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Painted With The Same Brush

In my southeastern corner of Pennsylvania, there has been quite a bit of school news this weekend. On Friday the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced plans to close and merge 49 Catholic schools. The papers are full of pictures of students and parents in tears as they take in the news their school will close in June. On Monday, teachers in Neshaminy School District went on strike after a four-year negotiations battle. The teachers on the picket line are, of course, headline news.

And perhaps in your corner of Pennsylvania it seems relatively calm today. When education news breaks, however, it is always wise to remember that some members of the public paint us all with the same brush. Particularly when a district is geographically close to yours, your community may confuse events in another district and believe the events occurred in yours.

Let's look at the Catholic school closings as one example. I can foresee two problems for other districts with this story. The first is that the Archdiocese is closing schools due to budget cuts from declining enrollment. What if you are a neighboring district that is building a new school due to increased enrollment? For the community member whose newspaper covers 30 or 40 districts, it is easy to mix stories together and then to believe that, "these schools are wasting my tax dollars closing schools and building them at the same time!"

The second issue with the Catholic schools involves the school choice legislation. Some commentators are suggesting that the Catholic school closings could have been prevented if the school choice legislation had passed. The Catholic school system, however, has a drop in enrollment of 38% - big numbers to fill. It is impossible to predict whether the legislation would have helped or whether parents would even have chosen Catholic schools for their children. Regardless, it is likely this type of talk will catch on with some people and the closings of religious schools will be blamed on the resistance from public schools to implement school choice. See where I am headed?

In the case of any strike, it always serves as a reminder to many communities of past strikes or labor difficulties and the vulnerabilities they feel during these times. Any strike anywhere in the state is a loser story for all districts.

So how do you avoid being painted with that brush that is the wrong color or shape? Be proactive and continually scan for news that could have an impact in our districts. When that type of news is on the horizon, counter with accurate information from your district. You don't even need to mention the other stories. Just be certain that your community has access to the news they need to know about you! In these two cases, you could do a quick "state of the district" update that would cover enrollment, construction, staffing, etc, and would negate any questions that could arise for stakeholders from that other educational news. In this way, scanning for other educational news can help you generate story ideas for your newsletters and websites. Your response to something else becomes a new story in your community, and you have turned a potential negative into a positive.

How Will You Demonstrate Your Excellence? - Publications Contest

The annual PenSPRA publications contest has begun! 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

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>

Member Request

Dave Sherman from Colonial School District has a quick question for all of you – Are you using text alerts to send news or information to parents? Please email Dave at dsherman@colonialsd.org and let him know if you are. Thanks all!

Job Opportunity

Communications Specialist - Montgomery County Intermediate Unit. Deadline January 23.

Full-time, year-round position beginning as soon as possible after expiration of deadline. Bachelor's degree and 2-5 years experience in marketing/communications field required. Must have excellent writing and communication skills. Proficiency in Microsoft Office and desktop publishing required with experience in Adobe Design preferred. Assist with the writing and design of MCIU publications and contracted work with school districts, create marketing plans for MCIU divisions and provide appropriate communications support.

Salary range \$40-47,000 depending on experience and qualifications. Applications may be downloaded at www.mciu.org. Contact Mrs. Flowers at (610) 755-9307 for more information.

Interesting guest opinion on school choice

<http://delcotimes.com/articles/2011/12/23/opinion/doc4ef3f8b35ca86769894165.txt?viewmode=fullstory>

Online schools are not measuring up on standardized tests:

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/education/students-of-virtual-schools-are-lagging-in-proficiency.html?_r=2&ref=education

Another tough budget year is headed our way:

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/12006/1201697-56.stm>

And another sign of the difficult budgets:

http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20120110_Some_moving_out_of_troubled_Chester_Upland_School_District.html

A Tech school success story:

http://articles.philly.com/2012-01-09/news/30607812_1_achievement-career-and-technical-education-county-technical-high-school

Details on the Catholic School Closings:

http://articles.philly.com/2012-01-07/news/30602137_1_school-closings-elementary-schools-catholic-school-enrollment