



Who's Telling Your Story?

Use technology to share—and shape—your school's story

By Ryan Sheehy

A picture of one of our first-grade classes flashed across the screen during our superintendent's presentation at a recent district administration retreat. I spotted my daughter—one of my four children—and my mood instantly brightened.

Parents love to see what their children are doing. We can use that simple fact to tell our schools' stories while building connections with our parent communities.

Before I arrived at my current school, the school's story was being written by the individuals who made the most noise. The administration effectively handled parent complaints, but negative issues drove the narrative of the school and formed the chapters of our school's story.

Today, we proactively share student moments with parents to build connections, encourage family involvement, and shape the perception of our school. Here's how:

1. **We post classroom activities on social media.** We use various social media platforms, including Twitter and Instagram, to open a window into our classrooms, so parents can see what happens on a daily basis. This communication showcases our students and gives parents opportunities to engage their children. When their child hops into the car after school, parents can ask about

the activities they saw on social media earlier in the day.

2. **We hold parent edcamps.** Parent edcamps are an extremely effective way to bring the parent population together and have real conversations about parental concerns. We also use edcamps to show parents how they can play a more supportive role at school. Some of our most successful session topics include special education, homework, nutrition, coding, computer science, science, writing, and literacy.
3. **We make and share YouTube videos to highlight literacy.** Every month I create a YouTube video of me reading a book somewhere in our community. We send a link to the video to our families via email, in hopes that parents and children will discuss the video and book, and share their love of literacy.
4. **We let students check out tech.** Some of our families cannot afford a computer or internet access. So, we've decided to allow our students to take technology home. Now, every Friday students line up in the office to check out different devices. Recently, our most popular devices are our Spheros (www.sphero.com), robotic toys that encourage students and parents to experiment with computer coding. Sending technology home has dramatically increased family engagement and allows parents to be part of the learning process.
5. **We produce a podcast.** Some of our parents lack the time to read school emails or watch school videos. We reach some of these parents via a student-produced podcast that gives parents an inside look at their students' school experiences. Parents


can access podcasts while on the move, whenever they have the time. Many of our families listen together.

6. **We visit families at home.** I walk students home, ride the bus with them, or simply show up at their homes when we need to connect. One of our families hadn't been seen in school in three days; they got a big surprise when I rang their doorbell! The family's eldest daughter answered the door and welcomed me into their home. There, I learned their story. I will never forget this home visit and the relationship that it built. My visit showed them that I cared, and this parent became an engaged member of our community.

At my school, we choose to focus on and share the great things that are happening in our building on a daily basis. That's allowed us to take control of the narrative, and that's given our staff the freedom to fail. The positive relationships we've built with our parent community—and the positive story we tell each and every day—have reassured parents that our teachers and administration work

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hard for the good of our students. Mistakes happen, but together, we work for positive outcomes.

Negative incidents happen in every school, every year. Focus on telling your story. Encourage parent participation. Meet families where they are, and any negatives will be outweighed by the many positive things happening in your school. I encourage you all to "Be the One" who steps outside of the norm and does something different to change the life of a child. Be the One who engages families in the wonderful things happening in our school communities. 

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