

8

Putting It All On Paper

As previous chapters have illustrated, a great deal of written communication is essential in all successful school-community relations plans. Because of the size of some schools and/or school districts and due to the busy, often hectic schedules of many school employees and constituents, much of what is communicated is done so in writing. An important skill for a good school administrator, therefore, is the ability to clearly articulate one's thoughts through the written medium.

However, a pitfall that school administrators can fall into exists because of the many audiences that comprise a school's internal and external publics. Great attention was paid to the importance of communicating internally and externally in Chapters 5 and 6. The focus here, therefore, is on writing for all of these different audiences. Because so much is communicated through writing, it is absolutely essential that the school administrator develop the skills to distinguish between the abilities and interests of these various audiences. The result of such skill development will be communication that reaches the intended audience in a manner appropriate for their understanding.

Three Kinds of Readers

Essentially, we can classify people that read our written communications into three groups. Although variations certainly exist among those given the same classification, the general behavior characteristics apply. It is important that these three kinds of readers are considered whenever we craft any written communication for distribution. Although specific attention will be paid to particular design elements of our written communications later in the chapter, the focus here is on the essential components for reaching all three kinds of readers.

The 20-Second Reader

The 20-second reader devotes less than one-half minute to reading our written communication. Unless this individual is a graduate of Evelyn Wood's speed reading course, he/she will never be able to read everything

in a several page school newsletter. Because of this, the newsletter or other school publication must be designed to maximize the 20 seconds that we have this reader's attention.

The 20-second reader looks at no more than headings, titles, and pictures. With this in mind, care must be taken to develop headings, titles, and pictures that capture the essential ingredients of the story. Additionally, attention must be paid to the font, size, and style in which headings and titles are written. They must appear to jump off of the page to prevent the 20-second reader from having to spend time searching for them. Twenty seconds can go by quickly. We cannot afford to lose any of that precious time as the reader searches for headings and titles.

With pictures or other graphics, they too must clearly depict that which we intend to be depicted. Far-away group photographs, for example, take too long to process. Pictures and graphics must, therefore, be kept simple while also representing the main ideas of the story well.

The Newspaper Reader

The newspaper reader goes through our written communications in much the same way as the typical person reads his or her morning or evening newspaper. That is, this reader glances at titles and pictures and then reads a little bit of some stories and all of those that really interest him/her.

For this reader, many of the same design elements necessary for the 20-second reader also apply. This reader also does not like to search for information. Because this reader does tend to glance at each story, it is important that the opening paragraph of each item grab the reader's interest. Remember, this person will read the full text of some of our articles. The title, opening paragraph, and accompanying picture(s) will do a lot to determine which stories this reader chooses to pay close attention to.

With this reader in mind, those stories or reports that you want read the most must be made the most interesting. Although this seems obvious, positioning these stories in prominent locations, such as the left-hand column on the front page, will help draw attention to them. Writing them with an irresistible opening that leaves readers needing to read on to get the information they need is essential.

The Novel Reader

The novel reader will devour our written communications in much the same way as he/she devours a favorite novel. That is, this reader will proceed through the newsletter or other school publication from cover to cover. This person wants to miss nothing so, in many ways, he/she becomes the easiest audience to write for.

This is
ments, tho
every wor
prominenc
look at pic
publication

Beacaus
cation, this
may slip f
elude the v

A majo
nication th
jargon. To
that is unc
the wrong
appropria
are using i
questions

SH

"Pr
sch
tra
on
rea
anc
sis,
rec
car
a la
sur
Wr
pri
Ind

This is not to say that the novel reader is not influenced by design elements, though. Quite the contrary, this individual, although he/she may read every word, will determine the importance of a newsletter story based on the prominence it appears to be given in the publication. This reader will also look at pictures and will make determinations of the quality of the school publication based on these and other design features.

Because the novel reader will read every word of your written communication, this reader may, in some cases, become your biggest critic. A mistake may slip past the 20-second or newspaper reader. Mistakes are unlikely to elude the watchful eye of the novel reader, however.

Does Impressive Language Make the Impression You Desire?

A major complaint that many parents have about the written communication they receive from their child's school is the overuse of educational jargon. Too many educators flood their writing with this professional jargon that is unclear and unimpressive to the targeted audience. This is done for the wrong reason, in many instances. Although there are certainly times to appropriately use professional educational terminology, too many educators are using it to show their professionalism to a public that they think already questions it. In thinking back to the results of polls like those illustrated in

SHOWCASE

Written Communication

"Principals are incredibly busy people. Probably no one in the school system is more overburdened than the building administrators. Their tasks are myriad and diverse. They are constantly on center stage. Everything they say, do, and write is observed, reacted to, and scrutinized by their public. Although their actions and statements are always subject to public response and analysis, only their written documents become part of a very public record. Principals need to guarantee that they have done all they can to prevent their writing from coming back to haunt them at a later time. Principals cannot avoid writing, so they must make sure that their writing will present them in the best possible light. Writing clearly, simply, concisely, and correctly should enable the principal to communicate with authority, humanity, and pride."

India Podsen, author of *Written Expression: The Principal's Survival Guide*

Chapter 1, this fear that the public fails to see us as professionals is largely unfounded. Nevertheless, many educators refuse to believe this and, thus mistakenly believe that by using educational jargon with the public, they will get the professional respect they yearn for.

School administrators have an obligation to demonstrate to their staffs that respect is earned through actions and behaviors. The overuse of terminology that is unknown to the public creates an image that the educator is unapproachable and unable to communicate effectively. Regularly communicating with the public in terms that are appropriate to the audience will have the opposite effect. The school leader must demonstrate this understanding by creating written communications that are free of jargon and appropriate to their intended audience. In this way, they are more apt to earn the respect they desire because of the public's perceptions that they are approachable and skilled in communications.

The School Newsletter

One of the most frequently used forms of written communication created by school administrators is the school newsletter. Although the frequency of distribution may vary from one situation to the next, it is a wise idea for all school principals to publish newsletters on a regular basis.

When properly written, the school newsletter becomes an essential public relations tool. Not only is this so because of the information a newsletter provides, but also because the school newsletter can serve as a great source of goodwill. The principal, through the newsletter, provides information about school events that parents will find essential. As a goodwill gesture, the principal can also use the newsletter as a forum for parent organizations, business partners, community groups, and media outlets to provide information relative to their work within the school community. Not only does this create feelings of goodwill, but it also increases the likelihood that members of such groups will regularly read the newsletter. The first objective of any written communication ought to be that the intended audience reads it. Any steps that can be taken to ensure that newsletters are read, therefore, should be attended to.

Because the school newsletter is such an important information instrument for parents, great care must be taken in its design. The first step in such designing is for the school administrator to understand the many uses of the newsletter in order to maximize its effectiveness. Many school leaders agree that the school newsletter is an important instrument to the following:

- Build support for the school and its programs
- Give all stakeholders accurate information

- Increase
- After
- Informa
- has i
- Show
- enga
- Give
- child

There a
ably the m
many insta
has with m
visitors to
with the sc
letter as ar

Furthe
of their ch
what the n
ing contac
throughout
ents may, i
parents to
newsletter
in this pul
communic

The at
the principl
thought o
tant ways
ously be t

The fir
your mes
cussed ea
layout. Ho
or other g
the decisio

There
letter. As l
letter can
gives som

- Increase parental and community involvement, participation, and attendance at school functions
- Inform all community members of the important role that the school has in improving the overall community
- Showcase the many educational endeavors that students and staff are engaged in at the school
- Give parents advice and assistance regarding how to best help their children academically

There are many other reasons for using a school newsletter as well. Probably the most significant one is that a regularly scheduled newsletter is, in many instances, the only recurring communication that the school principal has with many parents. Although the more difficult parents may be frequent visitors to the principal's office, the majority of parents never speak in person with the school principal. This majority comes to depend on the school newsletter as an opportunity to get to know the principal.

Further, as most parents do view the principal as the educational leader of their child's school, the newsletter becomes the leader's way of saying what the most important information about the school is. With students having contact with different teachers and varying school subjects and programs throughout the course of a school day, the information coming home to parents may, in some cases, become overwhelming. It may be difficult for some parents to sort out what is most important. When the principal sends home a newsletter, however, then parents can believe that the information contained in this publication is the most important information that the school has to communicate with them.

The above paragraph leaves a great deal of responsibility at the feet of the principal in designing a newsletter. Therefore, a carefully planned, well thought out and appropriately written newsletter is one of the most important ways that a principal communicates with the public. Care must obviously be taken in creating one.

The first thing to consider after deciding to write a newsletter is how your messages will be communicated with the three kinds of readers discussed earlier. This will surely lead to an examination of the newsletter's layout. How many columns of type, the font used, the positioning of pictures or other graphics, the wording of headlines, and the paper size are some of the decisions to be made. The variables in each of these are discussed below.

There is no end to the list of topics that can be included in a school newsletter. As long as it is written in a style comfortable to most readers, the newsletter can be a forum for sharing a variety of thoughts and ideas. Exhibit 8-1 gives some examples.

Exhibit 8-1 Topics to Include in Newsletters

- School activities, especially classroom activities
- Opportunities for parents and others to help at school
- Personality sketches of staff members
- How staff development programs on early release days better prepare teachers— what specific activities they participate in on those days
- Awards and special recognition of students
- How the instructional program is meeting individual needs of students
- Brief summaries of parent group business
- Reminders—arrival and departure times, breakfast and lunch prices
- Thoughts for the day
- Poems or inspirational messages

Exhibit 8-2 was created to give even more specific ideas for newsletter stories. These have been divided by months so that the school administrator can have ideas for each individual month while also being able to see the big picture in planning stories for the entire school year. As you can see from reading the list, there is certainly flexibility possible in moving story ideas from one month to another.

Although Exhibit 8-2 was created to give administrators a ready list of newsletter ideas, school leaders would be well served to adapt this list or create their own list to suit their school's uniqueness. Creating such a list during the summer months, before students and teachers arrive is an excellent idea. In this way, the less hectic months for school administrators are used in preparation or planning for the busier months from September through May.

Again, it is important to remember that the following list provides a framework to build upon. The school administrator could utilize the faculty and staff to generate ideas specific to a particular setting. It is amazing what a time saver it can be to have a list like this available when the school year begins. Although important events will happen on the spur of the moment and pieces of information will need to be communicated with little warning, the items on this list work very well for those times when there just does not appear to be any news.

Exhibit 8-

August

New p
Summ

Septem

New e
School

October

Home
Novem

Novem

Americ
Capita
unc

Decem

Holida
Cold w

The Use

Witho
manner in
nal. Many
easy assist
ware and
also has c
that some
tors becau
technolog
examine c
efforts the
benefits of
Invari
than it wa

Exhibit 8-2 Newsletters: What to Include and When to Include It

August

New programs to be introduced
Summer maintenance

September

New employee profiles
School lunch nutritional information

October

Homecoming plans
November holiday plans

November

American Education Week plans
Capital improvements planned or
underway

December

Holiday programs
Cold weather school closing information

January

Long-range planning activities

February

February holiday reminders
Spotlight on history curriculum
(i.e., Black History Month)

March

Spotlight on Special Education
Budget needs for next year

April

Spotlight on school secretary
Bike safety tips

May

Graduation plans
Volunteer Appreciation

The Use of Technology

Without question technology has changed and continues to alter the manner in which we communicate with our publics, both internal and external. Many administrators see technology as a blessing, as it has provided easy assistance to many publication tasks through the advent of better hardware and software. Other administrators curse the use of technology as it also has caused the bar to be raised in regard to the quality of publications that some people have come to expect. It has also troubled some administrators because of their own confusion and/or apprehension about utilizing technology to their advantage. For this reason, all school districts need to examine carefully the quality of any staff development or in-service training efforts they employ to assist all educators in taking advantage of the many benefits of technology.

Invariably, written communication is easier in the twenty-first century than it was previously. The addition of software packages that virtually cre-

ate professional-looking publications by themselves has made the task of designing newsletters with high visual appeal much easier than it used to be. Little technological proficiency is required to produce professional quality publications either. The ability to type and to access the desktop publishing program is about all that is required. Because the computer will do the rest, there really is no excuse for newsletters that fail to have visual appeal.

Technology assists educators in many other ways as well. In many communities, newsletters are no longer printed on paper and sent home. Instead, they are posted on the school's website for community members to access at their convenience. This is a tremendous cost-saving idea that also appeals to people who want to access school information at their own convenience. It backfires from a school-community relations viewpoint; however, if all members of the community do not have ready access to the school's website. Therefore, this is one more area in which school leaders must know his or her own school community and must make these decisions accordingly.

School websites are also very useful for staff members desiring to post important information to be viewed by masses. Many teachers post homework assignments, study guides, and other pertinent classroom news. Media specialists highlight special book selections and/or reading incentives. Food service specialists post menu changes and nutritional information. There is really no end to the uses of technology for communicating information that would otherwise be written the traditional way. Although the cost savings and freedom of access are benefits, many community members still rely on being kept informed through more traditional means. These people cannot be forgotten in our school-community relations plans. Instead, school administrators must ensure that they and their staff members communicate with community members through a variety of forums.

The Student Report Card

Rarely thought of when we focus conversations on written communications from the school is the student report card. Ironically, however, it is the report card that is the most widely recognized and read communication that ever leaves our schools. Despite this fact, a large number of school administrators fail to consider the design of their school's student report card as an essential component of their written communication plan.

Poorly designed student report cards give very little written communication outside of a checklist of accomplished skills. Although checklists are far easier for teachers to complete than are narratives, the best report cards allow for some narration from the teacher. Knowing that a child recognizes numbers from 1 to 100 may be important for parents, but most parents also wish to know how their child performs, behaves, and adapts in the teacher's own

words.
than de

No
report
one ma
person
card, s
assessi
commu
checkli

Req
report
with th

In a
require
memb
Althou
of a de
ties fo
amate

Al
essenti
comm
takes t
rushed
the pri

Th
cipal r
layout
cipal v
teache
princip
letter t
of ima
to reac

Ex
cipals.
impro
to the

words. This gives a greater sense of the child being important to the teacher than does a mark on a checklist.

Now in certain situations, such as those in which teachers must give report cards to 150+ students, suggesting written comments accompany each one may seem unfair. There are other ways to accomplish providing more personal, specific information, though. By examining the design of the report card, school leaders may find that there are no appropriate places to report assessments of study skills or interpersonal behavior. Even when written comments are not possible or practical, adding items to an already existing checklist can be helpful.

Regardless, all school leaders ought to regularly examine their student report cards in light of one simple question: "As a parent, would I be satisfied with the depth and breadth of information this report provides?"

A Personal Letter from the Principal

In addition to regularly scheduled newsletters, school principals are often required to write personal letters to parents, business leaders, or community members that inform, persuade, or thank them for some service or donation. Although few people enter the profession of school administration because of a desire to write, these written communications are important opportunities for principals to show professionalism and care or, on the other hand, amateurism and carelessness.

Although principals are finding themselves to be increasingly busy, it is essential that they or somebody they trust carefully proofread any written communications that leave the principal's office. Although they are mistakes that happen to everybody, spelling and/or grammatical errors imply a rushed, unprofessional job. Such work is probably not part of the image that the principal intends to portray.

The layout of the letter is another very important element that the principal must consider. Laying the letter out professionally, particularly if such layouts are taught as part of the school's curriculum, is essential. If the principal were unsure of proper layout, he/she would be wise to consult with teachers charged with teaching this skill. It would be very damaging to a principal's image if he or she made habitual mistakes in the crafting of a letter that students of the school knew better than to make. Beyond the issue of image, a letter that is laid out properly is much easier and more accessible to read than is a poorly designed one.

Exhibits 8-3 and 8-4 are two excellent sample letters from school principals. Exhibit 8-3 is a letter to parents that intends to inform the parents of improvements that their child has made academically. Exhibit 8-4 is written to the owner of a local business, thanking her for sponsoring a school dance.

Exhibit 8-3 Letter to Parents

Woodview School
123 Woodview Lane
Anytown, USA

Lou Who, Principal
Susie Sunshine, Administrative Assistant

Mr. and Mrs. George Gray
456 Guardian Drive
Anytown, USA 12345

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gray,

It is with great pleasure that I write to inform you that Clara has been making steady progress in Algebra class over the past 4 weeks. This is indicative, I believe, of Clara's increased focus and effort, your support and encouragement from home, and some great teaching from Mrs. Parker. If this great work continues, Clara will finish this academic marking period with a much-improved Algebra grade.

I am particularly pleased with Clara's attitude in class, as reported to me by Mrs. Parker. Mrs. Parker has told me on several occasions that Clara is attentive in class and willing to take risks at a much greater rate than was previously the case. I attribute this to Clara's newfound confidence and to the support system that she has come to count on. I extend my thanks to both of you for being such integral parts of that support system.

Please share your reactions to this letter with Clara. She has obviously benefited from your support thus far. My sense is that this support will continue to be important to Clara's future academic progress.

Sincerely,
Lou Who
Principal

Exhibit 8-4

Lou Who
Susie Sunshine

Ms. Parker
Unit 1127
Anytown, USA

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gray,

to express my appreciation for Clara's progress and your support.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Lou Who
Principal

It is important to note that teachers who send home personal notes to parents when appropriate also enjoy more positive relationships with them. Although newsletters from teachers are important means for regularly communicating with parents, as will be illustrated later in this chapter, a personal note goes a long way toward establishing bonds with parents.

Words

They go into whether mass di

Putting I

Exhibit 8-4 Letter of Gratitude to a Local Business

Woodview School

123 Woodview Lane
Anytown, USA

Lou Who, Principal
Susie Sunshine, Administrative Assistant

Ms. Allison Brown, Proprietor
United Beverage Distribution
1127 3rd Avenue
Anytown, USA 12345

Dear Ms. Brown,

On behalf of the students, staff, and parents at Woodview School, I wish to express deep gratitude for your generous donation of sixteen soft drink cases for last week's Homecoming Dance. Without the support of generous merchants like you, our students would not enjoy as many quality extracurricular experiences as they deserve. I can assure you that there are many people in this community who recognize this fact and appreciate your support.

The dance was a huge success. Over 300 students were in attendance and, I am happy to report, none of them went thirsty. In fact, the many bodies huddled together in our gymnasium raised the temperature a bit and caused your soft drinks to be an increased relief for all.

Thank you again for your continued support of our school. Your generosity will be acknowledged in our upcoming newsletter. As you may be aware, this newsletter is distributed to all residents within our school's boundaries. It is my sincere hope that this acknowledgment gives you the increased business you so richly deserve.

Sincerely,

Lou Who
Principal

Words or Phrases to Avoid

Thus far, it has been clearly established that great care and thought must go into the design and creation of all written communications. This is true whether the communication is intended for a one-person audience or for mass distribution. The written word has lasting power. Although the spoken

word is powerful in its own right, words that are written down can last much longer. Weeks after initially reading something you wrote, an individual can revisit your written communication, which is something he or she cannot do with verbal dialogue. For this reason, the specific wording must be carefully crafted to ensure that you are communicating as accurately and as effectively as you intend to.

Now, this can create an overwhelming feeling of responsibility that leads some school administrators to avoid writing things at all costs. However, because of the power of written communication, it is important that administrators do as much of it as possible. Many people feel that written words are more sincere. Still other individuals, particularly those who recognize the importance of correctly wording something, understand that more time is often put into a written communication than is the case with verbal communication. Finally, because the audiences that school administrators often find themselves communicating with can be difficult to reach via telephone or face-to-face communication, written communication is often the most efficient means we have at our disposal. It is also one of the best ways to reach large audiences.

If the responsibility of correctly crafting a written piece of communication seems daunting, then pre-planning and practice become essential steps. Just as we instruct students to begin with thoughts, then connect them with proper sentence and paragraph structure, and then to re-read and share their writing with other people to avoid choosing inappropriate or ambiguous words, so should school leaders engage in the writing process.

Although using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are important, it is more important that the language used is not offensive to the audience. Many educators, usually with good intentions, have discovered the challenges created by choosing inappropriate and unflattering words to describe children and their behaviors. Even though the message these educators attempted to communicate was important and accurate, choosing words that parents were offended by caused the messages to get lost. Exhibit 8-5 seeks to assist educators in avoiding some of these more common wording errors.

Written Communication from the Classroom

If a school principal heeds all the advice in this chapter and regularly, purposefully, and accurately uses written communications with all stakeholders, only one step toward positive and productive school-community relations will have been taken. Even though the principal may be the most influential adult in the school, it is the teachers and staff who are the most important. Therefore, these employees must understand all that the principal

Negat

Uncle

Bashfu

Troub

Stupic

Poor-c

Liar

Must

Imper

Urgen

Failed

Show

Profar

Uncoc

Steals

Will fa

Cheat

Doesr

Dunk

Selfisl

Stubb

Insole

Below

Disint

Clum

Waste

Lazy

Mean

Truan

Messy

Dubic

Rude

Time

Exhibit 8-5 Negative and Positive Expressions Helpful in Reviewing School Correspondence

Negative Expressions	More Positive Expressions
Unclean	Exhibits poor hygiene habits
Bashful	Reserved
Troublemaker	Disturbs other students
Stupid	Can do better with help
Poor-quality work	Below his or her usual standard
Liar	Tends to stretch the truth
Must	Ought to
Impertinent	Discourteous
Urgent problem	Lost opportunity
Failed	Failed to meet requirements
Show off	Tries too hard to get attention
Profane	Uses inappropriate language
Uncooperative	Needs to learn to work with others
Steals	Takes without permission
Will fail	Has chance of passing, if
Cheats	Depends on others to do his or her work
Doesn't care	Seems unmotivated
Dumb	Capable of doing better
Selfish	Seldom shares with others
Stubborn	Overly self-confident
Insolent	Outspoken
Below average	Working at his or her own ability level
Disinterested	Complacent
Clumsy	Awkward
Wastes time	Could make better use of time
Lazy	Gives inconsistent effort
Mean	Difficulty in getting along with others
Truant	Absent without permission
Messy	Could do neater work
Dubious	Uncertain
Rude	Often inconsiderate
Time and time again	Usually

understands about written communication. This will only happen if the principal makes such understanding a school wide priority.

Partly through staff development but mostly through modeling, the school principal must demonstrate to all employees that written communication is important. Beyond the importance, the principal must also ensure that staff members understand the different types of readers and the efforts that must go into written communications to appeal to all stakeholders.

Teachers, regardless of the grade level(s) or subject(s) they teach, should also have a plan for regular written communication with parents. Just as is the case with school-wide communications, parents need to be able to count on the teacher to keep them informed. Many teachers, in a response to this edict, have developed their own classroom newsletters. Although teachers of primary grades tend to design these newsletters on their own, teachers of older children often enlist the help of the students in the newsletter's creation. In many high school classes, the newsletters are entirely student created, with the teacher serving as editor-in-chief. Also, in many high schools, newsletters from grade-level sponsors or chairpersons of large departments are common practice.

Exhibits 8-6 and 8-7 illustrate two different school newsletters created by elementary grade teachers. The simplicity of the design shown in Exhibit 8-6 allows the teacher to update it weekly with very little effort. The newsletter depicted in Exhibit 8-7 requires a bit more time and effort, but looks rather professional. For less-frequent updates, this model would make a better impression. However, as a weekly newsletter, Exhibit 8-6 does an excellent job.

The newsletters teachers create can be very beneficial to parents, as they often contain information that children may inadvertently forget to communicate. In this regard, teacher-created newsletters also deliver the unspoken message that the school staff understands the importance of keeping parents informed. They further demonstrate that teachers believe so strongly in parent involvement that they are willing to devote the necessary time to creating these newsletters. This is a powerful message to parents who may otherwise believe that the school is not interested in their involvement.

Newsletters, whether created by principals, teachers, or other staff members are essential components of a successful school-community relations plan. If regularly scheduled newsletters do not currently come from your school, then you would be well served to change this behavior promptly. Do not be concerned if your writing and publishing skills will limit the initial quality of your newsletter efforts. Most principals and teachers readily admit that the style of their newsletters has evolved over time. By heeding the suggestions in this chapter, anybody can produce a top-quality newsletter for parents. Although you will improve with practice, the parents of the students you serve will appreciate your initial offering. The time to start is now.

Exhibit 8-



Clas

Math
The c
tion f
tests.

Scien
Our c
and v

Lang
Pleas
Reac
on w

DA'



Watkin's Words

November 3, 2010

Classroom Watch

Math:

The children are doing well with their multiplication facts. Please remember the weekly timed tests.

Science:

Our classroom is spinning with planets. Come in and visit our hand made solar system.

Language:

Please remind your children to keep up on their Read It! books. The whole class is working hard on winning the pizza party.

Thank You!

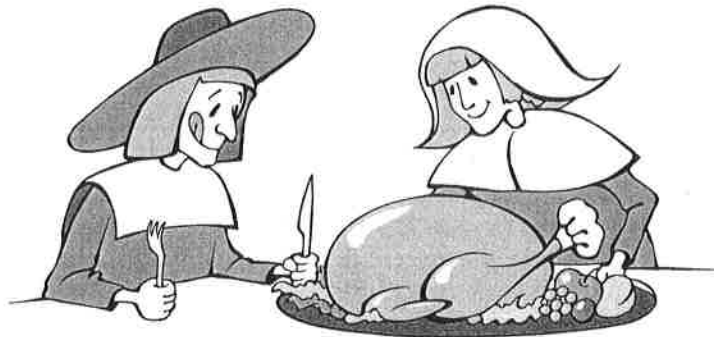
A big THANK YOU to all of the parents who helped make our Halloween Haunt a success. Nobody could believe the transformation of the school gym.



DATES TO REMEMBER:

Nov. 23-24 Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 4 Winter Concert



McCoy's News

May 10, 2010

May is Filled with Many Exciting Events!!

Technology Night

Tuesday, May 25, 2010
6:00-8:00 PM

As you know, next Tuesday is Our First Ever Technology Night. Please plan to attend for updates of the exciting things that have been happening in our building! There will be many displays of student learning through technology. Plus, you could be the winner of the FREE Dell Computer!! See attached registration form to volunteer your child's services as one of our class's docents. I need approximately 12 children to work in our classroom to highlight the learning that has taken place.

Field Day

Friday, May 28, 2010

Calling all volunteers! By now, you may be familiar with this routine. We need at least 4 parent volunteers to run stations on Field Day. Like always, this year promises to be filled with great activities. If you are unable to attend, we could still use your help in other ways. Donations of lemonade or juice, paper cups, peanut butter sandwich crackers and ice would be greatly appreciated. Thanks in advance for doing your part to make this a great year.

Awards and Accomplishments

Readers of the Year Susie Blake and David Silva

Most Improved Reader of the Year Denia Grates

Writer of the Year Samantha Latke

Reading Your Child's Accelerated Reader **Student Record Report**

There are some key areas to watch on your child's weekly Accelerated Reader **Student Record Report**. The report should be **dated for the prior week**. It will list the **title**, the **percent correct**, the **points possible** and **points earned** for each book your child tested on that week. **Your child should check out, read, and test on enough books during the six weeks to meet his/her point goal. Use the weekly point goal as a guide.** Longer books may take more than a week to complete.

The u
stood sinc
connectec
those pur

1. To
2. To
3. To
4. To
5. To
6. To
7. To
8. To
9. To

As scl
their curri
even mor
increased
tool. As r
ers via th
still many
World Wi
As this bo
widely u
informed

Accor
Education:
Education
This com
1994 (Cat
increase i
cation of
though, i
disposal
with any

Howe
of Educa
of Educa
the Intern
(LANs), a

Communicating via the World Wide Web

The use of the World Wide Web for academic pursuits has been understood since the infancy of the Internet. All across America, students are now connected to the Internet and are using it for a variety of purposes. Among those purposes are the following:

1. To communicate with another class through e-mail
2. To communicate with an expert or a significant person
3. To gather data for use in a class project
4. To follow an online expedition or trip
5. To read works written by other children
6. To read for information about current events
7. To take a virtual field trip with their class
8. To join an existing online project
9. To create their own online project (www.lburkhart.com; Burkhart, 2010)

As schools have increasingly infused usage of the World Wide Web into their curricula, they have begun to realize that the Internet can provide even more uses than purely academic ones. School leaders understand with increased frequency, that the Internet can also be a powerful communication tool. As recently as 1990 the idea of schools communicating with stakeholders via the Internet was considered futuristic thinking. By 1995, there were still many schools lacking the capability and the staff to effectively use the World Wide Web for communicating with parents and the larger community. As this book goes to press, however, the Internet represents one of the most widely used methods school leaders employ for keeping all stakeholders informed and connected to the business of their schools.

According to a May 2001 report from the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), 98% of all public K-12 schools are connected to the Internet. This compares to 35% of K-12 schools that enjoyed Internet access back in 1994 (Cattagni & Farris, 2001). Although this data verifies the tremendous increase in connectivity experienced in our schools, it does not give an indication of how the schools are actually using this technology. What is clear, though, is the fact that almost all school administrators now have at their disposal a very effective means of sharing information about their school with any and all of their publics.

However, a December 2009 report from the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) sheds further light on how schools are connected to the Internet. Unlike in 2001, the new report focuses on local area networks (LANs), as well as district networks, and the means by which schools utilize

these methods for getting students and teachers on the World Wide Web. The report revealed the following data:

- Districts reported information on local area networks connecting computers within a school, district networks connecting schools to the district, and connections to the Internet. Ninety-seven percent of districts had a local area network in all schools and 2% had it in some schools. Eighty-one percent of districts provided a district network to all schools and 3% provided it to some schools. Of the districts surveyed, 100% of those with a district network were connected to the Internet.
- Districts reported that 92% of public schools were connected to a district network. Among these schools, the types of connections from schools to districts included direct fiber (55%), T1 or DS1 lines (26%), and wireless connections (16%).
- Among the 84% of districts with a district network, the types of connections from districts to Internet service provider(s) included T1 or DS1 lines (42%), direct fiber (37%), wireless connections (18%), broadband cable (13%), and T3 or DS3 lines (12%). Direct fiber connections were reported by a larger percentage of city districts than by suburban, town, or rural districts (62% versus 49%, 46%, and 24%, respectively). Relatively more rural districts than city districts reported T1 or DS1 connections (51% versus 18%).
- The percentage of districts that offered access to online district resources to all elementary or all secondary teachers was 92%. The percentage that offered access to electronic administrative tools to all teachers was 87% for elementary and 95% for secondary. The percentage that offered server space for posting web pages or class materials to all teachers was 82% for elementary and 83% for secondary.
- The percentage of districts that offered online access to the library catalogue to all students was 72% for elementary and 82% for secondary. The percentage that offered electronic storage space on a server to all students was 62% for elementary and 83% for secondary. (Educational Technology in Public School Districts: Fall 2008, NCES, 2009)

One way in which school staff members use the connectivity of technology is by sending and receiving e-mail. This process is further developed in Chapter 9. It is common practice in many schools for teachers and administrators to use e-mail as an internal communication tool. It is also becoming increasingly common for e-mail to be an external communication tool. The downside to this trend is that some school staff members forget to regularly check their e-mail accounts for messages. Although it has long been a habit to check for telephone messages, new users of technology often forget to be as diligent in checking e-mail. The result can be a frustrated public that is not

SHO

In an
Mant
fans o
35 e-
e-ma
a har
the fa
paren
Teach
ers. V
comr
the j
to ex
conc
One
frequ

getting ans
be to not a
unwilling c
School
their public
increasing
school lead
holders to
evolves to
access sch
becomes ir
sources for
events, and

Points to

Many
circulated
sites. Sch
styles and
reminders

Putting It Al

SHOWCASE

E-mail Newsletter

In an Illinois school district, the music teacher publishes the Manteno Magic E-Mail Newsletter for the parents, students, and fans of their show choir program. This began in 1998 with just 35 e-mail addresses from the students. The students without e-mail were partnered with an online student who would print a hard copy of the newsletter for them. Today, more than 99% of the families in this school community have access to e-mail, and parents are just as likely as students to read the e-mail newsletter. Teachers from across the country are also among the subscribers. When the show choir competes, the judges record their oral comments onto audiotape. The choir director then summarizes the judges' remarks and sends them in the newsletter. He tries to explain what a judge has said and how it relates to the show's concept. He also publishes some press releases in the newsletter. One of the best features is the short articles he writes that answer frequent questions from parents or students.

getting answers as quickly as they should. A rule of thumb, therefore, should be to not advertise e-mail as a means to communicate with you if you are unwilling or unaccustomed to regularly check for and respond to messages.

School leaders who understand the need to provide information to their publics in as accessible a format as possible are using the Internet with increasing frequency. By creating a school website and updating it regularly school leaders can, in effect, leave important information available for stakeholders to read and view at their convenience. As the American workforce evolves to include both parents often working different shifts, the ability to access school information at any time of the day via the World Wide Web becomes increasingly attractive. School websites have grown to be efficient sources for posting school calendars, lunch menus, important dates of school events, and stories, pictures, and audio/video clips of classroom activities.

Points to Consider

Many of the same considerations for writing any materials that will be circulated to a school's publics are applicable to the creation of school websites. School leaders must again be cognizant and respectful of the reading styles and abilities of those who will be visiting the website. With this in mind, reminders for parents should be free of unnecessary jargon and should be

designed with pertinent information easy to find. The different ways in which people read newsletters may also have applicability to the way in which people read the contents of a web page. Headlines and pictures should, therefore, be chosen carefully and purposefully. Font size, style, and color should all be chosen with creating minimal distractions to readers as a primary goal.

Another point that is easy to overlook is the speed with which the user's computer will be able to access and download information from the school's website. For many home users these speeds are far less than the speed with which the school's computers access the web. Without having received a great degree of technological training, many school leaders mistakenly assume that the more photographs, videos, or multimedia elements they place on their school's website, the more attractive it will be to the viewing public. What happens instead, in many instances, is that the viewing public does not own computer hardware with the capability of opening these graphic-intensive web pages in an efficient, timely manner. The result is often a public that is frustrated at the thought of ever accessing the school's website again. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that school websites be designed in a manner that increases, not decreases, their accessibility. In many cases this means that the school leader must opt for a simpler design. School leaders would always benefit from consulting individuals with expertise in web page design before embarking on such a project alone. Many school districts have such people on staff for just this purpose.

Still another issue that is often overlooked is the fact that a substantial number of school stakeholders do not have Internet access in their homes. A 2009 report in *USA Today* indicates that 62% of Americans have Internet access in the home, up from only 17% in 1997. Trends indicate that this figure continues to rise, but it appears safe to assume that roughly one-third of the population in any given community is unable to access school information on the World Wide Web from the comforts of their home. Although this does not mean that school leaders should feel reluctance about using the Internet to inform their publics, they must remember that it is only one way to do so. The Internet provides a wonderful opportunity to inform people all over the world about the wonderful things happening in our schools. In fact, communicating through new technologies is a topic being explored in schools all across the world and is the focus of Chapter 9. The Internet is not poised to replace newsletters, telephone conversations, and most importantly, face-to-face encounters, though.

Chapter Summary

- In creating written communications, it is essential that you recognize the different types of readers likely to receive what you have written.
- The 20-Second Reader will glance at headings, titles, and pictures. Therefore, these items must be carefully placed and worded to convey essential information.

- The new par
- The For
- Pri pro
- The in t ing
- Wri ofte
- Stu nica the
- Pri lett the
- The abil leac ful
- We sch util

CASE

H
for th
woul
disgu
pledg
C
ated f
loved

- The Newspaper Reader will treat your writing as he/she treats the newspaper. That is, this individual will glance at titles and read all or part of stories that interest him or her.
- The Novel Reader will read your communication from front to back. For this reader, your writing must contain minimal flaws.
- Principals and teachers ought to recognize the benefits associated with producing regularly scheduled newsletters.
- There are suggestions of topics to include in newsletters for any time in the school year. These should be interspersed with ideas and offerings unique to your school setting.
- Written communication should be free of the educational jargon that often turns many readers off.
- Student report cards are an often-overlooked form of written communication. Report cards should be examined to see if they communicate the information we intend in a clear manner.
- Principals and teachers ought to also remember the power of personal letters. Time spent writing personal letters can pay large dividends in the long run.
- The proliferation of new technologies in our schools enhances our abilities to create professional-looking, errorless publications. School leaders should, therefore, embrace these new technologies as powerful communication aids.
- Websites and e-mail are quickly becoming normal, routine ways for schools to communicate with constituents. Care must be taken when utilizing these or any technologies.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The Write Stuff

Having been chairperson of the high school English department for the past 7 years, Cynthia Walker knew that written communication would be her strength as a principal. In fact, Cynthia had become so disgusted with the previous principal's lack of writing skill that she pledged to make quality written communication her trademark.

Cynthia got off to a great start in her new position. Teachers appreciated her understanding of the difficulties inherent in their jobs, students loved her, and parents were impressed by her organization and work

continued

ethic. The only negative comments Cynthia had received during her first semester as principal came from the few parents and staff members who stated that they missed the previous principal's frequent handwritten notes of praise.

As the year progressed, more complaints began to surface. Several parents stopped reading the principal's newsletters, claiming that the publications used language that was clearly meant to impress. These parents liked to be told things in terminology that they were familiar with. As one father put it, "We don't need to be reading news about the school that requires us to pull out a dictionary first." Cynthia dismissed comments like these as representative of the few individuals who had never learned to write properly. Pride in written communication, she reasoned, was something that this school needed.

It was Jean Harbison, new chair of the English department and one of Cynthia's closest friends, who finally came to Cynthia to give her guidance. "Cynthia," she began, "I think many of the teachers miss getting quick notes in their mailboxes, praising them for good efforts. Also, you ought to keep in mind that notes you send home are not candidates for the Pulitzer Prize. I think you need to lighten up, my friend. Some people are becoming a bit intimidated by your writing."

Questions for Analysis

1. What do you think of Cynthia Walker's desire to improve the quality of written communication leaving the principal's office?
2. Should principals and teachers create newsletters that meet the needs of the community or that set good examples? How does one arrive at the happy medium?
3. Is Cynthia failing to understand elements of praise and motivation? If so, how would you help her to understand them better?
4. If you were in Cynthia Walker's position, what next steps would you take to enhance written communication with your publics?