

TANGIBLE TRIUMPH

BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT KIT

School leaders who communicate effectively about community involvement will increase public support for their schools.

“Tangible Triumph” provides tools that school board members and superintendents can use to achieve the goal of more effective communication. This kit includes the following resources:

Part 1: Letters to your community

Samples of “Good-news” messages to include when you communicate with district residents, vendors and parents.

Part 2: Board meetings

Guidelines for using part of each meeting to share success stories and recognize community participation.

Part 3: Speeches

Examples of how to talk about what is going right – and the importance of community involvement – in a variety of settings.

Part 4: Newsletter articles

Ideas for including community contributions to schools and to student success.

Part 5: E-mail updates

Tips for including information about community involvement.

Part 6: Other forms of electronic communication

Voice mail, automated answering systems and Web sites all provide opportunities.

Part 7: News releases

Guidelines and sample text for communicating with the news media.

More information on school communications may be found in the Community Relations section of the OSBA Web site: www.osba.org.

Part 1: Letters to your community

Written communication with school district residents and vendors is a great way to promote the benefits of community involvement. Your “key communicator” list is the ideal audience for this type of communication. Information about developing a key communicator network is available on OSBA Web site in the “Change Your Message” section. Look for “Developing Key Communicators.”

But, you don’t have to have a key communicator network to make this work. Below are ideas to put your support of community involvement in writing on a daily basis.

- 1. In the letters and e-mails you write to constituents, provide a consistent, short message about community involvement. Possibilities include the following:**

Sample text for the opening:

“I appreciate the opportunity to write you about (identify issue here). Our schools couldn’t succeed without the active involvement of community members like you.”

Sample text for the conclusion:

“Thank you for supporting (name of community/district here) schools. When community members are involved in schools and provide real-life learning experiences, children win.”

Sample tag-line for use as a postscript:

“Community members make learning come alive for our students.”

- 2. Provide a similar message in all correspondence from your district-level departments to the vendors and other organizations that provide services and goods to your district.**

One possibility is the following sample tag-line for use on letters and invoices:

“Thanks to the active involvement of business and community organizations, our students have real-world opportunities to learn.”

Continued

Part 1: Letters – continued

3. Develop correspondence that promotes the benefits of community involvement at greater length than in #1 and #2 above.

This could be sent to key communicators. However, even if you don't have a key communicator network, you could include a letter with other correspondence that goes to an already defined community audience, such as the people who receive your board agendas by mail. The sample letter below shows one possible way to approach the topic.

4. To give the letter in #3 extra impact, find a community member whose involvement in schools is well known and ask him or her to sign it.

More information on written communication may be found on the OSBA Web site's "Change Your Message" site by looking for "Low-fat writing."

Sample letter:

Dear _____,

Can I ask you NOT to keep a secret? I hope so, because I want to let as many people as possible in on this one.

The secret is that the students in (name of community/district) schools learn best when community members get involved in their education.

That's right: Our schools can't do it alone. And they wouldn't want to. Our educators have learned:

- Students are most successful in school when they can apply their lessons to real-life problems through internships and other experiences in the community.
- When real-world learning opportunities keep kids involved with their education, those kids are far less likely to get into trouble.
- Students do best when parents and other adults from the community are actively engaged in their schools.
- Our graduates do better in college and at work when they have participated in community based learning.

There are examples of real-world learning throughout our schools. One of my favorites is (*provide a short narrative about a local program here*).

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

To the people who make these programs possible, I want to publicly say, 'Thank You!' When community members are involved in schools and provide real-life learning experiences, children win.

Sincerely,
Name and title

Part 2: Board meetings

The Oregon School Boards Association advises boards to present good news about students, staff and programs early in their meetings.

With that in mind, we suggest that your working plan for board meetings include the following check-points:

- The meeting includes recognition for at least one program that involves parents and/or non-parent adults in the education of students.
- Representatives of the staff and parents/community members from the program are present.
- The superintendent or designee describes for the board how the program works, how it boosts student achievement and how it prepares students for college and work.
- The board chair reads and presents a certificate or similar acknowledgement to the representatives of the program.
- After the meeting, a board member or the superintendent sends a handwritten note thanking program representatives for attending.

Suggested wording for a certificate appears below:

The (name of district) School Board
Thanks
(name of program/group)
For contributing to the success
of students at
(name of school).
Because of people like you, our students
are winners!

More information on conducting a community-friendly board meeting may be found on OSBA's "Change Your Message" Web resource page under "Communicating during the board meeting."

Part 3: Speeches

Whenever you speak before a community or parent audience, you have an opportunity to promote the benefits of community involvement. Below are templates for segments that can be fleshed out and dropped into three common public-speaking situations.

GRADUATION

These suggestions are designed to fit into a longer speech to an audience primarily of students and their family members. For this segment, you will need to gather information about one or two community members who helped students succeed in a significant way. A conversation with the principal or student representatives on the graduation committee should help here.

"When I think of this year's graduates, I also think of the community members who contributed to their success.

"Community members like *(insert information about one or two key people and their contributions here)*.

"We know from experience and through research that students learn best when they can apply their lessons to real-life problems. We know that students' experiences in school are much more positive when the community provides ways for these young people to stay active and engaged in learning. And we know that graduates are better prepared for college and work when the community has been involved in their education.

"I want to thank every community member

Continued

Part 3: Speeches – continued

who contributed time and energy to the education of our graduates.

“And graduates – now that you are assuming your place in the adult community – I encourage you to look for ways in which you can enhance the education of the students who follow you.”

CIVIC GROUPS

This segment is designed to fit in to a longer speech to an audience primarily of adults who aren’t affiliated with your schools. As with the graduation segment, you will need to gather information about one or two community members – ideally people who will be in the audience – who have helped students succeed in a significant way.

“Because this is a community audience, I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about the importance of the community in educating our students.

“We know that 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.

“We know that students’ experiences in school are much more positive when the community provides ways for these young people to stay active and engaged in learning.

“And we know that graduates are better prepared for college and work when the community has been involved in their education.

“Hundreds of people provide these kinds of opportunities for our students. Today, I want to single out *(insert information about one or two key people and their contributions here)*.

“Community members like *(names of key people go here)* are helping prepare students to succeed in college and work. Make no mistake: Our schools cannot do this job on their own.

“Schools need the help of community members and are getting it here in *(community name)*. We are deeply grateful for this assistance, and we hope we show it with graduates who contribute to the economic and civic health of our community.”

THE 30-SECOND SPOT

This segment is designed to stand alone when brevity is needed. Use it with an audience of primarily adults who aren’t affiliated with schools.

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

More information on giving speeches may be found online in OSBA’s “Change Your Message” resource section by looking for “Giving a Speech,” “Sample Graduation Speech” and “Keep it in your pocket: A short speech about your schools.”

Part 4: Newsletter articles

Parent and district newsletter articles can carry your messages about community involvement to a large audience. In keeping with the “newsy” focus of newsletters, these messages may be tailored to specific events from the recent past or near future. Examples include attainment of an honor by a program or announcement of a coming event to showcase community involvement in your schools. Below are ideas for using your newsletter to recognize the benefits of community involvement.

1. **Develop a procedure for consistently generating story topics. Possibilities include:**
 - A districtwide inventory conducted early in the school year. Inventory forms could be sent to principals, business partner representatives or both.
 - A request for story ideas at each meeting of principals and district level administrators.
 - A cooperative effort with the teachers’ union to solicit story ideas from faculty members.
 - A cooperative effort with parent clubs to solicit ideas from parents.
 - A cooperative effort with the local Chamber of Commerce and service clubs to solicit story ideas from member businesses and community leaders.
 - A place on the district Web site where visitors can offer praise for specific programs and individuals.
2. **Determine how frequently you’d like to run articles about community involvement. If every issue will contain an article, consider developing a graphic identifier such as a logo for this feature.**
3. **Develop standard text about the importance of community involvement to drop in to each story about the topic. Suggested text could read as follows:**

“Community involvement through projects such as *(name of project)* is essential to education in *(name of district)*. Students are most successful when they can apply their lessons to real-life problems through internships and other community experiences. Students who participate in these programs are more likely to do well in college and at work after graduation.

“Students also are less likely to get into trouble at school when real-world projects keep them engaged in their education. Schools are more effective when parents and other adults from the community are actively involved.

“That is why *(name of district)* actively encourages parents, local businesses and community organizations to get connected with their schools.”
4. **Encourage local media to provide coverage of community-involved programs that are highlighted in your newsletter. Make sure key editors and reporters receive your 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.**

More information on developing newsletters may be found on OSBA’s “Change Your Message” Web section by looking for “Perk up your publications and Web pages.”

Part 5: E-mail updates

Whenever you provide e-mail updates to district staff, consider including items promoting the benefits of community involvement. Items could include information about programs that receive recognition at school board meetings. Other procedures for consistently generating story topics are covered in the section on newsletter articles. As with newsletters, your staff updates on community involvement should include standard text about the topic. Suggested text could read as follows:

“(Name of faculty members or school) are/is helping learning come alive through participation in (this project). Research shows that students are more successful in school when

they can apply their lessons to real-life problems through internships and other community experiences. Students also are less likely to get into trouble and schools are more effective when parents and other adults from the community are actively involved.

“That is why (name of district) encourages efforts by district staff to build connections with parents, local businesses and community organizations.”

Part 6: Other forms of electronic communication

In addition to e-mail, most school districts have a range of electronic communication tools at their disposal. You may be able to use these tools to promote community involvement with very little extra cost in terms of time or money. Suggested adaptations of electronic communication include the following:

VOICE MAIL AND AUTOMATED ANSWERING SYSTEMS

Include a tag line about community involvement in your outgoing message. The tag line might say, “We’re proud of our schools in the (name of community/district); community members make learning come alive for students.”

WEB SITES

Place a tag line in a prominent position on as many pages as possible. Suggested wording:

“Thanks to the active involvement of business and community organizations, students have real-world opportunities to learn in the (name of district/community) schools.”

More information on using electronic communication may be found on OSBA’s “Change Your Message” Web section by looking for “Useful tools for quick communication,” “Using Voice Mail” and “A Web content primer.”

7: News releases

If you have information about community involvement that is time-sensitive and of high community interest, consider putting it into a news release as opposed to a newsletter. Below are ground rules for news releases along with a sample news release that you may adapt for your use.

1. **Follow the ground rules below for all news releases – those sent in hard copy and those sent electronically:**
 - At the top, identify the item as a news release. Also, place the date on which the story is being sent to the media and the date when the story is to be released to the public.
 - Include the name, phone number and e-mail address of someone to contact for more information.
 - Include the name, mailing address, phone/fax numbers and Web address of the school district.
 - Top the text with a headline that is short, to the point and interesting.
 - Limit the length to the equivalent of a page and a half of typed, double-spaced text.
 - Write tight: Use straightforward language, short sentences, short paragraphs.
 - After the release is delivered, follow up with the editor or reporter to handle any initial questions. Rather than ask the reporter if he or she got the release (we're told this can be an irritating question), assume they have and be ready to offer interesting details.
2. **Follow the ground rules below for news releases that are sent in hard copy form, either by personal delivery, fax or by regular mail, although this method is seldom used:**
 - Put the release on white or light-colored paper 8.5 X 11 inches in size.
 - Leave about one-third of the page open at the top and leave ample side margins, so the editor can write comments and instructions on the release.
 - Text should be double- or triple-spaced and confined to one side of the page only.
 - Whenever possible, deliver a hard-copy news release in person.
3. **Develop standard text about the importance of community involvement that you can drop into each news release about the topic. Suggested text could read as follows:**

"The (name of district) encourages parents, businesses and community organizations to become involved with local schools. When that happens, students do better in school, have more opportunities to apply their lessons to real-life situations, and are more successful when they advance to college and work."

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Sample news release:

SCHOOL DISTRICT XYZ NEWS RELEASE

September 15, 2005 – *For Immediate Release*

Media Contact: Joe Smith

Phone: 503-123-4567 days, 503-987-6543 evenings

E-mail: joe.smith@xyzschools.org

XYZ District to Honor ABC Company's Support

XYZ School District announced today that it will honor ABC Company for providing real-world learning opportunities to students at 123 High School.

The district will hold a public reception at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 12, followed by an honors ceremony to start the XYZ School Board meeting at 7 p.m. Both events will take place at the district headquarters, 678 North Avenue in XYZ City.

ABC Company arranges internships for 20 juniors from 123 High each semester. The student interns become familiar with ABC's local operations, hear presentations by ABC executives and line workers and work on ABC-related problems that test their mathematics and business skills. The company has provided internships to local students for 10 years.

ABC Company makes advanced cutting systems for the logging and agriculture industries worldwide. The company's executive offices are located in XYZ City, along with one of three manufacturing facilities. ABC employs 200 people locally and 350 in all.

The XYZ School District encourages parents, businesses and community organizations to become involved with local schools. When that happens, students do better in school, have more opportunities to apply their lessons to real-life situations and are more successful when they advance to college and work.

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