



PRincipal Tips

Custodians, bus drivers, food service staff, classroom aides, and other support staff are important members of your school community. They also serve as vital sources of information for parents and families about your school. Here are some ideas to keep them in the loop.

Be sure they receive the staff newsletter, school handbook, staff email messages, and phone messaging news/alerts.

Invite them to staff meetings, if you don't already. If it's impossible to include them in regular staff meetings, schedule special meetings for them.

Schedule a time every month when any support staff member can come to your office to discuss concerns.

Start an annual "Celebrate Our Support Staff Day." Classes can undertake activities, such as creating personal thank-you cards, to recognize and celebrate support staff members.

Give support staff a PR role. Hold a professional development session on public relations for support staff. They can learn specific customer service skills, and the ways effective PR fosters community support for the school.

Food for Thought: Maximizing Community Partnerships

A school and grocery store team up to provide students with real-world learning.

Grocery stores are key suppliers of brain food—apples, peanut butter, carrots—but they're filled with food for thought, too, as one Illinois school discovered.

Marquette Elementary School in Illinois's Harlem School District 122, took its annual family reading night on the road, partnering with a local grocery store to engage students and parents in real-world application of reading and math skills. The program, held during store hours one evening in February, serves as a model for a successful—and creative—school-community partnerships.

Planning and Prizes

In January, a month before the event, school staff members began meeting with the managers of Logli/Schnucks Grocery in Machesney Park, Illinois, to prepare for the program. Marquette principal Shane Caiola and literacy coaches coordinated the project, along with district staff.

At the event, students would participate in grade-specific activities developed by teachers. The store would provide refreshments, raffle prizes, food for tasting, helium balloons for activity areas, and extra staff to help the teachers.

Analyzing Food Labels, Writing about Lobsters

So, what happened when one principal, 33 teachers, 227 parents, 336 students, and a few lobsters came together in one grocery store? Plenty of fun—and a hearty serving of learning.

On the night of the event, cheerleaders and the Huskie mascot from the Harlem district's high school volunteered to greet families in front of the store. Students then followed footprints to a location where they picked up activity folders, called "Food for Thought," with instructions. Teachers and store employees were stationed at "learning zones," where they helped parents and students work through the activities.

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Food for Thought

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First graders, for instance, were asked to visit the bakery and decide how many cookies they could buy with \$5.

Older students read food labels and worked through reading and math questions. One activity included a lobster parade at the lobster tank, where students were tasked with writing descriptive sentences about the crustaceans. (It was unclear who was having more fun—the students or the employee displaying the lobsters.)

In the flower department, students graphed their favorite rose color. In fresh foods, they tasted exotic fruits and vegetables. Students polled customers, toured the freezer area and bakery departments, and took part in a scavenger hunt. Each student received goodies around the store and entered drawings to win books; adults received coupons and entered raffles for extra prizes.

Because the store was open for business, families with children not enrolled at the school came to shop, and asked if they could participate. Teachers were prepared with extra folders and treats.

Positive Evaluations

Parents were surprised to find so many learning opportunities at a grocery store. “I’m discovering so much about reading food labels right along with my daughter,” said one mother.

Evaluations completed by parents were very positive. Comments included: “It was tons of fun,” “Great ideas to help children become familiar with how they can

use their math and reading skills,” “Thank you so much for putting this event on,” and, “Please do this again!” One student commented: “My teachers are here! I get to show my parents what I’ve learned!”

At the end of the event, the store manager encouraged teachers to take leftover refreshments and supplies—except, that is, for a special sign grocery store staff had erected, reading, “LEARNING HAPPENS EVERYWHERE.” The manager hoped to keep that for the next school event.

At the next community night, the school hopes to invite local media to participate through broadcast or advertising opportunities. A principal at a neighboring school is also planning a big-box hardware store evening.

Enhancing Learning and Community Engagement

In the end, expenditures from the school were minimal. Title 1 Parent Involvement funds contributed to the cost for books and activity folders, totaling about \$400.

The partnership was seen as a win-win for both the school and the store. It provided practical, creative, fun opportunities for student learning, and deepened parents’ engagement in their students’ education. Not only that, it was also an opportunity to involve families that are traditionally hard to reach, and forge lasting community ties.

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PRINCIPAL COMMUNICATOR

Concise, practical public relations help for your school. *Published six times a year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Telephone: 703-584-3345 or toll-free 800-366-2377; www.naesp.org; email: publications@naesp.org.*

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Dec. 1
 Anniversary of Montgomery (Ala.) Bus Boycott
On this day in 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus, sparking a bus boycott that became a significant event in the civil rights movement.

Dec. 3
 International Day for Persons with Disabilities

Dec. 8-16
 Hanukkah

Dec. 10
 Human Rights Day
Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948

Nobel Prize Day
Awarded for “scientific exploration of great value for mankind” in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, economics and peace

Dec. 15
 Bill of Rights Day
The first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified on this day in 1791.

Dec. 17
 Anniversary of the Wright Brothers’ flight

Dec. 21
 First Day of Winter

Dec. 25
 Christmas

Dec. 26
 Boxing Day
Celebrated in Canada

Dec. 26 – Jan. 1
 Kwanzaa

Communicating Safety Issues to Parents

Bolster your school's safety efforts with these ideas for garnering parent support.

Foster open communication lines.

Fewer than 20 percent of parents hear about bullying and safety issues from administrators. Quell the rumors that can feed school conflict by encouraging parents to speak to administrators directly.

Send regular updates about safety efforts.

Fewer than a quarter of parents say their child's school frequently communicates with them about discipline policies or safety curricula.

Publicize your bullying prevention program or school safety motto.

Parents can only reinforce lessons at home if they know what resources are available, or what's being taught.

Call or email.

More than half of middle school parents prefer phone calls and email as primary communication methods. Fewer than 15 percent prefer website updates, online newsletters, or texts.

Involve parents.

Suggest that your school safety committee recruit several parents, or invite parents to join safety trainings with staff.

Adapted from the National Crime Prevention Council

QUOTABLE

"To understand is hard. Once one understands, action is easy."

—Sun Yat-sen

Making Substitutes Feel Welcome Pays Public Relations Dividends

When a teacher is out, a strong substitute teacher can smoothly step in and keep classroom learning going—but that's not necessarily easy. Good communication can help substitute teachers feel welcome in your school, enjoy working on your staff, and feel energized about working with your students. Plus, it can ensure that the substitute will speak positively about your school in your community.

As a principal, you want the best substitutes to *want* to teach in your school. A substitute who is well-informed and feels appreciated will want to return. Here are some suggestions to help you make that good impression:

Set clear expectations. Make sure that substitutes have a clear idea of what you expect of them in the classroom, and make sure that your regular staff prepares adequate lesson plans.

Welcome substitutes. Meet with each substitute as soon as he or she arrives. Ask if the sub needs anything, and be sure he or she feels free to ask if you or another staff member can help during the day.

Demonstrate your interest. Stop by the substitute's classroom early in the day. A few minutes can demonstrate that you care and can assure you that the day has begun well.

Practice good customer service by going the extra mile. A new substitute can feel lonely, since he or she is likely not to know others on your staff. Take a digital photo of the substitute at the start of the day and post it with some basic information in the staff lounge, or send a staff email welcoming the substitute, with the photo attached. That way, your staff can greet the substitute during breaks and at lunch.

Cultivate credibility. Provide substitutes with an information packet with school fact sheets, school calendars, and data on achievements. This information will help them serve as community ambassadors for your school. Also, let them know they're always welcome to ask questions about your school's operation.

Follow up with good substitutes. Send subs who have done a good job the staff bulletin to keep them informed about your school. They will see that you care about them, and will be more likely to want to return.

From the NSPRA resource Practical PR for Principals, available for purchase on the NSPRA website, www.nspira.org.

What's your favorite way to welcome a new substitute teacher? Tweet it to us at @naesp.

Combat Cyberbullying With Communication

Every student at Seven Oaks Elementary in Lacey, Washington, can recite the school's motto: FRED—Fairness, Respect, Empathy, and Dignity. But students don't always act with FRED, especially when they're online, says principal Ron Sisson.

"Cyberbullying is happening younger and younger," says Sisson, who's navigated several cyberbullying cases in his school. "We're handing technology to students at younger and younger ages, but we're not arming them with things to think about before you post or hit send."

Most schools have bullying policies in place, but cyberbullying—using the Internet, cell phones, video game systems, or other technology to post hurtful text or images—poses unique challenges for school leaders.

"It gets harder to decipher conflict and bullying when you're talking about social media," says Jill Ramsay, counselor at Midway Elementary School in Des Moines, Washington. "What may start out as conflict—how does that turn into cyberbullying? How do you teach kids the difference?"

Further, cyberbullying doesn't typically happen at school. It can be done anonymously and quickly, and is touchy to discuss with parents. For principals, one key to combating cyberbullying is smart, honest communication with students, parents, and community members.

What You Can Do to Combat Cyberbullying This Week

- **Update your school social media policies** to clearly address cyberbullying—against both students and staff.
- **Review your student handbook** to make sure the process for reporting cyberbullying is clear. Include instructions for documenting online incidents, such as taking a screen shot or printing a message thread.

This Month

- **Anonymously survey your students.** "We ask some education questions—like, how do you define bullying? But we also get down to asking: Who are the two or three kids most likely to bully?" says Sisson. "We can tell teachers to keep an eye on these students. Then, you can bring that information to your discussions with parents."

- **Outline expectations** for conflict management in a series of schoolwide assemblies or discussions with classes.
- **Enlist students** to create an anti-bullying slogan, online buttons, or banners

This Quarter

- **Organize parent classes on digital citizenship.** "It takes the parents being on board to try to stop [cyberbullying]," says Amanda Nickerson, director of the Alberti Center for Prevention of Bullying Abuse and School Violence. Classes should cover monitoring kids' social media use and teaching kids appropriate strategies, she says.

Sisson tries to frame interactions with parents in a positive, rather than accusatory, way. "My experience has been that the parents aren't even aware that these interactions had occurred," he says. "It's an opportunity for them to step in and work with their child."

This Year

- **Partner with teachers** to weave digital citizenship lessons into your school's curriculum.
- **Model positive interactions** with students online and encourage staff to do the same.
- **Share your successes.** It's easy for the media and the public to focus only on tragic bullying incidents, which Sisson says is tough to counter.

"That's the hardest issue we deal with in the school system. The 'Bully' movie, these media stories—many of them are isolated incidents. For the most part, when schools have bullying incidents, we deal with them," he says.

Share your anti-bullying program online in a blog post, or tweet about it. Publicize your parent classes, or collaborate with local law enforcement to hold a town hall-style meeting, and invite your community to take part.

Visit www.naesp.org/bullying for more resources.

Meredith Barnett is associate writer/editor at NAESP.