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Handling Layoffs

As budgets are finalized and school winds down over the next month, many districts are going to be faced with the painful realization that some staff members will not be returning in the fall. It is at these times when your skills at balancing multiple audiences are most in need. For the employees losing their jobs, for the employees losing their friends, or for families losing a trusted teacher or other school staff member, emotions are raw.

As a PR professional, it is unlikely you will be part of the team delivering the message of a layoff to other employees. This is a busy time of year, however, and there are many other messages you likely need to share. At this time more so than any other, you must continually ask yourself, "Is this the most sensitive way I can send this message? Is this the right timing? How would I feel hearing this message if I had lost my job or was fearful of losing my job?" Just as importantly, you must assist the other administrators in your district to remember to do this as well in their communications.

Here is a hypothetical example. A band teacher of 35 years plans to retire this year and a special concert is held in his honor with hundreds of current and former students in attendance. It is a moving and wonderful event; one of those that make school life what it is. A week later the youngest band teacher in the district, who is also quite popular, is laid off. A story in your newsletter or on your website right at this time about the retiring teacher's honorary concert could be difficult for the younger teacher and his/her colleagues and students at their school to handle. Although you want to recognize the special event for the retiring teacher, waiting a few weeks is probably the more sensitive choice.

A few other tips:

- Check to see that the district has arranged for employment assistance for laid-off employees and that this information is communicated properly to the employees.
- Be aware that remaining employees may feel resentful at the knowledge that their workload is likely to increase, or guilty that they retained their position and a friend did not.
- Plan to rebuild morale over the next year with additional ways to recognize and highlight staff achievement, and ways to include all staff in planning processes. Ensure their voices are heard.

Finally, be the voice of compassion, and not the voice of reason. At this time your staff and your families need a sympathetic ear more so than facts and figures. You have certainly already explained the budget difficulties and they know the whys. They just need a welcoming face and a concerned, supportive friend. They have come to the right place... the PR office.

Submit an Article for the September 2012 Pennsylvania Administrator Magazine

The PAESSP is seeking principals and educators to write for the September 2012 edition of its award-winning Pennsylvania Administrator magazine. This issue does not have a specific theme, so any education topics will be accepted for review by the Editorial Review Board. The deadline for submitting articles is July 6, 2012. Articles should be no longer than 1,500 words. Articles must be submitted via e-

mail as a Microsoft Word document. A biographical sketch and a photograph of the author(s) (saved as a JPEG or a TIFF file) must accompany all articles. E-mail articles to sherit@paessp.org.

Employment Opportunities

The North Hills School District is seeking a highly qualified Communications Coordinator with excellent writing and interpersonal skills along with experience in media relations, website maintenance, social media, publication design and digital photography. Bachelor's degree in communications, English or related field required. Public school experience preferred. Send resume to Dr. Patrick Mannarino, Superintendent, 135 Sixth Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15229 or phillips1@nhsd.net. Application deadline: June 8, 2012.

News From Around the State and Nation

A look at an online charter school by the New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/education/online-schools-score-better-on-wall-street-than-in-classrooms.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

Race to the Top Grant Applications Available Again

http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/penn_link/8678/penn_link_email_lists/520103

Some Statewide Stats on the Budget Situation in this Article

http://articles.philly.com/2012-05-23/news/31813277_1_school-district-survey-school-art-and-music-physical-education

PASBO and PASA Survey on District Finances. Summary shows:

- Class sizes will increase in about 60 percent of the districts surveyed.
- Students in 58 percent of districts will face reduced instruction in art and music, reduced physical education classes, and fewer elective and advanced placement course offerings.
- Nearly half of the districts are delaying textbook purchases.
- Forty-six percent are trimming or eliminating field trips and extra-curricular programs, including sports.
- Thirty-seven percent are cutting tutoring programs and 34 percent are eliminating summer school.
- Research-proven early childhood education programs such as full-day kindergarten will be reduced or eliminated in 19 percent of responding districts.

The full report here:

http://www.pasbo.org/PressReleaseReportSurvey_FINAL.pdf

A Look at the Recent Call by Harrisburg for Districts to Use their Reserve Funds

http://www.phillyburbs.com/news/local/the_intelligencer_news/are-schools-hoarding-or-planning-responsibly/article_d714ab3b-28fa-51a9-85dd-36f2fd10bc92.html

A Columnist who Attended School with Tina Fey Writes About the Importance of the Arts
http://articles.philly.com/2012-05-28/news/31869047_1_tina-fey-school-aid-nora-murphy