



# *The One Stop Communications Shop*

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*Share the Success Panel*

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*1:30 pm*

*Hyatt, Toronto*



**COOK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 130**

# What Will I Learn Today?



- Learn from a beginner's perspective how to start a comprehensive school communications plan
- Learn how to effectively communicate with a variety of audiences
- Come away with a communications toolbox

*\*This seminar is not for seasoned school communication professionals, but for those looking to start a school communications program*

# What's in My Toolbox?

- Communications Plan
- Public Relations Guidelines for Staff
- News Tip Form
- Sample of “Board Briefs”
- Sample News Release
- Photo Release Form
- Flyer Approval Forms
- Community Newsletter
- Sample School Newsletter Template



# Make School Communications Work for You



- **According to the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), school public relations is defined as follows:**

Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization.

It relies on a comprehensive, two-way process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization.

# Creating a Communications Office from Scratch



## What to Do First:

- Establish a media contact list (from local newspapers and reporters to online outlets like *TribLocal* and Patch.com)
  - \*Please note some local papers are so small they don't have staff writers and they rely on good news releases to fill their pages
- Get out and meet principals, assistant principals
- Get to know local community leaders (i.e. chambers of commerce, park district, local cities/villages, etc.)
- Attend select events to get to know the schools

# Creating a Communications Office from Scratch (continued)



- Create templates (i.e. news release)
- Meet with administration to decide upon job responsibilities of the Communications Office, set priorities and create a Communications Plan
- The first year will be the hardest, if you are a one-person office, realize you can't do everything and you need to use your time wisely

# The Communications Plan

*A comprehensive communications plan helps direct and focus your work while setting priorities*



## What's in a Communications Plan:

- Introduction
- An overview of various communications vehicles
- Target audience
- Communication goals
- Action plan to tackle communication goals
- Budget

# Tackling Publicity with Style and Grace



- Create a News Tip Form

Staff use this form to submit possible story ideas for the Communications Office to cover OR information and a photo to be put in the proper template and submitted to the local media after the story took place

- Create a News Release Template

Used when submitting stories to the local media and use the “inverted pyramid” style of writing: list most important information in the 1st paragraph, keep to 1 to 2 pages

- Create general Public Relations Guidelines for Staff to enhance their understanding of the communications process

# Tackling Publicity with Style and Grace (continued)



- Create a standard photo release form for parents to sign (review with your district's attorney)
- Track coverage in local newspapers, online publications, etc. and save clippings. Distribute to the Board and administrators when appropriate.
- Think of the Communications Office like your District's own personal newsroom – just like regular newspapers, the most interesting stories will be covered

# Tiers of Publicity



*When deciding if something is newsworthy, staff are to review the PR guidelines before submitting a News Tip form to the Communications Office*

**Tier 1**: A newsworthy item that announces an event to the public before the event takes place (i.e. Farmers Market) and no photo is needed, just the facts

**Tier 2**: Stories the communications professional covers, takes a photo if needed, and puts the information into the news release template and sends to the local media (i.e. community fundraisers, special guest speakers, Board election results, administrative changes and overall, students and staff going above and beyond)

**Tier 3**: A story so large and/or interesting, that a local reporter is given a tip by the Communications Office and the reporter/photographer come out and cover the story (i.e. Pop Up Art Gallery featuring student work)

**Tier 4**: Reporters contact the Communications Office when they are working on a story and need input from appropriate administrators (i.e. when the *New York Times* comes calling, you answer)

# Publications with Purpose



## Items to consider for your district:

- Community Newsletters:
  - Printed and mailed (decide whether it's bi-monthly or quarterly, two-color or four-color, type of paper and choosing a printer)
  - E-newsletters
- Annual Reports
- District-wide brochures and flyers highlighting programs
- Individual School Newsletters
- School Calendar and/or Parent/Student Handbook
- Employee communication pieces:
  - Notes from Board of Education meetings (i.e. Board Briefs)
  - Internal Newsletters and/or memos

*Know your audience! What works in one district may not be suitable for another.*

# Your Website, Your World



- Communications professionals oversee content on the website and work with the Technology Department and/or school staff to ensure content updates are made
- The communications professional is the district webmaster and also uploads content in some cases
- Clearly delineate boundaries early on between the Communications Office and Technology Department on who is responsible for what
- Make building principals aware of the power of an updated website and stress this to school web managers who post content
- Review current pages and always be thinking about future pages to add or revise and seek input from administration
- Virtual Backpacks – have flyer approval guidelines ready for print or for your virtual backpack when outside agencies come to you

# “It’s District 130 Calling with an Important Message”



## The Power of a Phone Notification System:

- Reach thousands of parents and staff in a crisis situation or to inform of school closures
- Inform parents about upcoming events (i.e. Open House)
- Reduce secretaries’ workload by creating standardized attendance messages
- Both email and text messaging options are available
- Prices vary depending on enrollment and chosen packages
- During the 2010-11 school year, 2,229 messages were sent

***“I think parents are much more informed about everything now and it’s a better way to let everyone know what’s going on.”*** – John Dudzik, principal at Nathan Hale Middle School in Crestwood

***“I love Connect-ED! After I have collected the absences from the teachers, it takes less than 5 minutes to click on the names and send the message.”*** – Tracey Bucki, secretary at George Washington School in Alsip

# Let's Talk About Social Media, Shall We?

*Again, know your audience and seek input from administration  
before jumping into social media waters*

- Social Media is the new trend, but is it for your district? Explore the pros and cons before choosing a social media platform. Create guidelines if needed.

## **Options:**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Blogging
- Podcasts



# Is That a News Helicopter Hovering Above the School?



## How to Prepare for and Handle a Crisis Situation:

- Clear, consistent and frequent communication is essential
- The communications professional is the spokesperson in some cases, and serves as a coach for administrators in others
- Work with your district's emergency management officer to prepare BEFORE a crisis hits
- Do not release information to the media, parents or your staff until all the facts are confirmed with administration
- Designate a staging area for media outlets during a crisis
- Assign a back-up communications liaison in the absence of communications professional

# Establishing Brand Identity

*Not just for businesses anymore, but creating consistency among all communication vehicles is key to properly “packaging” your school district*

## **Items to consider in your branding strategy:**

- E-mail signatures
- District and school logos
- Letterhead
- Business cards
- Flyers, brochures and posters
- Website
- Newsletters
- Fax cover sheets
- Building signage

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# Say “Yes” to Surveys



- Engaging stakeholders (both internal and external) is an important part of the communications process
- If you are looking for feedback on any issue, whether it be proposals or evaluations, surveys are a great way to get honest answers anonymously
- District 130 utilizes Survey Monkey – a great starting point if you’d like to include surveys in your communications toolbox ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))
- In District 130, the Public Engagement Model is used via the website, phone notification system, and staff email to direct respondents to live surveys

# Professional Development



- Attend conferences when you can and refer to reference guides when needed
- Network with fellow communications professionals and seek their advice when needed
- Investigate becoming a member of:
  - National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA): [www.nsprapro.org](http://www.nsprapro.org)
  - Illinois Chapter/National School Public Relations Association (INSPRA): [www.inspra.org](http://www.inspra.org)

# To Hire or Not to Hire, That is the Question...



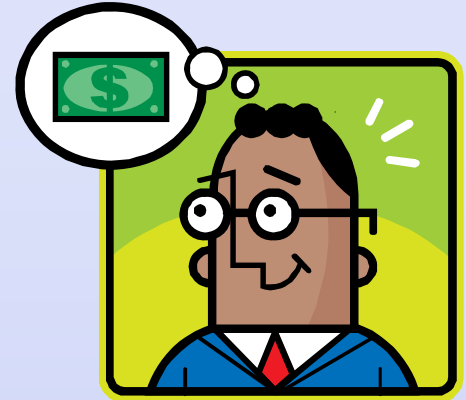
## The benefits of hiring a communications professional:

- One person (or a department) oversees the district's communication process in a consistent, organized manner

## Things to consider:

- How large is our district?
- Do we need full-time or part-time help?
- Do we have the funds?
- If we don't have the funds, who can take on this role for now?

# How Much Will Hiring a Communications Professional Cost?



## 2010-2011 salaries from NSPRA by enrollment group:

- 25,000+ students: \$99,211
- 10,000-24,999 students: \$84,907
- 2,500-9,999 students: \$69,428
- 300-2,499 students: \$56,976

The average salary in the Great Lakes region in 2010-2011  
was \$81,192

# What Kind of Professional is Needed to Run a Communications Office?



- Good organizational skills and deadline oriented
- Can play well with others ranging from the Superintendent to school staff to children
- Is a “jack-of-all trades” who is a good writer, familiar with graphic design and the production process, comfortable with technology (including website updating and social media), and able to take decent photographs
- Is creative, intuitive and can handle chaos without being threatened by it

# Final Thoughts

- Make friends at neighboring school districts
- Communicate in good times and bad
- Transparency is key
- Interactive, two-way communication is essential to building trust
- Take time to evaluate communication needs and priorities
- There is such a thing as a “hunch” when it comes to a good story – that’s something that only a seasoned communications professional can understand, it cannot be taught
- If your district serves a diverse community, don’t forget to translate important messages
- Don’t forget to breath and have fun – a sense of humor and friendly demeanor is key to being an effective communicator





If you have any questions,  
please contact...

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