terms that may need translation:
- **Fiscal year:** A 12-month period covered by the budget, usually from July 1 to June 30.
- **Revenue or income:** Available funds from local taxes, state and federal government and other sources.
- **Expenditures:** The amount of money the district spends to operate schools, including salaries, supplies and materials, facility operational costs, transportation, etc.
- **Fringe benefits or associated payroll costs:** Total employee costs except salaries. These costs are usually part of a collective bargaining agreement with employee unions, and they include insurance, retirement, social security, workers’ compensation, unemployment insurance and paid time off.
- **FTE:** Full-time equivalent is the number of employees a district would have if it totaled all employee hours and divided them by eight hours per day, a full work day. For example, six part-time employees working four hours a day is equal to three full-time equivalents.
- **Contingency fund:** Money set aside in the budget for emergencies or unforeseen expenses.
- **Reserve fund:** A fund established in the budget to set aside money from one fiscal year to another for a specific purpose.

**Break costs down. Many people can’t relate to the big numbers in school budgets.** Translate million-dollar terms into single dollar terms. If $60 million of your $100 million budget is allocated to teaching and $4 million is for administration, say, “Sixty cents of every dollar is spent on teaching and learning. Four cents of every dollar is spent on administration.”

**Keep them informed.** Continue to share information throughout the budget process. Post the superintendent’s message and budget proposal as soon as it’s available. Contact your local
media to share information. And don’t forget to talk to staff. They are relaying information to parents and community members in their networks. Be sure they have the latest news.

**Staff are trusted information sources.** Staff members are trusted sources of information. Enlist them to tell your budget story. Simply by talking to friends and neighbors about budget issues, well-informed staff members can raise community awareness and support.

From bus drivers to administrators, staff members have a wide circle of influence: neighbors, friends, relatives, parents at their schools or their children’s schools, friends and acquaintances at clubs and churches, temples, or synagogues. If they have the facts, staff members have the opportunity to share about school funding and the budget process in a personal way whenever those conversations occur.

Informing staff about budget issues and decisions, inviting their input, and involving them closely in the budget process can create or strengthen a sense of connection and ownership of district-level decisions. A staff member who feels deeply connected to the district can be a powerful advocate for schools among his or her circle of influence.

Provide your staff with access to tools to help them understand and communicate the intricacies of school funding, such as:

- Side-by-side charts that show funding sources and changes in funding over time.
- Charts that show categories of allocations and percentages. Make sure it is clear how much of the budget goes to teaching and learning.
- Lists or charts that show mandated vs. non-mandated expenditures.
- Charts that show funding per student vs. cost per student.
- Background on the rationale or priorities used to make budget decisions.

Ideally, the superintendent and/or board chair should be available for questions from staff. If you plan a speaking tour about your budget, include school staff meetings in the schedule.

Make sure staff members hear about new issues or decisions internally before information is shared with the community. This is crucial to building a sense of belonging to a team among your staff.

Keep staff up-to-date on budget issues and decision-making. Include a budget update in every issue of the staff newsletter, or send out a budget update email on a regular basis. Make sure staff have access to budget committee meeting times and minutes. Provide staff with scenarios and tips, such as how to answer difficult questions, or how to handle someone who is misinformed or angry.

And finally, be sure staff know how to share this information. Let them know if you are asking them to post on social media, respond to questions as employees or stay informed so they can answer questions.

*Contributed by Candace Wilson, communications consultant*
YOUR PRIMER TO USING PR CONSULTANTS  
WHEN, WHY AND HOW, PLUS DO’S AND DON’TS

Your primer to using PR consultants  When, why and how, plus do’s and don’ts

Ever wonder why folks “just don’t understand and support us these days?” You’re posting on social media, keeping your website current, sending emails, robocalls or using text messaging to reach parents — all the right stuff.

Or maybe you’re facing a crisis — or just want to introduce your new superintendent and feel unsure about being effective in today’s sadly familiar “fake news” environment.

A consultant can help — not only with great solutions, but in using those scarce “outside vendor” resources wisely, often in unexpected ways with benefits lasting far beyond the life of the contract.

A consultant is not a silver bullet — but they come to the rescue. These experts offer deep levels of expertise in specific areas, or they can provide an overall view of what you should be doing to communicate and build support. They can deliver a short-term project like a focus group, help you ease the pain of closing a school, or transition your “brand” with a new logo and presence in social media.

When should you hire one? If you already have a good PR plan and know what you need, contractors can fill in the gaps for things needing a professional touch, such as videos, writing features/speeches or web content.

If you don’t have a plan, and find yourself “needing a brochure” (red flag!) a good expert won’t simply do what you ask — he or she will help you dig deeper to learn what need or problem you need to fix.

A good consultant should also give “value-added” benefits such as new tools and ideas the staff can continue on their own.
**When not to hire.** If you already have a good two-way, systematic PR program in place, you’ve passed a recent finance measure, you have feedback tools suited to each audience and are proactive when issues emerge. However, consider just an audit, or an hour or two of a consultant’s time to “brush up” your efforts with new ideas. Check the NSPRA website (www.nspra.org) for resources.

**What is the MOST important thing a consultant can do for you?** Provide insight or tools you haven’t thought of. They should recommend system improvements (even if they are doing a very small project), in a neutral and unbiased way.

Consultants should leave behind tools/templates that make the project easily repeatable.

**How do they work?** Some contracts are long-term, or cyclic in nature. Most contracts are time-limited, should have a termination date and be very specific to an organizational need — preferably one based on research (or the need for it, since consultants are experts in that area.)

Meet with a prospective consultant, or buy an hour of their time (or ask if they would do this pro bono) to discuss whether your needs fit into a short-time service, or something cyclical. A good contractor will be honest — and would welcome the opportunity to meet again!

Most long-term large contracts (over $10,000) are conducted through formal requests for proposals (RFPs) and are conducted through a formal bidding process. Work with your business staff on setting these up.

**What do they cost?** Consultants often charge up to three times above what their salaried peers make per hour. That’s because they do not cost overhead, benefits and are legally responsible for their own equipment and all operating costs, from insurance to taxes. That is why it is important to ask for documentation of legal status. The higher cost is also because they:

- Get things done quickly and on deadline and often have relationships with vendors that drive down some of the hard costs of a project (like catering or printing).
- Can get a unique or “solo” project done (a very special event or new program) because it may be their only focus, unlike what your busy staff face every day.
- Gain new insights into a situation, because they’ve already done these projects for others.
- Problem-solve new solutions to issues or barriers that may be currently affecting organizational performance. People tend to trust them because they’re the “independent third party expert.”

**Common contract options and terms** Because of the open-ended nature of a scope of work, the client (you) and the consultant may agree to:

- An open, hourly billing system (depending on your location, most consultants bill at least $175/hour),
- A project retainer, which may be subject to “change of work” orders if your organization alters or makes additions or changes to a scope of work.
- A flat project fee.
Do not be put off by a high hourly rate. Savvy consultants should offer you audited hours along with their invoice. You may be surprised at how fast and cost-effect they are.

Ask what they’ve charged for similar projects with other clients.

**How do they manage their time?** It is the consultant’s responsibility to monitor their time, define and, if necessary, refine the scope of work.

Depending on your agreement, they log hours worked, although mileage costs should be part of the overall cost you agree to, unless otherwise noted. Contractors usually build those costs into the contract.

Make regular “check-in” times, even by phone, text or email, part of your agreement to discuss progress.

**What questions should you ask a consultant?**
- Consultants should be able to address how and why they bill.
- They must be able to document their legal status as a licensed independent contractor.
- Ask for references, especially from other districts or public organizations. They should have a list handy, or if they have a website, look for testimonials.
- Interview them much like you’d interview an employee candidate. They should treat this opportunity as a job interview.
- Ask to see their portfolio. If they’re able to post some work online, that’s a good sign, although realize their work is proprietary. Make sure they use a variety of tools, from social media to printed publications (your active senior voters still read those.)
- Judge their seriousness about learning your needs. They should ask for data, access to your communication tools, and they may even ask for a list of parents, businesses and other key communicators to contact, depending on the depth of the work you need.
- If they are providing photography, clarify how often you may use their photos, (i.e., who “owns” the photo?). Some photographers allow a one-time-only use since they own the rights to their work.
- Ask what they’ve charged for “similar work” with other clients.

**What questions should you expect the contractor to ask YOU?**
- The questions they ask will tell you whether they’re a good choice. Don’t let a consultant waste your time. Within a 60-minute interview, they may ask for everything from your organizational chart to your mission statement. That’s okay. But don’t overshare before a contract is signed.
- If the work is under a formal RFP, most of the questions about the scope of work should already be answered. However, the consultant should be entitled to ask questions about individuals or teams they may be working with and how the work is to be approved.
- The scope of work of the project may dictate that the consultant (after they are hired) will need to interview and speak to several other staff members.

**Where do you find them? Word of mouth? What qualifications should they have?**
- Consultants are typically listed on their professional association directory and have a strong online presence.
- Meet them at workshops, civic events, or through articles they’ve published.
- Ask colleagues and non-biased third parties for a referral.
- Consultants should have background information detailing education, experience any
credentials and details about how they work.

- Do not choose a consultant exclusively on their LinkedIn account or website. Meet them face-to-face or on the phone. Many great consultancies are now virtual.

SIDEBAR

The Do’s and Don’ts of working with contractors

**DO** hire based on personality and past performance. There must be a good feeling of trust in a consultant.

**DON’T** expect them to meet with you or your team more than two times before you are able to either accept or decline their services.

**DO** expect the consultant to ask lots of questions about your organization before and during their work. It shows they’re doing the research.

**DON’T** expect “lots of emails.” Good consultants let their clients know what they are doing, but don’t “nag” with too many email reports or phone calls.

**DO** use a formal RFP process for long-term or major work, including a time, before the RFP is due, when the consultant can ask how you think progress.

**DON’T** expect a consultant to know your organizational culture instantly. But **DO** expect them to pick up on these important internal realities very, very quickly.

**DO** rely on first impressions. The consultant’s “vibe” should be revealed by a face-to-face interview followed up by calls to references.

**DON’T** sit on the bill. Most of us folks are very small businesses with big bills to pay.

**DO** ask for regular reporting, especially if the consultant does not offer this. Most will have several types of progress reporting tools in place to offer. **Hint:** professionals love to see results of their work, which encourages them even more. There’s nothing more frustrating than to recommend a plan and not see progress being made.

**DO** expect accurate invoicing — no “sticker shock” when the consultant invoices your organization.

*Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former public information director for the Oregon School Boards Association; senior content specialist for Salem Health.*
Digital Fluency

If we measure technology skills by how much time kids and teens spend online, they must be digital experts. Daily consumption of digital media by kids is estimated at more than 10 hours a day for all screen time (http://bit.ly/2niZ6Va).

But media consumption is not a skillset. The jobs of the future will require mastery of technology and the ability to create new content — not just watch it.

The difference between digital literacy and digital fluency

If you can use devices proficiently and navigate apps with ease, you are digitally literate. That’s step one, and it is an important skill. Kids learn to use games and stream videos at very young ages. They are comfortable around the technology — they have basic competency.

Step two is mastering digital tools in order to apply skills in one technology to another. It is digital fluency.

“How is digital fluency different from digital literacy? In learning a foreign language, a literate person can read, speak, and listen for understanding in the new language. A fluent person can create something in the language: a story, a poem, a play, or a conversation. Similarly, digital literacy is an understanding of how to use the tools; digital fluency is the ability to create something new with those tools.”

— Jennifer Sparrow, Senior Director of Teaching & Learning
Penn State University (http://bit.ly/35gD6LM)

Being fluent means participating in conversations rather than just understanding them. Digital fluency moves students from being content consumers to content creators with skills that translate to a variety of platforms. It is “the ability to move nimbly and confidently from one technology to another.”

Tips to help children build digital fluency

“A report by the World Economic Forum notes that 65% of the children in primary school in 2017 will have jobs that do not yet exist and for which their education will fail to prepare them.”
https://cnn.it/332vpql

Today’s children need excellent technology skills for their future careers and in general, so they can access the educational and financial opportunities in an increasingly digitized society, opportunities such as job applications, personal finance, healthcare, community engagement, and so on. Building digital skills is a lifelong process, and the skills will evolve as technology changes and new developments arise.
Parents can help their children learn skills now that will pave the way for future learning as technology changes and give them confidence to try new things and make good technology choices.

**The Tech Advocate outlines the following essential skills for future work:**

**Coding:** a universal language that is useful for technical and non-technical careers. A basic understanding of computer language such as HTML and CSS creates a shared understanding and a sense of knowing what can and cannot be done with web pages. Find free lessons online at Khan Academy or Code.org.

**Collaboration:** online project management tools such as Basecamp, Trello and the collaborative functionality of Google Docs allows a student to begin experimenting with effective online collaboration.

**Cloud Software:** an essential part of document management. The cloud is used to store everything from photos to research projects to term papers and music. Students must also know how to find and access the files they save in the cloud.

**Word Processing Software:** used with collaboration and cloud software. Google has a suite of products and Microsoft Office is an office standard. Word processing apps provide an easy way to learn new interfaces for the same tasks. Be sure to have your student practice with different ones.

**Screencasting:** use screencasting apps to produce beginning videos. This is a great way for the novice videographer to make effective videos, which is a useful skill for explaining a topic as well as articulating what you are thinking. Ideal tools for teaching students how to screencast include Screencast-o-Matic and Camtasia.

**Personal Archiving:** essential for organizing our massive digital footprint. Students must learn skills to archive information so they can access it later. Students should be taught concepts such as metadata, tagging, keywords, and categories succinctly and directly to help them start thinking about how they are represented online.

**Information Evaluation:** reinforcing critical thinking skills to judge credibility of sites and information. Students should know how to identify credible sources and where to go for trustworthy information.

**Social Media Savvy:** important because social media serves different purposes depending on the user, the technology, and the need. Students must have guidance and an opportunity to practice using various social media.