

In This Issue:

1. Start the year on the Offensive and Stay There
2. Small World – When Recess in California Becomes News in PA
3. New Poll on Opinions about Charter Schools
4. Symposium Date
5. PSBA Request
6. News from Around the State and Nation

Start the Year on the Offensive and Stay There!

We hope your school year is off to a great start and it is surely exciting to have the students back in your schools again. Perhaps you are starting the year off with a lingering worry though... budgets are tight and getting tighter. What can you do to protect your position? Start the year on the offensive and stay there! PR is an offensive line position. Once you have to play defense, you are scrambling to take control and get the ball back.

When a public relations practitioner is good at his/her job, the organization he/she works for may not even notice the work he/she does. You are constantly listening and responding to your community, in a perpetual survey mode. When you sense issues arising, you ward them off with timely and accurate information that the public is looking for. You are doing your job properly and as a result communication may start to seem like it is not even necessary to some decision makers.

Protect yourself. At the end of each day spend two minutes tracking what you accomplished. How many phone calls and e-mails did you respond to? A simple tally sheet near your phone is all you need. On a weekly basis jot down some of those potential bubbling issues you warded off, how you noticed a co-worker struggling to communicate an issue effectively and stepped in to help or an event or program out of your normal scope that you assisted with. It is these little tasks that are hard to account for if you are ever faced with the burden of defending your work. Make a habit of recording what you do. Pay particular attention to issues you take control of that had the potential to cost the district money if they grew to larger problems. When four administrators and a lawyer have to spend time handling an issue, it gets expensive fast. Note where and how you saved the time of other staff. This is valuable!

When you are accountable to yourself, you will be prepared to be accountable to others.

Small World – When Recess in California Becomes News in PA

“Why are they canceling recess?” the caller demanded as soon as I picked up the phone.

“Excuse me? Canceling recess?” I answered, wondering where this was coming from.

“Yes, I saw it in today’s paper. No recess so the kids can study more for tests!”

Although I had read my local paper that morning, I flipped through it again just to check. And there it was. A wire story about a school in California that was canceling recess to provide more time for testing. Unfortunately the location of the school was only mentioned once and I could understand why a reader might think the story was about a local school district. After all, it is a local newspaper and most of the public doesn’t understand that smaller newspapers often purchase “canned” stories they use to fill out the paper when there isn’t enough local content.

After I reassured the caller that her child would be enjoying recess for the foreseeable future in our district, I thought about how damaging these national stories can be at the local level. The public tends to lump what they hear about all schools into one “overall school” and it becomes a barrier to communication about what is happening in your local school.

Fortunately, there is an easy way to use these national stories to your advantage. Find the local angle. As a national education story breaks, contact your reporters and let them know what is happening on that topic in your schools. They may or may not take you up on the story, but you can continue and make your own news about the topic. In this case it is as easy as posting some pictures of students at recess on your website, and in your parent, staff and community newsletters. A simple photograph will tell the story and you don’t even have to elaborate on the plight of the sad Californian students whose lost recess triggered the topic.

With these proactive steps you can stay out in front of the news, and even find some new issues in your district to share with your community. And of course, per article 1, this would be one of those tasks you perform that you should record!

New Poll on Opinions about Charter Schools

A poll conducted in Pennsylvania demonstrates that 67% of Pennsylvanians would choose not to use taxpayer dollars to send students to private schools. This finding has implications for the current school choice debate. Pennsylvanians clearly want all children to have an opportunity to attend a good school and this has been represented in polls where school choice is viewed favorably. Yet, this definite majority does not favor sending taxpayer funds to private schools. This indicates that the public does not understand the operation of charter schools because you can’t have it both ways! This poll supports the national Phi Delta Kappa poll information we highlighted in an email alert in late August.

Between these two polls you have solid research to use for a communication plan in your district. The public needs to know more about this issue. If you were thinking of doing a piece on school choice, make sure you include background information on charter school funding and operation as an integral part of the piece. If someone tries to talk you out of the background information with a comment like: “Oh, everyone knows how a charter school works,” show them this poll. A public awareness campaign on charter schools is obviously in order. Here is a link to more detail about the poll:

<http://keystonestateeducationcoalition.blogspot.com/2011/01/madonna-poll-shows-67-of-pennsylvanians.html>

Symposium Date

The PenSPRA symposium committee is already at work planning the 2012 PenSPRA Symposium. Pencil in the week of March 6th .The next issue of e-Comm will feature an online survey so that we can get your opinion on what topics you would like to see at the Symposium.

PSBA Request

PSBA is interested in working with PenSPRA to create a webinar for school board members on media training. If you have prepared anything on this topic for your board and would be interested in assisting with this project, please let Nicole or I know.

This article is long, but it is a wonderful summary of the state of education today. It discusses what is right and wrong and where we should go from here. Well worth having bookmarked as a reference or to add to your district site for informational purposes.

<http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2011/08/16/lifestyle/features/american-schools-crisis.html>

With the recent dismissal of Philadelphia superintendent Arlene Ackerman, superintendent salaries and bonus packages are in the news.

http://articles.philly.com/2011-08-29/news/29941632_1_school-superintendents-school-districts-contract-negotiations

This is a bill being considered for the fall session, Senate bill 904. The bill would appoint a seven member commission to approve and regulate charter schools. Currently local school boards perform this function. Members of the commission would not all be elected officials.

<http://www.psba.org/news-publications/headlines/details.asp?id=2127>

Here is a link that is continually being updated by PSBA. It lists districts that have ratified pay freezes for this school year. Good to know for that conversation with a community member who claims "school employees get automatic raises."

<http://www.psba.org/news-publications/headlines/details.asp?id=1767>