





Reach OUT!

Push the boundaries of
your digital network with
these three tools

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Twenty years ago, there was no social media to turn to. As for professional learning networks (PLNs), occasionally educators met in person with other educators, but most teachers and education leaders were reinventing the wheel, independently, on a daily basis.

Fast-forward to today. Our classrooms and our school doors are now wide open to a whole world of educators across the country and the globe. In this digital age, the sky's the limit, and the connections that principals can make are endless.

In 2015, Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis discussed the importance of being a connected leader in their book *Principal Professional Development: Leading Learning in the Digital Age*. Although research on digital connections is still new and limited, Sanfelippo and Sinanis gathered results from recent studies to determine that there is a true “need for current, connected, relevant, and personalized professional development opportunities” for principals.

Thanks to tools such as Twitter and Voxer—and connections created via PLNs, virtual book clubs, and podcasts—we now have professional development available to us 24 hours a day. We no longer have to wait until the next professional development day or the next leadership meeting or the next conference. We can grow ourselves as leaders, push boundaries, share successes, problem-solve, and challenge each other by connecting digitally. As John F. Kennedy once said, “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

The best leaders are always learning from one another. Here are several options for professional learning in today's digital age.



Twitter Chats

What Is a Twitter Chat?

A Twitter chat is a conversation hosted on the public Twitter platform. Each Twitter conversation has a unique hashtag called a handle, e.g., #NAESPChat. By following the hashtag, you can follow a discussion during the chat or several days later. Adding the hashtag to your tweets also allows you to participate in the conversation.

How Principals Can Use Twitter Chats to Connect:

Twitter chats can help principals stay current and connect with professional learning communities all over the world. You can:

- Enhance your professional learning community. Chats provide unlimited access to educators and their wealth of knowledge on a global scale. They are also an excellent opportunity to mentor others.
- Engage in book studies with students and adults via Twitter chats. A more extensive audience provides a more diverse, robust discussion.
- Connect with parents and community members by developing a handle for

parent groups. For example, if you are a Title I school, you can use Twitter chats to answer questions regarding Title I planning and expenditures.

3 Tips to Get Started:

1. **Start by following conversations of interest using your Twitter account.** Here are a few of my favorite discussions: #NAESPChat #KidsDeserveIt, #momsasprincipals, and #dadsasprincipals. The more you participate, the more you will connect with other principals.
2. **If you decide to host your own chat, set a date and advertise.** Include the subject of your chat, time, date, #handle, and moderator (that's you). Start to advertise your chat five to seven days before, and use multiple social media platforms to promote it: Facebook, school website, local principals organization, Instagram, and of course, Twitter.
3. **Prepare questions to stimulate the “chatter” among participants.** Chats are organized using the following system: Questions are posted as Q1, Q2, Q3, etc., corresponding answers as A1, A2, and A3. For example: Q1. From the perspective of a mentor or mentee, what piece of advice would you offer for a new principal mentor? #principalmentor. A1. Mentors must give honest feedback #principalmentor.

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“Recruiting members to join [an online learning community] is a first step, but making their membership meaningful requires deepening and sustaining their engagement in community activities.” — from “Exploratory Research on Designing Online Communities of Practice for Educators to Create Value”

Voxer

What Is Voxer?

Voxer is a free app that allows you to send audio messages, text messages, photos, links, and videos to individuals or groups of people. (A pro version is also available for purchase.) Voxer groups form around shared interests, such as work-life balance for principals or book groups.

How Principals Can Use

Voxer to Connect:

Voxer can help you get off of “Administrator Island.” Some principals use the audio aspect of Voxer as a professional development tool during their commute. You can be driving on a winding road in Kansas while conversing with principals from California and Ohio about teacher evaluation or sharing ideas for the next spirit day.

3 Tips to Get Started:

1. **Download the Voxer app** onto your phone, or create an account at www.voxer.com.
2. **Join groups.** A practical way to find out about different Voxer groups is through Twitter. (You can’t search groups through the Voxer app.) Ask your colleagues for recommendations. You can also reach out to me; my Voxer username is @principalgarden, and my Twitter handle is @PrincipalGarden.
3. **Start listening, sharing, and learning!** Joining Voxer groups has energized me, challenged me, and inspired me.

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Podcasts

What Is a Podcast?

A podcast is an audio—and sometimes video—recording that you can download and listen to at your leisure. Whether you’re out for a jog, driving to work, or just sitting on your couch with some earbuds in, podcasts are quite convenient and can help you grow your practice.

How Principals Can Use Podcasts to Connect:

Podcasts can introduce you to innovative educators and school leaders. Connecting (on social media) with the hosts or guests of a podcast opens new doors to learning.

Podcasts can also help you connect with school families and the larger community.

What better way to share the story of your school or classroom than to create a weekly podcast or vodcast (video podcast)?

Tips to Get Started:

1. **Subscribe—on iTunes, SoundCloud, or Stitcher—to a few education podcasts.** Here are some recommended podcasts:
 - The Teacher Learning Sessions
 - Book Love Foundation Podcast
 - The Robb Review
 - Kids Deserve It!
 - Sparks in the Dark
 - My Bad
 - 3 Educated Brothas
 - UnearthED
 - The 10-Minute Teacher
 - Teach Me, Teacher
 - Teaching Tales
 - Heinemann Podcast
2. **Connect with podcasters and podcast guests on social media.** Don’t be afraid to interact with the individuals who are sharing their stories. You can ask questions, get advice, and even potentially collaborate on some new ideas!
3. **Play with a few podcasting tools.** YouTube Live (formerly Google Hangouts on Air), PodOMatic, SoundCloud, and the app Anchor are some great places to start. Have fun! Be you, share useful information, and keep things short. 📺

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