



*Social Media*  
**3.0**

**Beyond Twitter  
and Facebook**



## DEVELOPING A CONNECTED MINDSET THROUGH INTENTIONAL PRACTICE.

By Daniel Butler

**S**ocial media is a tool that is only as powerful as the hand that holds it. Social media 3.0, however, is about mindset—believing in the importance of consistently differentiating communication and cultivating contagious, memorable messages. With relatively simple changes in the presentation and structure of information, principals can multiply their positive impact.

Never have there been more tools to engage in this work. But when we make a commitment to connect, we need not focus narrowly on the tool, but rather on the purpose. We have the means to use our social behavior to build a culture of success for our students, our schools, and ourselves. Before making the commitment to get connected, principals should follow these three critical steps to take social media to the next level.

### **1** Define Your Purpose

As you begin—or enrich—your journey toward connected school leadership, define your purpose and what will be gained by engaging in this work. When you are able to articulate the “why” for using social media, the “how” will become much clearer.

Are you interested in showcasing the work of your students and school district? Do you want to leverage social media to differentiate communication efforts with families and community members? Or are you simply trying to keep up with the times?

As I have become engaged with social media, I have created a brand presence while telling the story of the wonderful events taking place at the schools I lead, personalized professional development for myself and my staff, and contributed to a community of learners dedicated to continuous improvement.

**Shaping the message.** Public education has received a great deal of criticism lately, with a significant amount of misleading information about accountability, standards, and student achievement contributing to this narrative. Parents, community members, politicians, and others connected to your district are going to talk; the majority of the time the message is negative, and it is also often inaccurate.

School branding experts Tony Sinanis and Joe Sanfelippo state in their book, *The Power of Branding: Telling Your School's Story* (2015), “The time has come for educators, students, and families to use their voices, take control of their stories, and begin thinking about how a school or district community can brand their space.” Stakeholders need to know the facts and understand the great accomplishments that are taking place in schools. Never has this undertaking been more important.

There is an infinite number of social media tools at our disposal to leverage this work, whether it is Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Storify, or blogs. Controlling the message has become a reality because we have the ability to provide stakeholders with pictures, videos, documents, and links to resources through a variety of tools telling the story about how



both our students and the adults in the profession are learning, growing, and achieving. As I walk through classrooms, I am able to provide a glimpse into our schools by tweeting pictures of a student learning a new literacy strategy or posting a video of a teacher demonstrating a new method of division. This practice provides families with opportunities to see what is happening throughout the day and sparks conversations at home.

**Differentiating learning.** We live in an instantaneous and fast-paced world with the ability to get just about anything we need with the click of a mouse. Social media has opened up doors to personalize professional development for hundreds of thousands of educators across the globe. In *What Connected Educators Do Differently* (2015), Todd Whitaker, Jeffrey Zoul, and Jimmy Casas write about the passion that connected educators share for personalized learning: “They do not necessarily limit their love of professional learning to traditional delivery models—at least not all of their professional learning needs. Instead, they find ways to learn from other educators anytime, anywhere, and by any means that suit their learning needs.”

As I made a commitment to getting connected, learning from others was a tremendous piece of my purpose. I wanted to learn from the best and continue to expand my personal learning network.

With a growing trend of participant-driven EdCamps all over the world and a variety of Web-based tools, professional development has taken a different focus as educators are able to get what they need when they need it. Podcasts, blog posts, Twitter chats, Voxer discussions—you name your learning preference, and there are tools to support you. Listeners can learn from podcasts and Voxer discussions during their commute to work, while readers can learn from Twitter chats and blog posts in the comfort of their own living room.

The “sit-and-get” model of professional development is rapidly changing as educators have access to a variety of options to meet their learning needs. Connected educators embrace the mindset of learning and growing anytime, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, when and where they choose.

**Connecting with like minds.** Social media has brought together a community of connected learners dedicated to improving their schools and personal leadership skills. It doesn’t matter how we connect; all of the tools can help us share passions, view situations from different perspectives, collaborate on various projects, and

continuously grow in our improvement efforts. Social media has allowed us to connect further and enhance face-to-face interactions, while developing a learning community that is focused on continuous improvement, professional growth, and contagious communication.

## 2 Meet Your People Where They Are

Educators are in the people business, and the positive relationships that are established with school and district stakeholders lay the foundation for success. Social media and other communication tools can enhance communication and improve public relations while fostering positive relationships within the school community.

Eric Sheneringer describes a multifaceted approach to engaging stakeholders in his book, *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* (2014).

“Educators must be experts in effective communication techniques, especially when it comes to parents and other key stakeholders,” he writes. “As the times have changed, we now have a variety of means to disseminate in a more efficient and cost-effective fashion.”

Where are your families and stakeholders? Are they Twitter users? Is Facebook a platform they prefer? Or are they connected to social media at all? We must answer these questions by soliciting feedback from our stakeholders. Doing so helps us shape the message, tell our stories, and communicate effectively with diverse groups.

After you have determined the preferred communications vehicles for your stakeholders, develop a differentiated menu of both high- and low-tech communication strategies to keep everyone engaged. (See page 23 for examples.)

## 3 Commit to Longevity

Why would I use messaging app Voxer when I could just send a text message?

Why would I start using Twitter when I get everything I need from Facebook? Connected educators are invested in improvement, and if the mechanism or platform fits our purpose and audience, then we need to move beyond “Why would I use...” to “Which tool will maximize the impact?”

In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006),



### DO THIS






Want to implement the ideas in this article? Take these steps to get started.

- Define the purpose, message, and audience for your communication.
- Post photos of student learning to Facebook and Twitter.
- Personalize professional development with podcasts and EdCamps.

# High- and Low-Tech Options

Consider this menu of high- and low-tech communication strategies to differentiate your message to meet your school community's needs.

We use the following high-tech tools daily to communicate and engage families and stakeholders.

-  **Facebook:** The majority of our families who use social media consider Facebook their go-to platform. As a school, we created a Facebook page after listening to the feedback provided by our stakeholders.
-  **Twitter:** Our following remains small, but we continue to post on this platform because it allows quick, concise messages with the ability to grow professionally as resources are shared continuously.
-  **Remind:** This mass text messaging system is free and has contributed to increased engagement and involvement. The text messages can be scheduled and come from a third-party number that allows users to share information through text without revealing personal cell phone numbers.
-  **Storify:** For the non-social media users in your setting, Storify allows you to collect and archive tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram photos, and more. The archived link can be included in an email, posted to a website, or linked to a Remind mass text message.
-  **Google Forms, Docs, and Spreadsheets:** Google tools have allowed us to solicit quick and concise feedback from stakeholders when decisions need to be made.


Low-tech strategies are equally important to maximize positive relationships with stakeholders. Our daily low-tech tools and strategies include the following.

- **Notes:** We continue to send notes home in folders with students because a large number of families prefer this method. We post everything that we send by hard copy to our social media and Web-based outlets as well.
- **Parent meetings:** There is no substitute for face-to-face interaction where we are able to interpret body language, hear tone, and demonstrate mutual respect toward each other.
- **Home visits:** There are times when our families are unable to get to school, so we make the effort to connect with them in their homes. Through this practice, we have gained tremendous insight about our students and families.
- **Email:** Families are busy and often cannot take calls during the day, but they are usually able to access email at work.
- **School website:** There is still a place for school websites. To maximize the effectiveness, link other platforms to your website, such as Twitter or Facebook pages.

leading researcher Carol Dweck explains her philosophy on growth: “Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience.” By modeling what Dweck has defined as a “growth mindset” in our approaches to connectivity, we send the message that it’s not about the tool, but rather how the tool can help us get what we need effectively and efficiently.

Leveraging social media to accomplish your leadership goals is not an item on a daily agenda. Rather, it should be embedded in everything that connected leaders do. Thinking through the purpose, message, and audience, while matching it with the best tool allows us to focus on the

importance of the work.

It really isn’t about social media; it is about connecting ourselves with a community of learners to tell our story, manage the message, and cross the threshold of little moments transforming to whole-system impact. Fostering a growth mindset toward connectivity will allow educational leaders to harness the power of current and future social media tools to enhance branding, personalize professional development, differentiate communication, and commit to continuous improvement. 

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**Daniel Butler** is principal of Epworth and Farley Elementary Schools in Epworth and Farley, Iowa.

**NAESP MEMBER**

