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### Planning for Engagement

In the last issue we discussed spending some time in the last quarter of the school year planning for next year. Today I thought I would highlight some examples of engagement from PA and around the country. If your district is facing any major changes next year, including continued budget cuts, now is the time to begin planning the engagement process. It may seem like a long way off, but the process of increasing trust with your stakeholders through engagement is time-consuming.

It's always a good idea to have a solid definition of your work at your fingertips, should questions from co-workers arise. The following is from [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org):

"Public engagement is a process that brings people together to address issues of common importance, to solve shared problems, and to bring about positive social change. Effective public engagement invites average citizens to get involved in deliberation, dialogue and action on public issues that they care about. It helps leaders and decision makers better understand the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of citizens and stakeholders.

When done well, public engagement goes far beyond the "usual suspects" to include those members of the community whose voices have traditionally been left out of political and policy debates. It also:

- helps people weigh a variety of perspectives and listen to each other's views;
- builds common understanding, manages differences and establishes direction for moving ahead on tough issues;
- builds trust and improves communication between the public and leaders;
- creates new opportunities for citizens to become involved in public problem solving and decision making."

Starting right here in PA with the North Penn School District, look at how parents and community members were invited to one of several community forums about the budget:

<http://www.npenn.org/55771098101828460/lib/55771098101828460/2011-2012/CC%20Flier.pdf>

If North Penn stakeholders were unable to attend any of the forums, one was shown live on the North Penn TV station and the district's website, and viewers could call in with questions:

<http://www.npenn.org/55779929102241/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=69209>

Already you can see how a process that reaches out to the community during tough times or change results in solid stakeholder relationships. Let's move on....the links below are from school districts around the country that were recognized by NSPRA for outstanding engagement/communication.

Washoe County School District underwent a communication audit, using the results to make communications a strategic priority for the district. Now the district states, "*We are proactive, creating*

*our own positive news and actively engaging the community in conversations about education. These efforts have led to national recognition.”* Browse through the Power Point to see the transformation and how engagement impacts education.

[http://www.washoe.k12.nv.us/docs/communications/AASA\\_Conference\\_Presentation -- Leadership Through Communication WEB VERSION.pdf](http://www.washoe.k12.nv.us/docs/communications/AASA_Conference_Presentation_-_Leadership_Through_Communication_WEB_VERSION.pdf)

The Elk Grove Unified School District has a blog written by administration to discuss the ongoing process of funding for staffing. You will note it is updated every two to three weeks as they make their way through the process, which ends in November 2012 with a referendum.

<http://blogs.egusd.net/budget/2012/02/16/egusd%E2%80%99s-2012-2013-staffing/>

Rockwood School District has a budget task force which is making its way through their budget process. On this page they have posted summaries of statements by staff, notes from stakeholder meetings and telephone and online survey results.

<http://www.rockwood.k12.mo.us/guidingchange/budgefy12/Pages/default.aspx>

This document is a summary of Rockwood’s award-winning budget planning process:

[http://www.nspra.org/files/docs/Gold\\_Medallion2011-Rockwood.pdf](http://www.nspra.org/files/docs/Gold_Medallion2011-Rockwood.pdf)

Finally, read about how Fairfax schools managed a proposed change to their bell schedule that would have impacted tens of thousands of students:

<http://www.nspra.org/files/docs/Fairfax.pdf>

You may also find this tip sheet from Non-Profit Quarterly useful in your planning:

<http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/images/stories/10-tactics-bigger.pdf>

Engagement is a powerful process that is necessary to help districts manage change. When your community feels that their input and opinions are valued, their reactions to change will be much more positive. Do you have a story on engagement you would like to share with the group? Or questions? Let me know, and we can include in a future e-Comm Alert.

Recap of the Eastern Chapter Workshop

Nearly twenty members of the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association (PenSPRA) Eastern Chapter attended a workshop at the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit on April 12th. After sharing insights from the annual symposium that had recently taken place, three presentations were made.

First, Diane Thompson and Kim Breuninger from the Chester County Intermediate Unit discussed many of the new programs available on PAIUnet, a high-speed educational network that connects all 29 Intermediate Units and their school districts throughout Pennsylvania. Attendees also learned about Keystone Catalog, which provides hundreds of online courses and professional development programs, as well as NewWorlds, a virtual environment that utilizes avatar technology to provide a multitude of learning scenarios.

PenSPRA East members were then provided a legislative update from Tina Viletto, MCIU Legislative Services and Grants Director, and Chris Sappey, Legislative Initiatives Director for State Senator Andrew Dinniman. The speakers emphasized that legislators tend to take action based upon the feedback received from their constituents. They also warned that it is important for educators to have their voice heard now before the opportunity to effect change has passed. Sappey discussed a grassroots campaign called Chester County Coalition for Education. They have enlisted community members to serve on one or more of 9 committees and have realized great success by involving members of churches, service clubs and Chambers of Commerce as key communicators.

The workshop concluded with a presentation on the Central Pennsylvania Public School Coalition, an association of public education leaders from Clinton, Clearfield, and Centre counties that have joined ranks to launch a public campaign aimed at educating and mobilizing the public about the successes of public education. Dena Cipriano, Public Relations Officer and Grant Writer for the Phillipsburg-Osceola Area School District, provided a recap of the coalition's communication plan, including radio ads that promote public education and debunk the advantages claimed by cyber and parochial schools in the State College area.

For additional information regarding PAIUnet, please visit [www.paiunet.org](http://www.paiunet.org). For more information about the Chester County Coalition for Education, contact Chris Sappey at [atcsappey@paseante.com](mailto:atcsappey@paseante.com) or 610-692-2112. For additional information regarding the Central Pennsylvania Public School Coalition, please visit [www.schoolfacts.co](http://www.schoolfacts.co).

#### News From Around the State and Nation

A look at the upcoming legislative agenda:

[http://www.timesonline.com/news/state/pa-lawmakers-near-busy-season-with-unclear-agenda/article\\_8c558ec2-4c74-537b-a6ba-16f3fca74181.html](http://www.timesonline.com/news/state/pa-lawmakers-near-busy-season-with-unclear-agenda/article_8c558ec2-4c74-537b-a6ba-16f3fca74181.html)

A letter writer commends the Central Dauphin School District for reaching out to the community during tough budget times:

[http://www.pennlive.com/letters/index.ssf/2012/04/corbett\\_keeps\\_throwing\\_school.html](http://www.pennlive.com/letters/index.ssf/2012/04/corbett_keeps_throwing_school.html)