

# TANGIBLE TRIUMPH

## PRINCIPAL KIT

Principals who communicate effectively about community involvement will increase public support for schools.

These pages contain tools you can use to achieve your goal of effective communication and includes the following resources:

### *Part 1: Newsletter articles*

Tips for generating story ideas for newsletters and sample texts you can use to communicate about community involvement.

### *Part 2: 30-Second intros*

Short messages you and your staff can deliver in almost any situation.

### *Part 3: Recognition programs*

Examples that highlight community involvement in your school.

More information on school communication is in the Community Relations section of the OSBA Web site: [www.osba.org](http://www.osba.org).

## Part 1: Newsletter articles

Newsletter items can carry your messages about community involvement to your school's "ambassadors" – parents and staff members. These are the people the public trusts for reliable information about your school. In fact, even as new communication technologies have expanded access to information, parents and staff members have gained stature as trusted sources of information about schools. Whenever you publish a parent or a staff newsletter, include information about community involvement that boosts student success. Below are ideas for using your newsletters to recognize the benefits of community involvement.

*Note: Just as the public relies on insiders for information about the schools, your staff and the parents of your students rely on you for information about your school and the school district. Always share important information generously and quickly, and be prepared to fully answer the questions of staff members and parents. Your openness with them will encourage their openness with you.*

### **1. Develop a procedure for consistently generating story topics. Possibilities include:**

- Summarizing on a regular basis the data your school collects on the number of volunteers assisting students, the number of hours they put in and the services they provide. Reporting these data in every newsletter will signal everyone that community involvement is important.

- Reviewing on a regular basis the requests your office receives from teachers to bring in outside speakers, to send students on field trips, to set up internships and to carry out other community-oriented activities. Each request is a potential newsletter item.
- Asking at each staff meeting for notice of newsworthy volunteer projects that will benefit students. Doing the same at site council and parent club meetings. In addition to generating newsletter items, the fact that you ask the question will signal the importance you place on community involvement.
- Talking one-on-one with staff members. There's no better way to find out about community involvement than to bring up the topic in every possible conversation.

### **2. Develop standard text about the importance of community involvement, to drop into each story about the topic. Suggested text could read as follows:**

#### FOR LONGER STORIES

##### *Version 1:*

"Community involvement through projects such as (*name of project*) is essential to education at (*name of school*). Students learn best when they have the chance to apply their lessons to real life problems through internships

*Continued*

## Part 1: Newsletter articles – continued

and other experiences in the community.

“That is why (*name of school*) encourages parents, local businesses and community organizations to get connected with our school.”

**Optional Addition:** “In fact, we are proud that (*number*) local organizations have provided real-life learning opportunities for (*number*) students from (*name of school*).”

### Version 2:

“Community involvement through projects such as (*name of project*) is essential to education at (*name of school*). Well educated students are essential to our economic and civic health, and teachers and schools can’t do this job on their own.

“That is why (*name of school*) encourages parents, local businesses and community organizations to get connected with our school.”

**Optional Addition:** “In fact, we are proud that (*number*) local volunteers are assisting students from (*name of school*).”

### Version 3:

“Community involvement through projects such as (*name of project*) is essential to education at (*name of school*). Studies prove that students do better when parents and other adults are involved in their schools. **Optional Addition:** In fact, we have seen performance in (*name of subject*) improve significantly among students taking part in (*name of project*).

“That is one reason why (*name of school*) encourages parents, local businesses and community organizations to get connected with our school.”

### Version 4:

“Community involvement through projects such as (*name of project*) is essential to education at (*name of school*). Kids who are active in school are less likely to engage in crime or get into trouble. **Optional Addition:** In fact, we have seen a significant decline in disciplinary referrals among students involved in (*name of project*).

“That is one reason why (*name of school*) encourages parents, local businesses and community organizations to get connected with our school.”

## FOR SHORTER ITEMS

“When community members and parents are involved in our school, children win.”

### 3. Develop a principals’ message about community involvement to appear in your school newsletter. The message below shows one way to approach the topic:

“(*Name of school*) has wonderful teachers and support staff. But I have to tell you: they’re not doing it alone!

“Our students are learning valuable lessons every day from parents and other community members. Although these volunteers come from all walks of life, one thing links them together. It’s their willingness to help students improve their academic skills.

“In the past (*span of time: weeks, months, years*), more than (*number*) volunteers have given their time to help our students.

“I know how important this help can be.

“Students learn best when they can apply their lessons to real-life problems, the kind they encounter in internships and other experiences in the community. For example, our students (*put example here*).

“Students do better in school when parents and other adults are involved in the school. For example (*put example here*).

“Kids who are active in school are less likely to engage in crime or get into trouble. For example (*put example here*).

“And, simply put, schools can’t do their jobs on their own. In order for schools to produce the well-educated students who are essential to our economic and civic health, they need the help of caring volunteers. For example, (*put example here*).

“Of course, there are many more such projects, each involving motivated community members, caring teachers and enthusiastic students.

“To the people who make these programs possible, I say, Thank You!

“When parents and community members are involved in our school, children win.”

4. **Encourage local media to provide coverage of community-involved programs that are highlighted in your parent newsletter. Make sure key editors and reporters receive your parent newsletter. Provide reporters with the names of contact people at the school and in the community. Help reporters set up visits to the program and interviews with the key players.**

NOTE: Staff newsletters generally do not warrant regular distribution to the media.

More information on developing newsletters may be found on the OSBA web site at the following address: Perk up your publications & web pages ??

## Part 2: 30-second intros

You have many opportunities to address the public: school socials, fund-raisers, student performances, awards ceremonies, graduations, meetings of civic groups and (for high-school principals, at least) athletic events. Whenever you speak to the public, you have an opportunity to promote the benefits of community involvement. Below are templates for short messages that can be dropped into almost every speaking opportunity.

### *For events at school*

**General events and meetings** – “The thing I’m most grateful for is the support we receive from community members and parents – like you. You know that well educated students are essential to our economic and civic health. You support us by providing learning experiences that our students will need to succeed in school, at college and at work. Without your help, we couldn’t do our job of preparing students to succeed.”

**Graduations and awards ceremonies** – “When I think of these (*graduates / award-winning students*), I also think of the parents and community members who contributed to their success. Research tells us – and I know from experience – that students learn best when caring adults are directly involved in their education. Our school cannot do this alone. So I want to thank every parent and every community member who contributed time and energy to the success of these fantastic (*graduates / award-winners*).”

**Athletic events** – “Thank you for coming to the game. When community members and parents are involved in our school, children win.”

### *For events away from school*

#### *Version 1:*

“My name is (*your name*), and I am principal of (*school name*). The thing I’m most proud of at our school is that students apply their lessons to real-life problems. Who makes this possible? Community members just like you. Community members know that well educated students are essential to our economic and civic health. Community members support our school by providing experiences for our students. Without them, we couldn’t do our job of preparing students for college and work.”

#### *Version 2:*

“I am (*your name*), and I am principal of (*school name*), where students are winners because of people like you. Our students are more successful because community members and parents are actively involved in our school. Because of caring adults like you, our students have real-life opportunities to apply their lessons. Because of caring adults like you, our students are better prepared to play a positive role in the economy and civic life of our community. Folks, we couldn’t do our jobs without your help.”

### *For teachers*

“For each school there’s only one principal, but there are many teachers. You can amplify your message about parent and community involvement – and about all of the other great things that go on in your school – with one simple stratagem: Encourage your teachers to

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## Part 1: Newsletter articles – continued

spend a minute at the end of each class period or at the end of the school day to summarize for their students what they did that day. You've just spread your message to hundreds or thousands of young people, who now will have a fighting chance of answering the dreaded question, "What did you do at school today?"

## For school secretaries

If you want the message of parent and community involvement to reach lots of people every day, ask your secretaries to answer the phone this way: "(School name), where parents and the community make learning come alive, how may I help you?"

## Part 3: Recognition programs

**A**n effective recognition program achieves three goals: It rewards those who take part in positive activities, it builds school spirit, and it informs others about the positive things happening at your school. Here are some ideas for recognizing staff members who get the community involved in activities that boost student achievement:

### 1. Use recognition opportunities that already exist. It's not necessary to create new ones. Some of the obvious opportunities are:

- **Meetings of your staff, your site council and your parent groups:** You can make community-involvement recognition a standing part of the agenda for any or all of these meetings.
- **All-school announcements:** Depending on the size of your school, you could recognize a staff member once every week or, at worst, once every month.
- **Reader boards:** Each honored staff member could have his name up in lights. The message might read: "Mr. Jones + Good Neighbors = Student Success."
- **Bulletin boards:** Post the photographs of honored staff members along with brief text describing their accomplishments.
- **Newsletters:** Each edition could include a paragraph or two honoring a community-involved staff member.
- **Web page:** Devote a page to a staff member who has played an important role in community involvement. Update the page regularly.

- **School assemblies and performances by student groups:** You could take a minute to recognize a staff member for community involvement – in front of hundreds of people.
  - **Civic club meetings:** Most clubs allow guests and provide time to introduce them. You can take your honored staff member to the meeting of your club and recognize her contributions in front of a roomful of community leaders.
  - **Individual performance reviews:** What these may lack in publicity value, they make up for in personal impact. They're another way to thank individual staff members for involving parents and the community in education.
2. **Make recognition frequent. About the sixth or seventh time you recognize staff for being community-friendly, people will begin to realize: This principal means what she says about the importance of community involvement.**
  3. **Make recognition meaningful. Make sure up front that your staff understands what you want them to accomplish, why you want them to accomplish it and how you want them to accomplish it. Then, recognize and honor everyone who accomplishes the task you've set out.**
  4. **When you recognize a person's accomplishment, give the gesture extra significance by (1) arranging to have students present the awards, (2) arranging to have community members present the awards, and/or (3) giving value-added awards such as restaurant coupons for two.**