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### Fruit Loops and Macaroni Noodles

Several years ago when I worked at a school district, the Superintendent asked me to address our board about the state of communications in the district. After a couple of days I went back to him and said the topic of my speech was going to be, "What we can learn about school communications from fruit loops and macaroni noodles." He looked at me like I was a fruitcake, but I did eventually address the board with this concept. Here is a summary of the presentation.

I visited a first grade classroom on the 100<sup>th</sup> day of school. When I entered the classroom I saw the students making the number 100 out of fruit loops and macaroni noodles.

"How cute," one may think. "What a nice little craft project."

But that was far from the whole picture. Students had been studying the number 100 all year, in counting exercises, and in how 5 and 10 relate to 100. They created graphs. They read books about the numbers, and books about how other schools celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> day of school. They worked with spelling words on the topic. They wrote stories about what they had learned in the first 100 days of school. They studied a school from 100 years ago.

And then they happen to use fruit loops and macaroni noodles to do a craft project during a class party. But you would be sorely mistaken if you thought that was all that had happened in that classroom with the number 100. Those fruit loops were just the icing on the cake. Through all these activities; math, reading, writing, spelling and social studies, the students were engaged in active learning, cross-curricular learning and differentiated instruction. Special education students were mainstreamed into the regular education classroom as well. These are all improved methods of teaching that vastly enhance learning, and result over time in 3<sup>rd</sup> graders that can develop a coherent PowerPoint presentation, and in this district, 98 % of the 11<sup>th</sup> graders scoring proficient or better on the PSSA.

What I spoke about to the board that evening is that communicating about schools is difficult because modern education is complex. The same holds true for making decisions about schools. Experience in business, management, law, or accounting all sound like experience that can be put to good use in schools....but is more often used to criticize the work of a district. The simple truth is if you don't have experience in education, you are going to walk in that classroom and see fruit loops. You aren't going to see the whole picture, and that could lead to the wrong decisions. In this case a picture is not worth a thousand words.

As you communicate in your districts, remember that even though you maybe relating to a well-educated professional population, they are more than likely only going to remember the fruit loops from that first grade class, and it is your job to help them look beyond and understand the whole story. It is a

challenge that you rise to every day, graciously interacting with a public that wants to reduce your work and the work of your district to the minimum, even though this work requires a great deal of skill, knowledge, determination and courage and leads the way for our nation's youth.

Information on the PenSPRA 2012 scholarship program is now available. PenSPRA offers six \$500 scholarships, two in each of its three regions, for public school students planning to major in communications or public relations. Deadline for submission is March 16, 2012. Applications and more information are available on the PenSPRA website at:

[www.penspra.org/5105273120013/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=51303&5105273120013Nav=|&NodeID=31](http://www.penspra.org/5105273120013/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=51303&5105273120013Nav=|&NodeID=31)

Contact Vicki F. Flotta at 412-854-8438 or [flotta.vicki@bpsd.org](mailto:flotta.vicki@bpsd.org) with questions on the scholarship program.

#### How Will You Demonstrate Your Excellence? - Publications Contest

The annual PenSPRA publications contest has begun! Thanks to all the great entries we have received so far.

If you haven't entered, remember that the publications contest gives you a chance to demonstrate the excellence of your communications by winning a state-wide award. There are multiple categories so you are sure to find one to fit with the work you have done over the past year. Deadline has been extended until January 31st! You can find all you need to know at this link:

<http://www.penspra.org/5105273120013/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=51304&5105273120013Nav=|&NodeID=29>

#### Symposium Registration

We are facing difficult times in schools these days. Don't hunker down and go at it alone! It is more important than ever that you take a little time to recharge your batteries and your ideas with your school PR pals. Registration for the 2012 PenSPRA symposium is now open. Make time for some powerful networking, and important information on fund development, crisis communication and budget communication. For more information, click here:

<http://www.penspra.org/5105173120422/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=51318&5105173120422Nav=|&NodeID=45>

#### Save the date – Eastern region

Eastern region – plan to attend a regional workshop at the MCIU on Thursday, April 12, 9:30 – 12 pm. If you have any suggested program topics or are interested in presenting, please e-mail Kristen Rawlings at

#### News From Around The State and Nation

Our President Nicole McGalla was in the news last week as Parkland Schools Debated the Issue of Advertising on School Buses.

<http://www.mcall.com/news/local/parkland/mc-parkland-bus-ad-vote-20120117,0,119644.story>

More on Financially Troubled Chester Upland.

[http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20120123\\_Is\\_there\\_a\\_solution\\_for\\_Chester\\_Upland\\_s\\_problems.html?page=1&c=y](http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20120123_Is_there_a_solution_for_Chester_Upland_s_problems.html?page=1&c=y)

Interesting Commentary on What Works to Turn Troubled Schools Around.

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/18/17blankstein\\_ep.h31.html?tkn=TMSFqYmH4ldUv2sAeGsEciUiucqtzMMMe8F&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/18/17blankstein_ep.h31.html?tkn=TMSFqYmH4ldUv2sAeGsEciUiucqtzMMMe8F&cmp=clp-edweek)

The Strike in Neshaminy has ended.

<http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Neshaminy-Teachers-Back-in-Class--137744948.html>