



## Looking Back/Thinking Ahead by Shari Prest, Ark Associates

**Finding time for public relations can be challenging when schedules are overloaded and pockets of resistance exist. It is essential to student improvement and support for our schools to change how we relate to people within and outside of our schools in these dynamic times.**

Summer is the best time for school leaders to review the accomplishments of their schools and students and begin to formulate plans for how they can be even better the next year. Sometimes those changes are little and sometimes they are big, but they always require an element of communication to make them most effective. Grade yourself on the following, and then determine the value of improving in each of these areas for the future.

### **Communicating with colleagues**

**Do you capitalize on the summer months to engage with colleagues who may face similar issues and opportunities and to explore their insights?**

- Share information about best practices and initiatives.
- Solicit ideas on a specific issue you are dealing with in your job.
- Stay updated on MASSP, MASA, and MESPA websites; publications; and events.
- Discuss and explore the future direction of public education.

### **Communicating with staff members**

**Do your summer communications address the accomplishments, challenges, and areas for improvement from the academic year that has ended? Do your summer communications make clear the challenges, opportunities and expectations for the coming academic year in a way that will inform and inspire?**

- Send group e-mails with a compelling subject and message at regularly scheduled intervals and/or at critical times.
- Create an intra-district blog to keep staff updated and energized.
- Send occasional newsletters to staff. Use pictures and stories and factual information that will support staff members in their communication.
- Hold gatherings during the summer months and invite staff members to participate in conversations about your schools and community.

### **Communicating with students**

**Do you have expectations, models, and pathways to let students know in advance of the coming year that they are valued and anticipated and that you will work with them to make the school year a good learning experience?**

- Host principal open hours one day a month for students to stop in and visit and share their concerns and ideas.
- Host a student-focused blog.
- Send mailings directly to students' homes inviting them into the learning process.
- Encourage teacher phone calls to homes of students in advance of the first day of school.
- Publish a mid-summer reading list.
- Suggest ways students can prepare for the coming school year.

### **Communicating with parents and families**

#### **Do you respond to what research says about parental involvement, and build upon that information to realize optimal student outcomes?**

- Building upon the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein, PhD., of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, National PTA created program standards of excellence.
  - **Standard I:** Communicating- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful
  - **Standard II:** Parenting- Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
  - **Standard III:** Student Learning- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
  - **Standard IV:** Volunteering- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
  - **Standard V:** School Decision Making and Advocacy- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
  - **Standard VI:** Collaborating with Community- Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (Source: U.S. Department of Education

Topics: *School Involvement, National Standards and Tests*) Reprinted with the permission of the U.S. Department of Education.

### **Communicating with community partners and the legislature**

#### **Do you create opportunities to communicate with community members, community businesses and your elected officials encouraging them to be partners in creating greater school/student success?**

- Attend or present at community service organization meetings.
- Host invitational meetings to explore how businesses can contribute to student success, and how students can contribute to business success.
- Hold community focus groups about community/school opportunities.
- Send letters to the editor that encourage and acknowledge the importance of working on behalf of schools. (Cite examples of successes and opportunities.)
- Create a spot in newsletters, etc. to highlight how an individual or group has advanced the quality of education and your learners' experience.
- Grow a relationship with your legislators through individual meetings designed to identify areas of mutual interest that can be promoted on behalf of leading, teaching, and learning.

Materials provided by:



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