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Tough Day in Philadelphia School District

It was a really hard day in the Philadelphia School District last Friday, when more than 3,800 staff members, including 2,600 teachers, were laid off. The district is experiencing a \$304 million shortfall, and unless aid is received from the city or the state by July 1, these cuts will be permanent. The staff cuts leave schools that are “basically an empty shell,” District Superintendent Hite said. All extracurriculars are cut, as well as nearly all guidance counselors, librarians, nurses and lunchtime aids. In a district with a high poverty level, these drastic cuts to social services and education are very short-sighted indeed.

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20130609_Philly_schools_to_lay_off_nearly_3_800_staffers.html#FzqfTX1Ku5itij8T.99

Summer Planning Ideas from NSPRA

Here is a summary of three summer planning ideas from Rich Bagin at NSPRA:

First, consider using the Branding Concept of “WE’RE GETTING BETTER” in all that you do. Every day we battle critics who claim our public schools are bad. Even after we can prove that graduation rates, student achievement, and even our comparative international tests results when they are based on level playing fields are better than in the past, our critics still continue to bash public education.

Instead of getting all defensive as we normally do, think about taking an approach that says we are getting better every day. When you say that we are getting better, you create a bridge that acknowledges that we still have work to do and that we need our community’s support to help make us better. Let people know that improvement is our first order of business.

By taking this “we-are-getting-better approach,” you may convert some of the more reasonable critics into supporters and advocates for your schools. Take some time this summer and plan how you can incorporate this idea into your current communication tools and messages.

Next, take a quick tally of the combined scholarships that your graduating seniors earned this year. That statistic could turn into a positive point when you are talking about your public schools in this era of increasing competition from private, charter, and home-schooled education.

For instance, the graduating seniors of one North Carolina School District were offered more than \$126.5 million in scholarship funding. This is one case where public school numbers really add up. The numbers can impress prospective students and their parents when they are choosing a school. Since we are seeing more competition in numerous states, this robust scholarship statistic is another feather in our public school hat.

Finally, education leaders are rarely out in front on major issues. We continue to play catch up and react to what others are saying about our new programs. We often let our critics and others set our community’s agenda, define our own programs with their language, and project our outcomes.

It is difficult to find the time and adequately plan the communication effort for major new components in your system. But if you want it to be successful, you must be proactive and get out in front of your opposition to set the agenda, to define your work, and project the benefits of your program.

At least pick one issue or program this year to give it a try. If you don't do it, you know your critics will gladly step into this leadership role for your schools. Be proactive and that is spelled **PR**oactive!

Summer reading

Here is a suggestion of excellent public relations books. Maybe you can find one to add to your summer reading list.

<http://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/14570.aspx#>

Member Request

Dave Sherman of Colonial School District has a question to ask of members:

"Do you prepare a summer mailing from the superintendent prior to the start of the school year, and if so, what is included in the mailing?" If you would like to respond to Dave, you can reach him at dsherman@colonialsd.org.

Information to Share with Colleagues

Here are a few tidbits which may be interesting to share with superintendents, other administrators or even principals and teachers in your district.

Terry Madonna Opinion research recently did a poll on the public's opinion of school in PA.

https://www.psba.org/news-publications/Public_School_Grade_Poll_Results-A_B-05222013.pdf

Next, this link has a great variety of sources to use for infographics.

<http://www.teachthought.com/technology/46-tools-to-make-infographics-in-the-classroom/>

Finally, *School Administrator* Magazine now has an electronic version which is very clear and easy to read, if you prefer that to a paper version.

<http://www.aasa.org/schooladministratorissue.aspx?id=28274>

News From Around the State and Nation

Corbett's Focus for June includes Pension Reform, Liquor Privatization and Transportation Funding

<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/local/state/corbett-focusing-on-3-key-pieces-of-legislation-690801/#ixzz2VnyslYm>

Special Education Bill Set to be Signed Friday: Will Redistribute Special Ed Funding in an Equitable Manner

<http://warminster.patch.com/articles/gov-corbett-holding-bill-signing-event-at-tennent-friday>

Update on the Common Core Postponement

http://www.inquirer.com/local/pa/philadelphia/20130608_Standardized_testing_to_change_for_Pennsylvania_students.html?authenticate=y

Who's Minding the Schools? Editorial from the NY Times that reviews the history of the Common Core and asks how such a major change occurred with so little input from so many.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/the-common-core-whos-minding-the-schools.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

A Philadelphia Teacher Responds Eloquently to Being Laid Off

<http://thenotebook.org/blog/136089/letter-district-our-dedication-we-are-rewarded>

This Iowa teacher's response to a nasty newspaper editorial contains some unique answers.

http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20130523/OPINION01/305230091/Iowa-View-Iowa-reform-isn-t-focusing-on-Maryland-s-steps?Opinion&gcheck=1&nlick_check=1