COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Guidebook for communication with staff, students, parents/guardians, and community members

ANOKA-HENNEPIN
SCHOOLS
A future without limit

TABLE OF CONTENTS

_____

Other documents within this guidebook:

        Media Guidelines

        Response to Trauma Guidebook

Jim Skelly, executive director

Heather Peters, assistant director

Tim Evans, communication specialist

Dax Larson, communication specialist

Jessica Sauro, communications project assistant

 View the electronic version of this guidebook online at ahschools.us/bestpractices to access hyperlinks.

OVERVIEW

Basics of communication

- Communication is two-way, which means listening (really listening!) is as important as speaking, writing, etc.
    - Communicate early.
    - Communicate openly and honestly.
    - Communicate in multiple ways.
- Personal is preferred.
- Communication builds trust; people trust and support what they know. The more they know about their schools, the more they support them.
    - Good key messages are gold (Read the book *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath).
- Communicate with staff first: "If the house is on fire, tell those inside first."

Basic school communication should consist of:

Essential	Highly recommended	Optional
- Effective face-to-face - Staff meetings - Blackboard voicemail/email/text - School website - E-newsletter - Facebook - Media	- High quality photos for school homepage - Electronic sign (if your location has good visibility)	- Marketing - Presentations (internal or external) - Print documents (brochures, flyers, posters using district-created templates) - Other social media (Twitter and YouTube)

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

_____

Goal: Continually build relationships with current families, prospective families and community members.

Preparing for the interaction
- Think through, plan and assess how you want to communicate regularly with the parents/guardians of your students. Know which mediums they prefer.
- Keep your website updated with information.
- Send home handwritten "good news" postcards.
- Put extra planning into positive, relationship-building opportunities with parents such as open houses and conferences.

When parents/guardians initiate the communication
- Contact parents/guardians back promptly and thank them for contacting you.
- Be a good listener when parents/guardians are sharing concerns.
- Converse in a respectful manner.

Keep in mind
- Always put yourself in the parent's/guardian's shoes.
- Most parent/guardian concerns will be about their child's progress, accomplishments and challenges.
- Consider preparing your students for end-of-the-day questions parents/guardians ask, such as:
    - What did you learn today?
    - What was the best part of the day?
    - Tell me something interesting that you read today.

Recommended reading:
- *Making Parent Communication Effective and Easy* by Rich Bagin.

Additional help
- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

AUTOMATED PHONE CALLS

_____

Goal: to inform families of pertinent information in a timely fashion. They can be used for both emergency communications or weekly/monthly updates. Previously the district recommended messages be sent in all three systems: phone, email and text. That is no longer the case. The recommendation for regular, ongoing communication is to send via email and text message using the SMORE messaging platform.

Best practices for creating the script
- Write short, concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Keep the entire message as brief as possible, no more than a minute and thirty seconds, 30 to 45 seconds is ideal.
- Content ideas for weekly/monthly updates:
  - School activities/events.
  - Reminders of important events such as state test days or no school.
  - District news (anything provided by the district to use in school phone messages).

Best practices for recording the message
- Make sure the room doesn't have any distracting background noises.
- Sit on the edge or your chair or stand up.
- Read the script as you would naturally speak, not slow like a turtle or fast like a rabbit.
- Speak clearly and confidently.
- Listen to the message before you send it.
- Have water handy.

Best practices operations
- Know your audience:
  - Do they like regular, weekly news calls?
  - Do they prefer important or emergency calls only?
- Change the level of a call to "high" if the message is an emergency. This ensures faster delivery by our phone message system.
- If you're sending weekly/monthly updates, make sure to do so in a consistent fashion (perhaps a regular time of the week/month).
- Make sure families know to contact your school if their phone number changes so it can be updated in the student information system.

Additional help
- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

TEXT MESSAGES

_____

Goal: To inform families of pertinent information in a timely fashion. It can be used for both emergency communications or weekly/monthly updates.

Keep in mind; text messages aren't a completely fail-safe way to communicate. Families choose whether or not they'd like to receive this type of message.

Best practices for creating the script
- Write short, concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Keep the entire message as brief as possible, no more than 160 characters.
- It's ok to use shortened words such as info instead of information, but don't include so many that the message is hard to decipher or looks unprofessional, e.g., txting is fun 4 u.
- At the end of your message, refer families to your website for more details or information. A good link to share would be your news page, which is your school shortcut with "news" tagged on the end of it, e.g., ahschools.us/BHSnews.
- Content ideas for weekly/monthly updates:
  - School activities/events.
  - Reminders of important events such as state test days or no school.
  - District news (anything provided by the district to use in school text messages).

Best practices for operations
- If you're sending weekly/monthly updates, make sure to do so in a consistent fashion (perhaps a regular time of the week/month).
- Make sure families know to contact your school if their mobile number changes so it can be updated in the student information system.
- Use the SMORE messaging platform to send longer text messages. Copy the URL in SMORE and paste in Blackboard Mass Notification to send.

Additional help
- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

BLACKBOARD MASS NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

_____

Goal: To inform families of pertinent information in a timely fashion. It can be used for both emergency communications or weekly/monthly updates.

Keep in mind; Blackboard messages aren't a completely fail-safe way to communicate. Families choose what type of messages they'd like. Phone and email are the default.

District recommendation:
Send all messages by email and text using Blackboard Mass Notification and SMORE. This allows for the same message to be shared by email and text, maximizes viewership on a mobile device and allows for language translation by the reader.

Best practices for content
- These details are included on the two previous pages (automated phone calls page 4 and text messages page 5).
- Send all messages using the Smore message templates. This allows the ability for readers to translate messages for any language and also provides an easy option for sending information via text message.
- Include a "school hashtag" at the start of the message. See next page for examples. This helps parents with students in multiple schools know which school in contacting them.

Best practices for operations
- The "Caller ID" should be changed to your direct phone number or your school's/department's main phone number, not 763-506-1000.
- You're limited to 160 characters with the text message, include a link to more detailed information with a Smore message.
- Use your school or the district hashtag (see table on page 7) to minimize confusion among families regarding what school/student the message is intended for.

Additional help
- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

Approved hashtags for school text messages

Using the hashtag helps families with multiple children understand which school is communicating with them. If a school desires to use another hashtag, please consult with the Communications and public relations department.

Elementary schools	Hashtag	Middle/high schools	Hashtag
Adams Elementary	#Adams	Anoka Middle School for the Arts	#AMSA
Andover Elementary	#AndoverElem	Coon Rapids Middle School	#CRMS
Brookside Elementary	#Brookside	Jackson Middle School	#JMS
Champlin Brooklyn Park Academy	#CBPA	Northdale Middle School	#NMS
Crooked Lake Elementary	#CrookedLake	Oak View Middle School	#OVMS
Dayton Elementary	#DaytonElem	Roosevelt Middle School	#RMS
Eisenhower Elementary	#Eisenhower	Andover High School	#AndoverHS
Evergreen Park Elementary	#EvergreenPark	Anoka High School	#AHS
Hamilton Elementary	#Hamilton	Blaine High School	#BHS
Hoover Elementary	#Hoover	Champlin Park High School	#CPHS
Jefferson Elementary	#Jefferson	Coon Rapids High School	#CRHS
Johnsville Elementary	#Johnsville	Regional High School	#RegionalHS
Lincoln Elementary	#LincolnElem	Technical High School	#TechHS
Madison Elementary	#Madison	Secondary Technical Education Program	#STEP
McKinley Elementary	#McKinley	Compass	#Compass
Mississippi Elementary	#Mississippi		
Monroe Elementary	#Monroe		
Morris Bye Elementary	#MorrisBye		
Oxbow Creek Elementary	#OxbowCreek		
Ramsey Elementary	#RamseyElem		
Rum River Elementary	#RumRiver	**District programs**	**Hashtag**
Sand Creek Elementary	#SandCreek	School district	#AHSchools
Sunrise Elementary	#Sunrise	Community education	#AHCommEd
University Avenue Elementary	#UniversityAve	Transportation	#AHTransportation
Wilson Elementary	#Wilson		

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

_____

Goal: To listen carefully, giving full attention and respect to those communicating with you.

Listening is not a passive activity. Listening effectively demands active participation and it takes practice.
- Keep a positive attitude and remember to smile.
- Be aware of body language. Make sure to establish eye contact early and keep it.
- Take notes.
- Don't just hear what you want or expect to hear.
- Listen to more than just facts to understand the total meaning of the message.
- Relate the speaker's comments to your own beliefs and values.
- Beware of rehearsing a response to the speaker's ideas. It keeps you from listening fully.
- Don't prejudge the message.
- Keep an open mind.
- Listen with empathy.

Listening is valuable.
- People feel that you and/or your school really care about them if you take time to listen carefully.
- You can pick up on trends, possible areas for concern and community opinion.
- You can defuse an angry parent or citizen if you take the time to listen.

Listen everywhere.
- "Tune in" in the hallways, lounge, classrooms, cafeteria, in meetings, etc.
- "Tune in" to the conversations around the community: in grocery stores, after church, at athletic events, at the dry cleaners, etc.

SCHOOL WEBSITES

_____

Goal: To inform current families, prospective families and community members of the activities going on at your school and how they are preparing students for lifelong success. Websites are relatively concise and must be updated regularly (possibly daily).

The district provides websites through the Blackboard system. This is the official website for the district, school, department or program and should be the only online source used for communication. The use of Google sites for public communication is not allowed.

- *Elementary schools: The Comm/PR department manages posting of information on sites. Contact Comm/PR to make updates.*
- *Middle schools and High Schools: School web contacts manage each site directly.*
- *Departments: Work with Comm/PR on needs for their department pages.*

Keep this in mind when editing your school website: "The school's website is like the daily or weekly newspaper. It needs to have new content that is time-sensitive, to refresh it." [1]

Keep your website up-to-date and professional
- Regularly add content to the main areas of your website:
  - School news (announcements and news section under 'About Us').
  - Multimedia rotator (photo area): Please don't add clip art or individually created graphics. Use photos of students and/or staff and always provide a title for each image. Enter text within the caption box to provide additional information.
  - High-level events on the calendar (conferences, guest speakers, testing dates, theater productions, etc. Please note: Activity/athletic events are located on the rSchoolToday calendar at secondary schools.
- Make sure names and phone numbers are up-to-date on the contact info page in the about our school section under the 'About Us' tab.
- Double-check the operation of all links. Do they work? Do they link to the right content? Are they set to open within the same window?
- Confirm that emails coming through the website are being answered quickly.

Best practices in design
- Use the designated district fonts and design templates.
- Flashing/blinking text, animations, clip art and copyrighted material are prohibited on school websites. Please use photographs of our students and/or staff and provide a title or "alt text" for each image.
- Graphics should be used to inform or illustrate an idea, not as decoration. According to research, most people find superfluous graphics to be annoying; they get in the way of the content they want.
- Left-align all text to maximize space and create reader-friendly pages.

- Create scannable text by using short, informative subheadings and bulleted lists when possible.
- Minimize the number of clicks a visitor has to perform to get to important information.

Best practices in content
- Write short, concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon). There should be one idea per paragraph with a maximum of four to five sentences per paragraph.
- Use an extra space between paragraphs rather than indenting.
- Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalized unless the proper name or title of a program, department or school is shared.
- Use bold or hyperlinks to emphasize text, please don't underline, color or capitalize text.
- Hyperlink key phrases instead of using various versions of the words "click here." Make sure to apply "alt text" or a title for each hyperlink. Set the link to open within the existing window.
- Do not duplicate information that is already on another page, instead link to it.
  Do not link to Google sites on websites.
- Avoid relative dates like: two years ago, now, new, in the next six months, shortly; these are relative timeframes that become meaningless over time; instead use specific dates like "in 2007."
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes.

Best practices in operation
- Work closely with your school website contact to ensure all roles/responsibilities are being followed, including the timeliness and accuracy of the content being displayed and adherence to the district's style guidelines/standards and template structure. The website contact:
    - May choose to complete all website edits on their own or share duties with other staff members (with principal permission).
    - Is required to take part in trainings.
- Regularly remind other staff members to share upcoming events, photos of happenings, etc. with your website contact.
- Promote your school website through other school communications (e.g. posters, social media, email signatures, etc.) and in-person parent/guardian interactions (meetings, after-school events, conferences, etc.).

Additional help
- If you have questions, email web@ahschools.us or call your assigned communication specialist (Dax x61112 or Tim x61110). Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).
- Check out the Brand Guidelines on the Communication and Public Relations webpage for more website guidelines/best practices, an organizational spelling guide and the website support structure. Contact Heather Peters (x61140) with questions or requests.

E-NEWSLETTERS

_____

Goal: To inform current families, prospective families and community members of the good things happening at your school and how it is preparing students for lifelong success, and to provide information about activities that can enhance families' involvement in their children's education. E-newsletters are relatively concise and are sent on a regular basis.

Best practices for design
- Anoka-Hennepin e-newsletters are designed and distributed through a software platform called Smore. A design has been created for your school; Talk with your designated e-newsletter contact to get started.
- Use the designated district font.
- Use the designated graphic spaces in your e-newsletter template for multimedia additions (photos, videos, etc.). Please do not use clip art or blinking animations, only photographs of students and/or staff in our schools.
- Graphics should be used to inform or illustrate an idea, not as decoration.
- Left-align all text to maximize space and create a reader-friendly publication.
- Create scannable text by using short, informative subheadings and bulleted lists when possible.
- Include upcoming events and student/school accomplishments as top news. Other less important information should go toward the end.

Best practices for content
- Content suggestions and ideas:
  - Personal column from the principal.
  - School activities/events.
  - Student or staff success stories and awards.
  - Meeting announcements.
  - Reminders of important events such as state test days or no school.
  - Frequently asked questions and answers, rumor/truth, myth/fact.
  - Tips for parents on ways they can support learning at home.
  - District news (anything provided by the district to use in school e-newsletters can be included).
- Encourage staff to send items ahead of time for possible inclusion.
- Write short, concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Use bold or hyperlinks to emphasize text, please don't underline (unless hyperlinked), italicize, color or capitalize text.
- Hyperlink key phrases instead of using various versions of the words "click here."
- Use an extra space between paragraphs rather than indenting.
- Capitalize only the first letter of a word unless the proper name or title of a program, department or school is shared.

- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes by printing out a hard copy. It's easier to catch errors this way. Have another person proofread the hard copy as well - a person that didn't put the e-newsletter together will likely find any mistakes.
- Use detailed, recognizable subject lines (in the "subject" field of the email).

Best practices for operations
- Send messages on a regularly scheduled basis (elementary schools: monthly; secondary schools: weekly or biweekly). It's better to send a few brief news items on a frequent basis than sending long e-newsletters only occasionally.
- It's OK to send a "special edition" e-newsletter with only one item if it's an extremely important item.
- Promote the e-newsletter through other school communications (e.g. posters, social media, email signatures, etc.) and in-person parent/guardian interactions (meetings, after-school events, conferences, etc.).
- The master files must remain intact. Please always make a copy of the master and then make necessary edits on the copy.

Additional help
- Email enews@ahschools.us or call your assigned communication specialist (Dax x61112 or Tim x61110). Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).
- Check out the [Brand Guidelines](https://ahschools.us/brandbook) at ahschools.us/brandbook for an organizational spelling guide. Updates coming in the 2023-24 school year.

WRITING FOR E-NEWSLETTERS AND WEBSITES
_____

Goal:
- Before beginning, consider your audience (parents/guardians, students, teachers, etc.) and adjust your style and word choice accordingly.
- Keep it simple - use simple words, short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Answer the questions Who, What, When, Where, Why and How in the first one or two paragraphs.
- The first paragraph should be only one to three sentences long and a maximum of 30 to 35 words.
- Put the most important details in the first paragraph, the least important at the end of the story.
- Use short sentences, but vary sentence length somewhat to avoid monotony or choppiness. Sentences should be no longer than about 25 words.
- Never use two or more words when one will do as well. "Within the near future" means the same as "soon."
- Avoid the use of jargon or "educationese." Spell out programs rather than using acronyms. (ex. Physical education instead of PE.)
- Use active rather than passive voice. Write: The choir sang "The Star Spangled Banner." rather than "The Star Spangled Banner" was sung by the choir.
- Stick to facts, not opinions, unless the opinions are in a direct quotation.
- Add life to your stories by including quotations and comments of student participants.
- Make certain it is accurate- recheck dates, times, places, spelling of names, etc.

When you have finished writing:
- Re-read what you have written with an eye to shortening it as much as possible.
- Ask someone else to read your content, checking it for clarity, spelling, grammar, and completeness.

Story ideas for your newsletters:
(Based on a poll of what parents look for in a school newsletter,)
- What students are learning.
- What parent groups are doing.
- Opportunities for volunteers.
- Announcements of events.
- Special events in classes or around the school.
- Features about staff members.
- Tips on how parents can help their children succeed.
- Recognition of special accomplishments of students and staff.

CREATING PRINT MATERIALS

_____

Goal: To inform current families, prospective families and community members of the good things happening at your school and how it is preparing students for lifelong success, and to provide information about activities that can enhance families' involvement in their children's education. This form of communication should be used when you want to have a take-away or an added visual presence for your school.

Best practices for design
- Use district-approved print document templates when applicable, otherwise work with the district's Print Shop. (If something is created internally, use [Brand Book](#)-approved colors.)
- Do not use clip art or copyrighted images, only photographs of students and/or staff in our schools.
- Graphics should be used to call attention to, inform or illustrate an idea, not used as decoration. Graphics that have no function are perceived by readers as a nuisance.
- To maintain proportions in a photo when resizing, hold the shift key while moving your mouse.
- When possible, use user-friendly URLS to direct people to your website. (ex. ahschools.us/anokahsnews) Don't rely on QR codes. (Visitors can't scan QR codes on documents that are published online.)

Best practices for content
- Use templated (or [Brand Book](#)-approved) fonts.
- Write concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon). See writing tips, page 13.
- Use a line break between paragraphs rather than indenting.
- Capitalize only the first letter of the first word unless the proper name or title of a program, department or school is shared.
- Do not use all CAPS or the underline feature to emphasize text.
- Limit the amount of data shared in graphs, charts or tables.
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes by printing out a hard copy. It's easier to catch errors this way. Have another person proofread the hard copy as well; someone unfamiliar with the document is more likely to find errors.

Best practices for operation
- Share the finished piece in as many communication mediums as possible, e.g. hallways, student folders, social media, etc.

Additional help
- Contact the Print and Design Services at (x61343) for assistance.
- Contact Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

updated 7/1/2023

SCHOOL NAMES, LOGOS, SIGNS

_____

School names, logos and signs represent the brand of the school district and the school itself. Reference the [Brand Guidelines](#) to ensure fonts, colors and logos are consistent with official school and district branding. **Note:** *Departments are encouraged to use the Anoka-Hennepin School District logo when needed; alternate logos should not be created as they dilute the brand recognition of the school district.*

In alignment with school district [strategic priorities](#) and the continuous improvement model, it is preferred and most efficient to bring requests forward that are related to a school name or logo change between the months of November and December each year, with the intent of conducting work on the project between the months of April and July each year. School name or logo committees should allow at least four and up to nine months to develop key concepts for the project and engage community stakeholders.

School names
Official school names should be used on school stationery, signage, websites, e-newsletters and official school communications. Changes to school names must follow a School Board-approved process as indicated in [School Board policy 809.0](#). School name change requests should be brought to the school-level associate superintendent for consideration and approved by the Superintendent of Schools. Name changes must be done in consultation with a committee approved by the superintendent - involving the Chief Operations Officer, a representative from Communication and Public Relations and representatives from the school community.

School logos, icons, graphics
Consistency in branding is just as important for each school as it is for the school district. Approved logos for each Anoka-Hennepin School are accessible in the district [Brand Guidelines](#). Changes to school logos, or the creation of additional graphics related to the brand of a school must be done in consultation with a representative from Communication and Public Relations, the district Print Shop and a school logo committee as designated by the school principal.

School signs and signage
The intent of designing, ordering and hanging large/highly visible banners, flags, vinyl wraps or signs inside or outside the school should be consulted upon with school and district administration, and municipal officials as relevant:

- ☐ School principal.
- ☐ Buildings and grounds department.
- ☐ School district print shop.
- ☐ Communications/public relations department.

TIP: School board policies and city ordinances may influence or impact the ability for certain signage to be displayed on school district property.

1. Review city ordinances when considering window/door coverings, signage displayed on school fences or on outdoor school grounds.
2. Ensure signs don't cover windows to reduce visibility for safety.
3. Review School Board policies when considering signage not relevant to the school (facility rental agreements such as for-profit organizations, churches and after-school activities hosted by external vendors), stadium/fieldhouse/concession stand signage or ads sold by PTO/booster clubs, etc.

TAKING PHOTOS

_____

Good photos communicate more powerfully than words and are effective in calling attention to news in your electronic and print communication. Poor photos can be a distraction or disappointment. These tips will help you take photos that will communicate with your audiences.

Best practices for capturing
- Compose shots based on how you plan to use the photograph, use horizontal orientation if you plan to post it on your website or vertical orientation if you plan to post the photo on social media such as a Facebook story.
- Photographs should capture scenes that are both emotional and natural-looking; try to think like a news photographer rather than a portrait photographer.
- Move in and get in the action! Capture faces and interactions instead of backs of heads or profiles.
- Leave just a small amount of headroom at the top of photographs. Students and/or staff should take up at least two-thirds of the frame vertically.
- Check the background before capturing a photograph; avoid distracting objects directly behind a subject's head.
- Take several photographs and use a variety of angles from the same scene.
- Avoid taking photographs of students or staff who have some sort of distraction happening around them, such as holding up hand symbols, gum chewing or bunny ears.
- Pay attention to the type of clothing students and staff are wearing to ensure appropriate nature.

Best practices for operation
- Remember to only take photographs of students and staff without photo restrictions.
- Share finished photographs on one or more of your communications mediums: school website, social media page(s), e-newsletter, print materials and presentations.
- Make sure to include a small caption with any shared photograph. For instance, when adding content to the multimedia rotator application on your school website. This reinforces the significance of the photo and doesn't leave your reader/viewer guessing.
- Continually look for and ask your team about engaging activities happening in your school.

Additional help
- Call your assigned communication specialist (Dax x61112 or Tim x61110). Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).

SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK, X AND YOUTUBE)

_____

Goal: To provide brief updates on the great things happening in your school. Social media is an extremely concise and fast-paced communication medium. Subscribers expect to see new content multiple times a week.

Best practices for design
- Please do not use clip art or blinking animations, only photographs of students and/or staff in our schools.
- Graphics should be used to inform or illustrate an idea, not as decoration.

Best practices for content
- Don't write paragraphs of information, just a few sentences.
- The content needs to be easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalized unless the proper name or title of a program, department or school is shared.
- Do not use all CAPS to emphasize text.
- Mix the type of content posted. Here are some suggestions:
    - Major school activities coming up
    - Student or staff recognition
    - Human-interest stories (e.g. CRHS football team assisting flood victims in Duluth)
    - Tips for parents on ways they can support learning at home
    - Frequently asked questions and answers, rumor/truth, myth/fact
    - Interactive questions or voting opportunities
    - Encourage staff to send items for possible inclusion
- Vary how the content is shared using different multimedia (copy, links, photos, video, etc.).
- Routinely refer back to your school website.
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes before posting.

Best practices for operation
- Post a few times a week minimally. Every day would be best though.
- The highest viewership is between 6 and 9 p.m. Anything posted from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. will likely be noticed quickly.
- Check "insights" to see what posts are grabbing the attention of visitors.
- Monitor your school name throughout social media (see next section).
- Promote your social media page through other school communications (e.g. posters, email signatures, etc.) and in-person parent/guardian interactions (meetings, after-school events, conferences, etc.).

Social media monitoring
Social media monitoring is the process of identifying and assessing what is being said about a company, individual, product or brand online. The Communication/Public Relations department has a dashboard in place to monitor social media activity and comments about the district and its schools. Someone from the team may reach out to your school principal if and when communications consult is needed on sensitive topics.

If there is a sensitive issue and/or topic you'd like support with, please call your assigned communication specialist (Dax x61112 or Tim x61110). Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).

Troubleshooting and beefing up your Facebook presence
Facebook uses a complex, proprietary algorithm to determine which person or group's posts show up on a user's "Facebook wall" or "feed." In the case of business and organization pages, the algorithm elevates those that post one or three times per day, with gaps between posts, and with varied types of content. Pages that post more often (five or more a day), less often (once a week or less), post all their content at once (all three posts at 9 a.m.), or post only links or only photos are subsequently punished by the algorithm and will often not make the feeds of their audience.

Does your school's Facebook page have a vanity URL?
A vanity URL is a customized web address that includes the name of your school. If your school doesn't have one, contact the district's Communication and Public Relations department.

Searchability on Facebook
It is easier to search for a school's page on Facebook if the school has a vanity URL and is elevated in Facebook's algorithm. Be sure to include your school address or at least the city in which it is located to avoid confusion with other schools around the world that have the same name.

Be aware that Facebook pages of a PTO or booster club can confuse Facebook and Google searches as well as your families. If your school's PTO or booster clubs have Facebook pages, make sure they are identified clearly as belonging to the particular organization so they aren't confused with the school's page.

YouTube
The Communication and Public Relations department created YouTube and accounts for each school. When your school is ready to start using them, contact comm.pr@ahschools.us.

Additional help with social media
- Email comm.pr@ahschools.us or call your assigned communication specialist (Dax Larson x61112 or Tim Evans x61110).

- Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).

PRESENTATIONS (Google Slides)

_____

Goal: To highlight or emphasize specific portions of a formal presentation. A good presentation makes a topic easier to understand or more interesting for audiences. It should be an accompaniment to what is already being presented, not a word-for-word reiteration.

Best practices for design
- A Google Slides template has been created for use by all staff. Request a copy of the template by contacting the Communications Project Assistant, Jessica Sauro (x61114)
- This template should be used for all presentations to the School Board and may be used for other district purposes.
- Use the templated fonts, design and transitions.
- Please do not use clip art or blinking animations, only photographs or video clips of students and/or staff in our schools.
- In rare occasions, a stock photo (purchased or acquired from a stock photo source such as Getty Images) may be used. Do not use copyrighted photos without permission.
- Only one image or video should be shown on a slide.
- Graphics should be used to inform or illustrate an idea, not as decoration.

Best practices for content
- Write short, concise content that is easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Each slide should have one idea with a maximum of six bullet points (with only six words in each bulleted line).
- Only the first letter of the first word in each line should be capitalized: exceptions are proper name or title of a program, department or school.
- Left-align all text to maximize space and create a reader-friendly presentation.
- The text size should not be smaller than 18 point.
- Hyperlink key phrases instead of using various versions of the words "click here."
- Use bold to emphasize text, please don't underline, color or capitalize text.
- Limit the amount of data shared in graphs, charts or tables. It may be necessary to visually emphasize the portion being highlighted.
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes by printing out a hard copy. It's easier to catch errors this way.

Best practices operation
- School Board presentations must be approved for the School Board agenda by the Superintendent. Use this online form to coordinate the process.

Additional help
- If you have questions, contact Jessica Sauro (x61114) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department.

MARKETING

Goal: To strategically inform current families, prospective families and community members of the educational opportunities at your school and how your work is preparing students for lifelong success. Marketing is needed for five key reasons: increased competition, changing demographics, public skepticism, media scrutiny and scarce resources.

Questions to ask yourself
- Who is your competition?
- What sets your school apart from others?
- What's your mission? Are all your stakeholders on board with it?
- What do parents/guardians, students and community members think of your school?

Best practices for operations
- Have a plan with goals, objectives and strategies. Collected data can be used to form these elements.
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of each of your communication mediums.
- Avoid jargon in all marketing communications.
- Brainstorm with staff, students, parents/guardians and the community.
- Remind staff that they are at the forefront of your marketing efforts. How they talk about your school with family, friends and neighbors has a direct impact on how others view your school.
- Build community partnerships.

Additional help
- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

updated 7/1/2023

CREATING VIDEOS

_____

Goal: To highlight a specific accomplishment, event or program in an interactive fashion. The item/topic is something that is more understandable or interesting for current families, prospective families and community members to receive visually. Videos should focus on only a few concise messages.

There is a wide range in video production quality. High quality video is relatively expensive (average $1,000 to $1,500 per finished minute) because it is produced with professional videographers and talent. This is only done for significant and complex topics that need to make an impact.

School and district staff can produce effective video for far less; however, creating a good video takes a significant amount of time to pull off successfully.

Best practices for filming
- Be as steady as possible when filming. A tripod is the best way to do this.
- Compose shots by putting the main content in the latter two-thirds of the frame instead of directly in the middle (rule of thirds). This idea can be used both horizontally and vertically.
- Get in the action! Capture faces and interactions instead of backs of heads or profiles.
- Zoom and pan the camera very sparingly.
- Only use a high angle if you're trying to create a submissive shot and a low angle if you're trying to make someone or something dominant.
- Vary the type of shots you capture between close-up, medium and far away.
- Do not have the spokesperson look directly in the camera unless you're going for a dramatic feel or very personal message. On-camera spokespeople should instead look slightly to the left or right of the camera, and speak to the interviewer.
- Use lavalier and/or handheld microphones instead of the on-camera one for interviews and discussions.

Best practices for included visuals and audio
- Use Brand Book-approved colors.
- Graphics should be used to inform or illustrate an idea, not as decoration.
- Do not use clip art or copyrighted images, only video clips (or photographs) of students and/or staff in our schools.
- Do not use copyrighted audio, only clips that have been school-produced, are royalty-free (may have added stipulations) or have been purchased as stock.

Best practices for included copy
- Use Brand Book-approved fonts.
- Write concisely. Content should be so short that no paragraphs are needed.
- Avoid jargon and the use of acronyms.

- Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalized unless the proper name or title of a program, department or school is shared.
- Do not use all caps or the underline feature to emphasize text.
- Left-align the majority of text, especially name slates.
- The text size should not be any less than 18 points.
- Refer to your school and its contact information (school name, website, generic email, phone number) at the end.
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes.

Best practices
- Post finished videos on your school's YouTube page. The Communication and Public Relations department has created a "YouTube Channel" for each district school.
- Add subtitles to the final video. This is an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirement.
- Promote videos through other school communications (e.g. website, social media, e-newsletters) and in-person parent/guardian interactions (meetings, after-school events, conferences, etc.).
- Check YouTube's "insights" to see if the video is grabbing your audience's attention.

Additional help
- Contact Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.
- Check out the Brand Guidelines book on the Staff Intranet website.

Works cited
1. Lockhart, Johanna. How to Market Your School: A Guide to Marketing, Communication and Public Relations for School Administrators. National School Public Relation Association. Copyright 2011.

SOCIAL MEDIA LIVE STREAMING

Goal: To highlight a specific accomplishment, event or program in an interactive fashion.

Note: Live streaming comes with inherent risks, including inappropriate or unwanted comments from followers or the inability to predict what could happen, live. Consider pre-recording a video and posting after the fact. Community meetings hosted by the school district are typically live streamed on YouTube with comments disabled, and a recording delay to use if needed.

Best practices for filming
- Be as steady as possible when filming.
- Compose shots by putting the main content in the latter two-thirds of the frame instead of directly in the middle (rule of thirds). This idea can be used both horizontally and vertically.
- Stay with one orientation the entire duration of the filming (either horizontal or vertical).
- Get in the action! Capture faces and interactions instead of backs of heads or profiles.
- Zoom and pan the camera very sparingly.
- Only use a high angle if you're trying to create a submissive shot and a low angle if you're trying to make someone or something dominant.
- Talent can look directly into the camera if a more personal or dramatic feel is preferred. Fairly common on social media.
- Preferred: Use lavalier and/or handheld microphones instead of the on-camera one for interviews and discussions.

Best practices for included copy
- Don't write paragraphs of information, just a few sentences.
- The content needs to be easy to understand (avoid jargon).
- Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalized unless it is the proper name or title of a program, department or school..
- Do not use all caps to emphasize text.
- Routinely refer back to your school website.
- Check for grammar and spelling mistakes before posting.

Best practices
- Promote your live event: Signage, website, e-newsletters, social media, etc. and try to connect new users to your social media page.
- Use the right tools and equipment. Refer to the previous page for video best practices.
- Make sure your internet connection is strong.
- Do not use copyrighted material, including graphics, songs, etc.
- Go through the steps ahead of time with a trial run.

updated 7/1/2023

Additional help

- Email social.media@ahschools.us or call your assigned communication specialist (Dax x61112 or Tim x61110). Not sure who your contact is? Contact Heather Peters (x61140).

AVOIDING COPYRIGHT VIOLATIONS ON YOUTUBE

_____

There are consequences to using copyrighted intellectual property (songs, movies, TV shows, etc.) on YouTube without permission. YouTube uses a Content ID system that automatically checks to see if videos include copyrighted material, especially music and movies. If your content matches copyrighted material in their database, the company that owns the copyright can make a Content ID claim:

- You will get a mark on your account (school accounts are under the district umbrella account, so the mark goes against the district), which may result in a loss of privileges.
- The copyright holder can decide to mute the audio on your video (see below), or block your video, monetize it (run ads against) or track your video's viewership.
- The copyright holder may ask YouTube to remove the video.

To avoid potential problems:

- Use original music you or your students have created.
- Use music that is in the public domain.
- Use royalty-free music tracks (such as the generic music loop tracks that come with iMovie).
- Use free generic tracks.
- Get permission to use copyrighted music.
- Acquire the rights to use the music.

This generally rules out popular songs. If you don't have rights or you are not sure music is appropriate to use, don't use it.

What to do if YouTube makes a Content ID claim
Deleting videos that put your account in bad standing won't restore your good standing, however you can:

- Acknowledge the claim: If you agree with the claim, you can acknowledge it and move on. You can always change your mind later if you disagree with the claim.
- Remove the music: If you get a claim for a piece of music in your video, you can try to remove the song without having to edit and upload a new video.
- Dispute the claim: If you have the required rights to use the copyright-protected content in your video, or if you think the system has somehow misidentified your video, you can dispute the claim.

Additional help

- [Keep your YouTube account in good standing](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#)
- Contact Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

GUIDELINES FOR TAKING STUDENT PHOTOS AND USING STUDENT PHOTOS, NAMES, AND STUDENT WORK IN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PUBLICATIONS (PRINT, ELECTRONIC, VIDEO)

The following information is shared with parents/guardians:
Anoka-Hennepin staff, volunteers, representatives of the media and others may occasionally take photos and videos of students and staff in our district's schools. These photos may be used in newsletters, newspapers, programs, yearbooks, brochures, on television, on web pages, in educational videos and other appropriate uses.

Parents/guardians may choose to limit the use of their child's photo. When a child enrolls in an Anoka-Hennepin school, parent/guardian(s) will be asked to select one of the following options:

- **Partial restriction:** I want to restrict my child's photo from being used for any purpose except the school yearbook/class photo and school identification records. By choosing this option, I understand that my child will be photographed at school and his or her photo will be used in the school yearbook/class photo.
- **Full restriction:** I want to restrict my child's photo from being taken and used for any purpose except for school identification records. By choosing this option, I understand that my child's photo will be taken and used for school identification purposes only; it will not be used in the school yearbook/class photo.
- **No restriction:** By choosing this option, I understand that my child's photo will be taken and may be used as described in the first paragraph above.

The parents'/guardians' choice will be recorded in the child's student records. Parents/guardians may change their photo option choice at any time by completing a new photo option form, which is available from their school.

Although the school will take reasonable steps to prevent students with full or partial restrictions from being photographed, the school cannot guarantee that a student will not be photographed/videotaped as part of a large group, such as participating in a school assembly, walking through a school hallway, and other situations where there are large numbers of students.

Parents taking photos
We do not restrict parents from taking photos during events such as track and field, class plays, etc. We do not attempt to ensure they aren't taking photos of students who don't have photo releases.

Frequently asked questions regarding use of student photos

May student names be used on our website?
- Yes.

Can we use photos of students on our website?*
Yes. District policy allows use of student photos on classroom, school and school district websites.
- Student photos may be used unless parents/guardians have requested a restriction. (Restrictions will be recorded annually in Synergy.)
- Photo captions may include a student's full name.

May student work be used on our website?
- Yes. Student work may be used. It may be identified by first and last name.

Can we post our daily video announcements on our website?
- Yes.

May school or student newsletters/newspapers be posted on school websites?
- Yes.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

_____

Goal: Understand how to respond respectfully in controversial situations.

Keep in mind; all parents/guardians and community members have the right to express their opinions – even if we don't agree with them.

Before reacting to controversy
- Have a positive attitude about the controversy. Don't see a challenge as something that is inherently destructive, or the challenger as someone who is simply trying to cause problems. Instead, see it as:
  - An opportunity to listen and respond to public concerns.
  - An opportunity for public discussion of important issues.
  - The right of parents/guardians to have input into what their children learn in school.
- Develop key messages – statements of the basic facts about the situation that everyone needs to know.
- Be aware of maintaining privacy of data. It can be shared with staff who have a need to know. Remember that volunteers are not employees and private data should not be shared with them.
- Know and follow policies/procedures the School Board has in place relating to situations that may arise (district policies are on district website at ahschools.us/policies).
- Meet with key members of the community and student body, if appropriate, to discuss the issues, explain the district's (or committee's/school's) position and the rationale; seek input if appropriate.
- Be mindful of what you include in email. Consider how others may interpret it. Employees' email may be deemed public data. Be prepared to share it if asked. If you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing it, don't put it in an email.

During controversial communications
- Avoid becoming defensive or sounding angry.
- Answer as truthfully as you can.
- Don't be afraid to say that you don't know an answer, but will find out and get back to the individual.
- If an individual states something that you know is incorrect, attempt to give the correct information.
- If a caller is abusive you do not need to continue the conversation, simply say firmly, "I am sorry, but I don't think this is a productive conversation. Thank you for calling," and hang up.
- If the caller says, "Well, my attorney says…" Contact district legal counsel.
- If a parent wants to remain anonymous, but has complaints about a staff member or a particular situation, say, "I would like to help but I can't be very effective unless I know more about the situation, including the identity of the student involved."

Keep in mind

- Most people are happy to have someone listen to them and respect their right to voice their opinions. Simply listening attentively can defuse a difficult situation.
- Don't take comments personally; respond from the point of view of "the district" or "the school," rather than as an individual.
- Be prepared to deal with calls from the media. (see Media Guidelines, page 36)

Additional help

- Contact Jim Skelly (x61111) or Heather Peters (x61140) in the district's Communication and Public Relations department if you have questions.

KEY MESSAGES AND WHEN TO CALL FOR ASSISTANCE

Goal: From time-to-time, an issue will arise that requires careful communication with parents/guardians, staff, students or the community as a whole. Carefully developed key messages are critical at those times. The Communication and Public Relations department is available to help when needed.

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, please contact the Communication and Public Relations department for assistance:
- Does it involve student safety?
- Does it involve a threat?
- Does it involve a death (refer to Response to Trauma Guidebook)?
- Does it involve theft/loss of money (includes parent organization, booster club, etc.)?
- Does it involve controversy?
- Does it involve significant change?
- Does it involve a significant parent complaint?
- Does it involve a threat to call/contact the media?
- Is it complex?

The Communications and Public Relations team will help you develop key messages to use with these situations. Key messages are the three to five most significant pieces of information about an issue that you want stakeholders to know. They may vary slightly for each audience.

Creating your own key messages
If your issue doesn't rise to the level of needing help from Communication and Public Relations, create your own messages considering the following:
- Student safety is always our top priority.
- Provide accurate, basic details.
- Be honest and compassionate.
- Offer solutions if available.
- Remember to protect private student and employee data.
- Include any important details for parents, such as changes in school closing time or locations to pick up children.
- If the situation arises from an error you (or your school, department, district, etc.) have made, admit the mistake, apologize and explain how you will correct it.

Strategies for creating them:
- Most situations will require no more than three to five key messages - fewer is better.
- Each message should be no longer than one or two sentences.
- Write each message as if you were telling it to your friend or neighbor. Be clear and concise.

- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- If possible, have someone unfamiliar with the issue read them before you are done to ensure they are clear.

Examples
Scenario 1
A child with special needs wandered off the playground during recess. The classroom teacher realized the child was missing when he was not in the classroom after recess.

Key messages:
- As soon as we realized the child was missing we began an immediate search of the school and school grounds and contacted law enforcement.
- The child was found within 15 minutes.
- We are very concerned about what happened and will investigate thoroughly.
- We will review our procedures for checking students in at the end of recess and revise if necessary.
- We cannot discuss specifics about the student, the staff members or the investigation due to state laws regarding data privacy.

Scenario 2
A parent reported Friday morning that several boys brought weapons to school. School officials investigated and found a bow and arrow, knives and shotgun shells, but no shotgun in students' vehicles in the parking lot.

Key messages:
- We took this very seriously, investigated immediately, found a number of weapons in students' vehicles and provided appropriate consequences as outlined in our student discipline policy.
- The students did not intend to use these weapons at school – they view themselves as outdoorsmen extensively involved in hunting and fishing.
- We emphasize at the beginning of the school year that no weapons are allowed on school property, including parking lots, regardless of the intended use of the weapon.
- We thank the parent who brought this to our attention. By working together, we can keep our students safe.

COMMUNICATION STEPS FOR EMERGENCIES

_____

1. **If this is an immediate emergency, call 911 (do not dial 9 for an outside line).**
    If medical assistance is required, immediately call 911, the dispatcher will send an ambulance.

    If this involves a lockdown or a facility issue (fire, gas leak, power outage etc.), call Greg Cole at 763-506-1175. If Greg Cole is not available, call Ben Martinson at 763-506-1228.

●   **Call the Communication and Public Relations department (see page 34 for phone numbers) or your associate superintendent.**
    Contact the Communication and Public Relations department if the emergency can be solved through communication alone. (Ambulance at school, social media threat)

    Contact your associate superintendent if the emergency requires a district-level crisis response and/or coordination through the Crisis Support Team. (Student death)

3. **Provide all known details to the Communication and Public Relations department.**
    Vital questions to answer immediately:
    A. What happened/is happening? Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?
    B. Are students and staff safe?
    C. Is the building safe and secure?
    D. Is the building being evacuated? To where?
    E. Is transportation needed?
    F. Has the school's crisis team been activated?
    G. How certain are you about the facts?
    H. What issues must still be resolved?
    I. Are support staff/counselors being provided?

4. **Determine if you need a Communication and Public Relations department staff member on site for assistance.**

5. **Develop key messages. The Communication and Public Relations department will work with you in developing key messages.**
    The key messages form the basis for communication to all audiences. Focus on two or three of the most important things staff, parents and public need to know immediately**.** _Whether key messages are being shared externally or internally, all must be approved by the Communication and Public Relations department before their release._

    Consider the following when forming key messages:
    ●   Provide accurate, basic details.
    ●   Be honest and compassionate.

- Offer solutions if available.
- Remember to protect private student and employee data.
- Include any important details for parents, such as school closings or locations to pick up children.
- Check with General Counsel if you're not certain of data privacy concerns.

6. **Determine to whom communications should go and methods for communication.**
   The Communication and Public Relations department will work with you in determining communication strategies. Associate superintendents, departments of Labor Relations, Employee Services, General Counsel and others may have input on this. Strategies may include some or all of the following:
   - Email to secretaries at school and district switchboard to use in answering questions; instruct switchboard to direct media calls to Communication and Public Relations department.
   - Email to all school staff or hand-distributed message if email isn't working.
   - Email to district staff.
   - Announcement to students.
   - Share with media.
   - Notice on school and district websites.
   - Notice on social media (Facebook/Twitter/others as this medium evolves)
   - Email notice in special edition of school's electronic newsletter.
   - Email notice in special edition of district Backpack Online.
   - Automated phone call to parents.
   - Personal phone call to parents.
   - Initial letter to parents.

7. **Plan for media.**
   During this time, remember that police control the site, but they DO NOT control the communication. The Communication and Public Relations department will work with you in determining the following:
   - Who will serve as liaison with the media and appear on camera?
   - Where should reporters be directed to go?
   - Is a news conference appropriate?
     - If so, where will it be located? Space must be large enough to accommodate several TV cameras.
   - Will we provide staff, students and/or parents/guardians to appear in on-camera interviews? If so, identify people who will present the correct image for the school/district. Obtain parent/guardian permission if needed.
   - Beyond key messages, what information can be released? Remember "no comment" is usually perceived as an admission of guilt or culpability.

   Note: In a multi-agency crisis, Anoka-Hennepin will work with other agencies to manage media.

8. **Develop a one-page data sheet to share with media, if time permits.**
   The Communication and Public Relations department will work with you in developing an information sheet including the following:
   - A brief summary of facts of the situation.
   - Basic data and demographics about school and district (how many students, cities served, number of teachers, etc.).
   - Correct spellings of important names and places.
   - Any relevant laws, facts or history about the situation.

9. **Follow-up**
   - Is follow-up communication needed with staff and parents?
   - Monitor media and news sources:
     - Are there errors in the media reports? If so, respond immediately!
     - Are there emerging issues that will create a new news cycle for this issue?

   Additional help
   - See below for important phone numbers for crisis.

Important phone numbers
Communication and Public Relations Department
Jim Skelly, executive director
763-506-1111 (office)
651-757-8726 (mobile)

Heather Peters, assistant director
763-506-1140 (office)
763-221-0444 (mobile)

For a Community Education emergency, or when the Communication and Public Relations department cannot be reached, call Kristie Thorson, communication coordinator, 763-506-1269.

Superintendent and School Board
For Superintendent Cory McIntyre and School Board call: Debbie Koffski, executive assistant to superintendent and School Board, 763-506-1002

Associate superintendents/Executive Directors
Dr. Mary Wolverton, associate superintendent of elementary schools, 763-506-1004
Becky Brodeur, associate superintendent of middle schools and student services, 763-506-1459
Dr. Josh Delich, associate superintendent of high schools, 763-506-1005

Transportation
B.J. Ison, director, 763-506-1132
Jeff Mueller, transportation safety coordinator, 763-506-1131
Traci Jackson, secretary, 763-506-1126

Child Nutrition
Noah Atlas, director, 763-506-1243
Callie Neumann, assistant director, 763-506-1241

Buildings/Facilities
Greg Cole, chief operations officer, 763-506-1175
Benjamin Martinson, director of buildings and grounds, 763-506-1228
Elizabeth Pipp, indoor air quality coordinator, 763-506-1224
Chris Nielsen, health/safety supervisor, 763-506-1220
Tim Fournier, security and emergency operations manager, 763-506-1208, 651-248-8256

General Counsel
Tim Palmatier, general counsel, 763-506-1089
Roseann Schreifels, 763-506-1144
Laura Becker, paralegal, 763-506-1081

Police non-emergency numbers:
For Anoka County schools
Anoka County central communications: 763-427-1212

For Hennepin County schools
Brooklyn Center police: 763-569-3333
Brooklyn Park police: 763-493-8222
Champlin police: 763-421-2971
Dayton police: 763-525-6220

Hospitals
Mercy Hospital: 763-236-6000, 763-421-8888
Unity Hospital: 763-236-5000
North Memorial Medical Center: 763-520-5200

MEDIA GUIDELINES

Guidebook for working with the media and organizing press conferences

TABLE OF CONTENTS

updated 7/1/2023

INTRODUCTION

_____

The Anoka-Hennepin School District seeks to develop positive relationships with news media to foster fair, accurate and positive coverage of district and school news. Every contact with the media is an opportunity to deliver a positive message about schools or the district, even if the story contains bad news. If you want to influence the way a reporter tells a story about your school or the district, you have to be part of the story.

Media coverage of the district is inevitable and essential
Effective media relations can provide important information to the public and help build support for your school or district. While working with a reporter on camera may feel intimidating to some staff members, the news media is a primary source of information about the district and its schools for the community, especially for non-parents. Working respectfully and professionally with reporters on stories - positive or negative - is critical in providing a public service. People support and trust what they know. The more people know about their school and their school district, the more they support and trust their schools.

Tip: Think of your conversation with a reporter as a conversation with your community. You are speaking through the reporter to your community.

More often than not, media coverage is positive
We often hear that the only stories that get told in the media are negative. That simply isn't true. Only rarely do negative stories appear in the media. A recent review of media coverage found that virtually all stories in print, on the radio or television were either positive or at least neutral. The problem is, bad news is sticky; people tend to remember controversy.

These guidelines are intended to help you get more and better coverage for your schools and to provide help for responding positively and appropriately in times of crisis and controversy.

GETTING POSITIVE MEDIA ATTENTION FOR YOUR SCHOOL OR PROGRAM

Great things happen in our schools every day. Telling the media about them is not bragging, it's cultivating a positive image of our district and our schools. When people have a positive opinion of the district and our schools, the occasional negative incident is easier to set aside.

Did you know? Most district residents rely on information provided from the school district for awareness, participation and value of services provided through the school district. A full 61% of residents note district communication tools such as the FOCUS Newsletter, district and school websites, and e-newsletters as their primary information sources. Contact the department to share newsworthy story possibilities. (Note: Provide approximately one week's notice on an upcoming event whenever possible.)

What is newsworthy?
It is generally one or more of these:
- Timely – it's happening now or soon, not three weeks ago.
- Visual – situations with color, movement, action are especially important for television.
- Significant – winning a significant state or national award, a school that made unusually high gains on a state test, etc.
- New – a new program, a new practice.
- Special – what are you doing that others aren't?
- Unusual – three of the four winners of a state science award are from one high school.
- Has human interest, creates emotion – great examples from Anoka-Hennepin are runners who stopped to help others, a boy who walked for the first time at his homecoming pep fest.
- Reflects a trend (state or national trends with local implications) – current trends are anti-bullying efforts, progress in closing the achievement gap, etc.

Sharing your news
Each Anoka-Hennepin school has a website, e-newsletter and social media account. Publish and post school news and information on these visible communication tools to increase support for your school.

Tips: Include school events on your school web calendar. Share the Smore communications (including your school e-newsletter) on your school Facebook page.

If you are contacted by a reporter or the media, alert the Communication and Public Relations department.
When an Anoka-Hennepin school is featured in the newspaper or on TV, it's important to share what to expect with school district leadership and the School Board, in some instances. In addition,

the Communication and Public Relations team strives to cover all schools each year and can help share positive school news through district news mediums.

In your email or conversation, provide the reporter or news desk with the basics: who, what, when, where, why. Emphasize why your story is newsworthy. Describe what visuals the reporter will see to illustrate the story. This is important with all media, but essential for television.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS, PHOTOGRAPHS, TAPING FOR POTENTIALLY SENSITIVE STORIES

Individual situations and reporter requests vary dramatically. When contacted by the media on a potentially controversial or sensitive topic, immediately contact the Communication and Public Relations department for help in developing key messages and strategies for response as needed. Depending on the situation, a member of the department may come to your school to assist.

Guidelines:
The media does not have an automatic right to be on school property. It is a privilege granted by the building administrator, superintendent or associate superintendent, or the Communication and Public Relations department in consultation with a building administrator.

Interviews, photographs or video/audiotaping should not occur without approval of the building administrator, the Communication and Public Relations department in consultation with a building administrator, or the appropriate associate superintendent or cabinet member.

Interviews may be deferred to the Communication and Public Relations department, however, the principal or other staff member is more likely to be known and trusted by your audiences than an unknown central office staff person.

Interviews, photographs or video/audiotaping should not disrupt class time or the school day. A reporter is not allowed in a classroom during class time without approval of the building administrator, the appropriate associate superintendent or the Communication and Public Relations department in consultation with a building administrator.

Reporters do not have an automatic right to an interview. The subject of the interview must give consent. Before refusing an interview, weigh the potential consequences. If the subject has facts or opinions that are important to the story, it is preferable to do the interview; this can often turn around a negative story. When a subject refuses to do an interview or offers a "no comment," the reporter is likely to believe he or she has something to hide and will dig deeper or look for other subjects to interview. Refusal to be interviewed does NOT mean the reporter will drop the story. He or she will have to get the information another way – it's their job.

Prior consent of a parent/guardian must be given before a student can be interviewed or photographed or videotaped for coverage of a potentially sensitive or controversial topic.

MEDIA PREPARATION GUIDE

_____

Ask the following questions, as needed:
- What news organization do you represent?
- What is your deadline on this story?
- What is the story angle?
- Who else have you interviewed for this story?
- Who is coming to the interview?
- Who would you like to interview?
- What kind of visuals are you seeking?
- Confirm contact phone number.

Create your message:
Outline in priority order the key messages that are most important for you to convey. Try to stick to two or three messages; never more than five.

Prepare materials:
- Assemble any additional backup material.
- Create a one-page quick summary of a detailed issue.

Ask yourself:
- Does this issue/incident have any district-wide appeal?
- Are there data privacy issues to consider?
- Are there any district policies that apply to this incident/issue?
- Who should I alert to the media inquiry?
    - Principal
    - Communication and Public Relations department
    - Associate superintendent
    - Superintendent
    - School Board

Arrange interview:
- Identify and contact persons to be interviewed. (They may refuse to be interviewed.)
- Brief them on the issue and key messages.
- Help them work the key messages into their own wording, as needed.
- Find a suitable place to conduct the interview.
- Rehearse as needed.

Arrange visual:
- Seek out locations or activities with high visual appeal.
- Clear an area for cameras to set up.

GENERAL TIPS

_____

Develop a good relationship with your local media
- Get to know reporters well. Be cooperative. If they get to know you, they will look to you for story ideas.
- Learn what kind of information they want, what kind of photos they want.
- Do they want story ideas or do they prefer news releases that are ready to use?
- Give them ideas for feature and news stories.

Be prepared for crisis and controversy
If your school faces a crisis or controversial situation, you may have to deal not only with your local and metro area media, but also with wire services, and national newspapers and television news shows and talk shows.
- Contact the Communication and Public Relations department **immediately** if you believe you may be facing a crisis or controversy. Department staff will help develop key messages, talking points and a plan for responding, not only to the media, but also to staff, parents, students, School Board and other key audiences. (See Response to Trauma guide.)
- Talk with staff and students about how to respond appropriately to questions from reporters. They need to know they do not have to answer reporters' questions, but if they do, they must be reminded that how they respond will reflect not only on them, but also on their school and district, and possibly on their family and their community.
- Make sure someone is available to react. Appoint a spokesperson who knows the issue and can respond confidently using the appropriate key messages. While a member of the Communication and Public Relations department can serve as the spokesperson, it is preferred that the school principal or other school staff member take that role because he or she will be known and trusted by families.
- **With permission**, give reporters home/mobile phone numbers of people who are necessary contacts.
- Work with the Communication and Public Relations department on a brief statement that can be given to your staff and reporters; it will ensure that information provided is consistent and it will increase the likelihood of greater accuracy in news stories.
- Be aware of data privacy considerations. See page 54.

Remember the Anoka-Hennepin Media RESPECT tips
(Tip cards are available from the Communication and Public Relations department. Keep one handy near your telephone.)

Return calls promptly.
- Don't avoid talking with reporters. Your input is valuable and it can change the whole slant of a story. By talking, you increase your control over a story. By not responding, you are at the mercy of what others say.
- Deadlines are important. Find out when they are.
- Make yourself available. Where and when can you be reached for further comments, clarifications?
- If you avoid the reporters they will think you are trying to hide something and will dig deeper.

Everything is on the record
- Even if a reporter says they will keep it confidential, it is on the record, especially if you tell them something that they feel they have a duty to report.
- They can't always remember what you said is off the record.
- If you can't answer a question, tell them why, don't just say "no comment;" a no comment response leads people to believe that you have something to hide.

Speak with confidence
- You are the expert in the situation. Be confident and convey that to the reporter.
- You need to know what you are talking about, but the message the audience remembers depends on other factors including body language. The overall perception television viewers have of you comes from:
    - Your persona - 55 percent
    - Your voice - 38 percent
    - Your message – 7 percent
- Relax. Take a couple of deep breaths and compose yourself.
- Be positive, not defensive.
- Look at the reporter when answering questions, not directly at the camera.
- Steady eyes suggest honesty; blinking, darting eyes suggest nervousness and dishonesty.
- With TV reporters, answer a question in a few words and then "bridge" to get back to a key point. (Go from the answer to your key point by bridging with the reporter's name, or with words such as "and", "but" and "however". Example: "That's a good point, John, but it's essential for your viewers to know that _____ .)

Prepare information

- In most cases reporters call in advance, giving you some time to prepare. Occasionally they appear without warning. You do not need to respond to their questions immediately. Ask about a deadline and take time to prepare.
- Ask questions about what the reporter wants to know so that you know what to prepare.
- Do your homework. Get background information.
- Decide what the key points of your message are and keep bringing them back into the discussion. Ask yourself what points are most critical for your audience to know.
- Be concise. Think about ways to present ideas that will be understood: be concrete, give examples, make analogies. Don't use jargon or acronyms (IEP, PLCs, interdisciplinary curriculum, performance-based assessment).
- If you don't know an answer, say so and offer to get it and provide it later.

Expect challenges

- Reporters may come with a hidden agenda, assumptions or misconceptions. Try to anticipate these and develop responses.
- Smile and appear relaxed.
- Don't get defensive.
- Don't get angry. Count to 10 if you need to. Be patient.
- Avoid an argument.
- Don't pass the buck. Deal with it.
- Don't let the reporter put words in your mouth.
- If it's a complex or sensitive issue, check to make sure the reporter has understood by politely asking him or her to repeat what you have said. (You might say, "Could you please repeat that…I want to make sure that what I said made sense.") Listen carefully. If you don't agree with the way the reporter paraphrases your ideas, say so.
- If you get a multi-part question, start with the part you like best. Don't feel you have to remember the whole question.

Choose catchy quotes

- Short, memorable phrases are more likely to make it into a story than detailed explanations.
- The average length of TV soundbite shrank from 43 seconds in 1968 to under eight seconds in 2011.
    - Try to prepare some in advance.
    - Don't use jargon.

Tell the truth

- It's the right thing to do.
- If you don't, you can face consequences and lose credibility.
- If you don't know, don't guess. Say so and offer to find the answer.
- If you accidentally say something that is incorrect and realize it later, make immediate attempts to correct the misinformation.

PRESS CONFERENCES
_____

Decision to hold a press conference
- A press conference is convened only at the direction of the superintendent or School Board when it is determined to be the best method of providing information to the public through the media. Any changes from the original plan must be approved by the superintendent.
- Staff members who wish to hold a press conference for any reason must contact the superintendent's office and the Communications and Public Relations department for permission and assistance.
- Students who wish to hold a press conference on school grounds for any reason must contact the superintendent's office for permission and assistance.

Staff involvement in press conferences called by other organizations
- The Communication and Public Relations department or whomever learns about plans for a press conference informs the Superintendent of the possible press conference.

Department gathers as much information as possible about the suspected event:
- Talk with reporters and contact the organization/individual purported to be planning the conference.
- Attempt to speak with leaders from the organization planning the event, try to learn their objectives and the points they plan to make with the press.
- Inform the leaders that they will not be able to use school property for the press conference. If they appear at a school site, they will be asked to move off school grounds.

Department shares information with the superintendent to develop a response plan.
- Determine who will attend and monitor the conference for the district.
- Determine district's key messages in response.
- Determine who will provide the district statement following the press conference.

If time permits, the Communication/Public Relations department will prepare a fact sheet about the issue for the media.

The superintendent and/or associate superintendent(s) and Communication and Public Relations department staff attend the conference (arriving at least 30 minutes prior to scheduled start time) to:
- Ensure the conference is not held on school grounds.
- Maintain control of any adjacent school sites.
- Choose a location on school property to provide a district statement immediately following the conference.
- Make contact with reporters immediately prior to conference:

- - ○ Provide fact sheets about the event/issue to the media.
    - ○ Indicate the district will make a statement immediately after the conference to provide the district's position on the topic. Indicate where this will occur.
  - ● Listen to speakers and note what was said in order to respond appropriately to reporters following the conference.
  - ● Video record the event, especially if it relates to a sensitive topic, to create a record of what was said.

If the conference is planned for a school site, inform the principal and explain protocol:
- ● The press conference is not to be held on school property.
- ● The superintendent and/or associate superintendent(s) and Communications and Public Relations department staff will be present to ensure the press conference does not occur on school property and become disruptive.
- ● If speakers and reporters arrive prior to district staff, the principal should direct them to the boulevard area off school district property.

GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOGRAPHING AND VIDEO/AUDIOTAPING STUDENTS, USE OF PHOTOS

Anoka-Hennepin staff, volunteers, representatives of the media and others may occasionally take photos and videotape students and staff in our district's schools. These photos may be used in newsletters, newspapers, programs, yearbooks, brochures, on television, on web pages, in educational videotapes and other appropriate uses.

Parents/guardians may choose to limit the use of their child's photo. When a child enrolls in an Anoka-Hennepin School, parent/guardian(s) will be asked to select one of the following options:

- **Partial restriction:** I want to restrict my child's photo from being used for any purpose except the school yearbook/class photo and school identification records. By choosing this option, I understand that my child will be photographed at school and his or her photo will be used in the school yearbook/class photo.
- **Full restriction:** I want to restrict my child's photo from being taken and used for any purpose except for school identification records. By choosing this option, I understand that my child's photo will be taken and used for school identification purposes only; it will not be used in the school yearbook/class photo.
- **No restriction:** By choosing this option, I understand that my child's photo will be taken and may be used as described in the first paragraph above.

The parents'/guardians' choice will be recorded in the child's records. Parents/guardians may change their photo option choice at any time by completing a new photo option form, which is available from their school.

Although the school will take reasonable steps to prevent students with full or partial restrictions from being photographed, the school cannot guarantee that a student will not be photographed/videotaped as part of a large group, such as participating in a school assembly, walking through a school hallway, and other situations where there are large numbers of students.

Parents taking photos
We do not restrict parents/guardians from taking photos during events such as track and field, class plays, etc. We do not attempt to ensure they aren't taking photos of students who don't have photo releases.

Frequently asked questions regarding use of student photos

May student names be used on our website?
- Yes.

Can we use photos of students on our website*
- Yes. District policy allows use of student photos on classroom, school and school district websites.
  - Student photos may be used unless parents/guardians have requested a restriction. (Restrictions will be recorded annually in Synergy.)
  - Photo captions may include a student's full name.

May student work be used on our website?
- Yes. Student work may be used. It may be identified by first and last name.

Can we post our daily video announcements on our website?
- Yes.

May school or student newsletters/newspapers be posted on school websites?
- Yes.

*The school district may provide district photos to local government entities to be used for joint purposes.

DATA PRIVACY GUIDELINES

_____

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) makes all school data public data, with a public right of access, unless it falls within certain exceptions.

Government Data includes all government information, including information kept by a school district on its students and employees. Neither the physical form (i.e., documents, computer data) or the words temporary or permanent designations make any difference. All such government data is subject to the conditions of the MGDPA.

Government data falls into two major categories:
- *Data On Individuals* (including decedents); which is defined as data in which an individual can be identified as the subject of the data.
- *Data Not On Individuals (*i.e., financial data, property records).

The MGDPA then categorizes such data as follows:
- *Public Data*: Data accessible by any member of the public or media for any reason.
- *Private/Non-public Data*: Data accessible by the data subject, the representative of a decedent, or in the case of Data Not On Individuals, the subject of the data, if any. This data is not accessible by the public or media.
- *Confidential/Protected Data:* Data not accessible by the data subject, the representative of a decedent, or in the case of Data Not On Individuals, the subject of the data if any. This data is not accessible by the public or media.

Educational data
Data on individuals maintained by the school district or by a person acting for the district, which relates to the student is private. However, the following directory information* has been designated by the Anoka-Hennepin School District as public information:
- Name and photo
- Name of school attended
- Date of birth
- Grade in school
- Participation in officially recognized activities and sports (includes related awards)
- Dates of attendance
- Last grade completed
- Date of graduation
- Immunization

*Parents may request that certain directory information not be made available.

Personnel data

Data collected on staff, applicants and volunteers is considered personnel data. Personnel data designated by the district as public information is:

- Name
- Annual gross salary
- Salary range
- Value and nature of paid fringe benefits
- Job title
- Job description
- Education and training background
- Previous work experience
- Date of first and last employment
- Existence and status (but not the nature or substance) of complaints or charges against an employee regardless of whether or not a complaint or charge resulted in disciplinary action
- Final dispositions of disciplinary action including specific reasons for the action and data documenting the basis of the action, excluding data that would identify confidential sources who are employees of the school district
- Terms of any agreement settling any dispute arising out of the employment relationship
- Work location
- Work telephone number
- Awards and honors received
- Payroll information

All other personnel data is private and/or confidential data.

Government data

All data collected, created, received, maintained or disseminated by the school district regardless of its physical form, storage media or conditions of use. Government data of a public nature are:

A. Written record of district School Board meetings, committee/task force meetings, special ad hoc committee meetings, public hearings, etc.
B. Official district contracts, ordinances and resolutions.
C. Financial documents including:
    a. Budget
    b. Payable records
    c. Copies of warrants, invoices, etc.
    d. Revenue/expenditure

Student records policy

While a student is enrolled in Anoka-Hennepin District, the permanent record, the health record, and the cumulative folder are maintained in the home school. Special service personnel such as school psychologists and speech clinicians maintain additional separate records in their offices for the students they serve.

After students graduate, approximately 60 days later (August) the permanent record and the health record are scanned and stored digitally. Alumni can request a transcript following the process shown at the [Anoka-Hennepin website](#). If you have any questions regarding this process, contact the Technology: Applications and Connection Services department at 763-506-1028.

Determining whether a record may be disclosed

In situation where there is a discrepancy or uncertainty on the part of a district employee regarding release of an official record to a member of the media or the public, contact the:

- General Counsel, Tim Palmatier, 763-506-1144, for employee and labor relations data.
- Director of technology and information services, Michelle VanDenTop, 763-506-1026, for regular education student data.
- Director of elementary special education, Melissa Hayes, 763-506-1359, for elementary special education student data.
- Director of secondary special education, Stacey Dahlby, 763-506-1353, for secondary special education student data.
- Executive director of communications and public relations, Jim Skelly, 763-506-1111, for all other issues.

The Tennessen Warning

When an individual is asked to provide private or confidential data concerning that individual, the individual shall be informed:

- Why the data is being collected.
- How the data will be used.
- Whether the individual can refuse or is legally required to provide the data being collected.
- What the consequences are if either providing or refusing to provide the information requested.
- Who will have access to the data provided.

MEDIA CONTACT LIST

_____

COMMUNITY WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

ABC Newspapers (owned by ECM)
Anoka County Union-Herald and Blaine Life
Managing Editor, Matt Debow   763-712-3514
matt.debow@apgecm.com
Deadline Monday at noon, published Friday

Champlin Dayton Press (owned by ECM)
Managing Editor, Alicia Miller   763-424-7361
alicia.miller@apgecm.com
Deadline Friday at 5 p.m., published Thursday

Brooklyn Park Sun Post (owned by ECM)
Managing Editor, Kevin Miller   952-424-7385
kevin.miller@apgecm.com
Deadline Thursday at 5 p.m., published Thursday

Brooklyn Center Sun Post (owned by ECM)
Managing Editor, Kevin Miller   952-424-7385
kevin.miller@apgecm.com
Deadline Thursday at 5 p.m., published Thursday

Blaine Banner (monthly)   763-755-3832
Blaine, Minn. 55449
Editor Marilyn Hamm, littlepaper@comcast.net
Monthly publication, article deadline is one week prior to the first Wednesday of the month

DAILY NEWSPAPERS

Minneapolis Star/Tribune
General information   612-673-4472
Eder Campuzano covers north metro schools
eder.campuzano@startribune.com

St. Paul Dispatch/Pioneer Press
General information   651-222-1111, infodesk@pioneerpress.com
Jverges@pioneerpress.com   651-228-5557

LANGUAGE SPECIFIC NEWSPAPERS

Asian American Press
651-788-3469

LaPrensa De Minnesota (Latino)
612-729-5900
sales@lcnmedia.com

Spokesman-Recorder (African American)
612-827-4021
News tips and press releases, msrnewsonline@spokesman-recorder.com

LOCAL CABLE TV CONTACTS

CCX Media   763-533-8196
Serves Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Osseo
Shannon Slatton, news director, sslatton@ccxmedia.org
Cory Bork, assignment editor, cbork@ccxmedia.org

North Metro TV (Telecommunications Commission-Blaine)   763-231-2810
Serves Blaine, Ham Lake
Send news to Danika Peterson, danika@mtn.northmetrotv.com

CTN Studios   763-767-6525
Serves Coon Rapids only
Coon Rapids, MN 55433-3761
Send news to news@ctnstudios.com

QCTV (Quad Cities Cable TV Channel 15)   763-427-1411
Serves Anoka, Ramsey, Andover, Champlin
Karen George, executive director
contactus@qctv.org

NETWORK TV CONTACTS

WCCO TV (4)   612-330-2509
News Assignment Desk
wcconewstips@cbs.com

KSTP TV (5)   651-646-5555
Ask for News Assignment Desk
newsreply@kstp.com

KMSP TV (FOX 9)   952-946-5767
News Assignment Desk
fox9news@foxtv.com

KARE TV (11)   763-546-1111, 763-797-7215
News Assignment Desk
news@kare11.com