

# Making the Call

Principal spotlights students' positive performance by phone almost every day

By Mark French



If you could make parents cry tears of happiness, students smile, and build a positive school culture by doing something that takes 10 minutes a day and costs nothing, would you do it? If you answered “Yes,” you’re in luck, because you can do all of those things by making what I refer to as a “Good News Call of the Day.”

During the summer of 2015, I was participating in a Twitter chat when a teacher mentioned that she made a positive phone call home on behalf of one of her students every day. I thought this was a great idea; I have 750 students and could certainly find a student worthy of a positive phone call each day. Thus, the #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay was born.

## Expanding the Effort

It has now been three years since I started making these phone calls, and my original goal was to make one call per day, every day I was at school. The first year, I made 130 calls; the second year, I increased that total to 135. Last year, I made calls for 137 different students. I call moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas—whomever the student wants me to phone.

I use a spreadsheet to identify the student, the date, the student’s teacher, and the reason for the call. I do this so I don’t repeat students during a school year, and so I can spread the positive news from pre-K to 6th grade.

I pick most students based on something I’ve observed and experienced myself. I might have seen the student help a younger child, clean up in the cafeteria without being asked, improve their behavior, volunteer and answer questions during a lesson, or simply exhibit kindness.

I also created a simple recommendation form I keep in a folder on my office door that all staff members can use to nominate a student. I've had teachers, custodians, kitchen staff, office team members, and bus drivers nominate students for a Good News Call of the Day.

### Recognizing an Accomplishment

When it's their day, I go to the student's classroom, tell the teacher I'm there to get someone for the Good News Call of the Day, name the student and announce their good deed, lead a round of applause, and bring the student to my office. There, I give the student a #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay wristband, and I look up the phone number.

I can usually reach a parent on their cellphone or work phone on the first try. I tell them why I'm calling and how proud I am of their child and then hand the phone over to let the student and parent talk to each other. Then we go into the hallway to take a selfie, which I share on Twitter with the hashtag #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay.

Since I need permission to share student photos on social media, the last thing I ask on the call is, "My practice is to take a selfie with your child and share that with others on social media, only using their first name. Are you comfortable with that?" So far, not a single parent has said no.

If a family member can't answer the phone, I leave a message and check to see if they got my Good News Call the following day. This year, I plan to add a certificate for the student to take home.


At first, I used a dramatic pause during my calls: "Hello, this is Principal French, and I have your child in the office with me ... for the Good News Call of the Day!" Now I say, "Hi, this is Principal French, do you have time for some good news?" instead of making the parent anxious.

### Spreading the News

I shared this practice with others, and there is now a community of principals and educators making positive phone calls using the hashtag #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay. They often add their own personal flair, wearing hats for selfies, giving certificates, and posting photos on school bulletin boards. One principal even uses a gong in announcing the recognition!

Many say that it's the best part of their day, and I agree. If I'm out of the building at a meeting or have been too busy to make the #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay, I

feel like something is missing. I love making that connection with students, identifying the positive things they do, reaching out to families, and spreading the good news. Why should a phone call from the principal be a dreaded event? We should share what the great students in our schools are doing.

This year, I plan to make at least 150 #GoodNewsCallOfTheDay calls, and you can make them, too. Visit [www.GoodNewsCallOfTheDay.com](http://www.GoodNewsCallOfTheDay.com) for ideas. You'll be glad you did. 

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