DISTRICT LEADERS

Sustainability for District Leaders

SUSTAINABILITY

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS
TOOLKIT

Communicating strategically and effectively is important. Communication can strengthen essential partnerships between families and schools as it is used to support young children's learning and academic success. Effective communication strategies can be used to share information over time, raise awareness, accelerate changes in practice, generate excitement, and empower stakeholders to advocate for students and schools. To achieve this impact, it is key for district leaders to have a clear and consistent message, and to repeat it through as many avenues as possible. For these reasons, it is important to be strategic about communication as district leaders – both in content and tactic.

Digital tools can provide an effective method through which district leaders deliver key messages to a variety of audiences. Social media provides a way to diversify communication by using various approaches to share information with audiences of interest. Incorporating such practices into school district communications plans is an emerging trend and one that is finding traction and success.

This resource serves as a guide for district leaders in using social media as an effective avenue to share information and build ongoing relationships with key stakeholders. This resource provides tips for district leaders on emphasizing the importance of family engagement as districts implement the formative assessment process.

Recommendations

Implementation Settings
- Back-to-school nights
- Family engagement events
- Annual school/district events
- Planned individual time

Planning Time: 60 minutes to plan for communication methods and content

Implementation Time: Duration of chosen event

Teachers can use this resource to review strategies for digitally engaging families.

Principals can use these resources to access information about communications outreach with families throughout the formative assessment process.

> "What made these tools different from any I'd used before was their power to reach in all directions. Whether sending updates on school cancellations or tweeting about great student projects, with a few keystrokes, I could share ideas and information with students, students' families, community members, and the larger world—while inviting everyone's responses… Using social media and digital tools as a lever, we can open the door to new ways of learning, thinking, and communicating for all members of our community.

- Eric Sheninger, K–12 Director of Technology and Innovation n the Spotswood School District in New Jersey

Five Tools to Support Digital Leadership *

These social media tools can be used to enhance your district's existing communications plan, improve flow of information with key stakeholders, and to further strengthen essential partnerships between families and schools to support student learning and success.

Twitter

140-character tweets can be a dynamic combination of text, pictures, videos, and links to websites. By creating a hashtag in Twitter, you can share a searchable conversation on any threaded issue—meaning categorized and tagged through Twitter—with stakeholders. Or you can use established hashtags to increase exposure of your key messages.

Key Features:

- 140 characters or fewer
- Powered by searchable/connected hashtags
- Drives people to external sites
- User is more in control of how to view tweets

Benefits:

- Text-based (for easy on-the-go updating)
- Real-time engagement opportunities
- Hashtags are easy to create
- Trending topics are easy to tap into when relevant
- Fast-paced and works well with live events
- Increasingly moving towards visual features

Tips for Use:

- Learn lingo/jargon (including hashtags) to be a valued member of the Twitter community (consider: #ECE #EarlyEd #EdLeaders #PTChat).
- Use url shorteners like bit.ly to save space and increase measurement power.
- Share visual content.
- Consider using a personal voice (tweeting as an individual district leader, and not from the district account).

Examples:

- Family engagement is key when implementing formative assessment. Learn more at bit.ly/fameng #EarlyEd
- The research is clear – family engagement positively impacts student achievement and teacher effectiveness. bit.ly/fameng #ECE
- To successfully engage families, we must recognize & appreciate the diversity they bring. #PTChat

* These tools to support digital leadership are informed by Sheninger, E. (2015). Transforming your school with digital communication. Educational Leadership, 72 (7). Retrieved from http://www.ascd. org/publications/educational-leadership/apr15/vol72/num07/ Transforming-Your-School-with-Digital-Communication.aspx

Facebook

This tool can become a digital storytelling hub. Facebook allows for families, educators, principals, and community members to congregate in a virtual space. If the page is set up to support two-way communication, families and other stakeholders can add their own content, as well as "like" posts, comment, and share with their followers.

Key Features:

- Emphasis on visuals (photos & video)
- Hashtags allow for content and conversation aggregation
- Facebook insights offers strong snapshot of user demographics and behavior

Benefits:

- Go-to source of information for significant portion of key audience
- Rewards quality content (visuals, video) with higher engagement
- Analytics help take guesswork out of what types of content resonate and what times to post
- Relatively inexpensive ads and promoted content

Tips for Use:

- Take advantage of visual opportunities – share images overlaid with calls-to-action in text, or videos.
- When repurposing content, find a new angle (add a picture, link, etc.) to stay on top of newsfeed changes.
- Shares are key to building your reach; encourage people to share your post and pay attention to data from insights about what people like, share, and comment on the most.
- When sharing information from your website, blog, or newsletter, take the time to craft multiple compelling headlines. Potential headline examples include:
  - The research is clear, when you are intentional about how you engage and include families as you implement the formative assessment process, there is a positive impact. "Click here" to learn more about opportunities for families to be involved with formative assessment in the district.

- We are so grateful for the partnership with our families as we implement formative assessment. "Click here" to learn more about how we work side-by-side with families to ensure student achievement. Insert link to blog post or article.
- Town hall meetings and listening tours are two ways to ensure that there is ongoing communication with families and school/district leaders. Be sure to like our page to stay in the know!

Digital Photo Sharing

Pictures can quickly capture and visually share the work and accomplishments happening across schools in the district. From a photo-sharing platform like Instagram, you can easily share any photos with "followers" and link picture sharing across other accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Key Features:

- Visual storytelling with photos and short videos
- Fully integrated with Facebook, Twitter and other major platforms
- Unlimited photo uploads
- Engagement through likes and comments

Benefits:

- Allows for powerful showing (rather than telling) of impact
- Use of filters can elevate the quality of images
- On-the-go posting via mobile phone is good for behind the scenes stories and events

Tips for Use:

- Balance consistency and quality. You should post enough that your followers remember they follow you and your photos need to be compelling.
- As with Twitter, learn lingo/jargon to be more easily found via hashtags.
- Experiment with uploading promotional photos/ videos to advertise events and awareness campaigns.
- Use a variety of photos and perspectives (behind the scenes, promotional, day in the life, etc.).

Examples:

- "Shared decision-making engages and affirms people." – Wayne B. Jennings. Be sure to provide families the opportunity to give insight and information as you make key decisions about implementing formative assessment.
- Share short promotional videos for upcoming family engagement events.
- Offer a photo series with examples of various types of parent engagement throughout the formative

assessment implementation.

Video Platforms.

Creating a YouTube channel for the district enables you to capture and share videos of learning and other districtwide activities as they happen. Through tools like Periscope, Facebook Live, and Ustream, you can also share live events in real time.

Key Features:

- YouTube & Facebook Live have easy-to-use, powerful analytics to help pinpoint who viewers are, where they're coming from, and how they're engaging with your videos.
- Periscope, Facebook Live, and Ustream allow you

to connect with an audience in real time, making them great platforms to host meetings or Q&As.

- Periscope videos create a sense of urgency with viewers because they disappear after 24 hours.

Benefits:

- YouTube has a [nonprofit program](#) that gives customized and enhanced branding and fundraising opportunities including a 'donate' button on videos and annotations that link to your website, campaign goal bars, and on-screen banners and calls-to-action.

- You can get an unlimited amount of video uploads though the time limit varies based upon the platform.

- There is a wide variety and flexibility in the types of stories you can tell using video.

- Live videos make it easy for viewers to react in real-time during the broadcast.

Tips for Use:

- Take advantage of visual opportunities – share images overlaid with calls-to-action in text, or videos.

- When repurposing content, find a new angle (add a picture, link, etc.) to stay on top of newsfeed changes.

- Shares are key to building your reach; encourage people to share your post and pay attention to data from insights about what people like, share, and comment on the most.

- When sharing information from your website, blog, or newsletter, take the time to craft multiple compelling headlines.

Examples:

Youtube Channels: [Brighton Central School District](#) & [Kent School District](#)

Facebook Live: [New York Public Library Story Time Live Coverage](#)

- Profiles of parents, educators, and administrators who have been engaged during the formative assessment implementation

- Live stream of community forums

- Q&A with educators or administrators

Blogs

A blog is the 21st century's newsletter. Blogs provide two-way engagement and enable leaders to integrate multimedia content to tell stories and share content. They can be a highly effective method for sharing strategies, ideas, and success stories. You can try well-known platforms, such as [Medium](#) or [Wordpress](#).

Key Features:

- A hub for content that can be shared on other platforms *(Facebook, Twitter, newsletter, etc.)*

- Flexible platform that allows you to pull in other types of content *(photos, videos, text, audio, etc.)*

Benefits:

- Primary way to position yourself as a thought-leader

- Easy to integrate a blog into your website

- Allows for versatile content

- Good for search engine optimization (making you come up higher when people search)

- Trustworthy source of content

Tips for Use:

- Plan ahead for blog content and create an editorial calendar that ties in with themes, events, key messages etc.

- Keep the length of each blog brief, to between 300-600 words

- Add pictures, videos, and other visuals to emphasize your key message

- Build a "share this" feature into your blog, making it easy for readers to share with their social networks

- Craft headlines that are tweet-worthy/shareable

- Incorporate multiple perspectives in your blog: parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, etc.

Blog Post Ideas:

- School/Program Spotlights: Buildings that are increasing family engagement

- Guest posts highlighting different points of view *(parents who have become more involved, educators who have improved relationships, principals who have noticed a difference in their school communities)*

- How-To-Guides and Best Practices

- Two-Way Communication *(in action)*

- Equity & Access *(in action)*

- Shared Decision-Making *(in action)*