

# How Board Members Can Support District Communication

By Keegan Kociss

**M**any in the community may be surprised by the amount of time, dedication, and effort put in by those volunteering to be a member of a Board of Education. Incumbents know the job of a board member doesn't stop with just two or three meetings a month. Those joining a school board for the first time will soon find out the position entails more than attending meetings and approving policy. It also includes advocating for schools and creating cohesive bonds between the community and the district.

The mission of every school district is centered on doing what is best for students. Showcasing success sometimes rests on a handful of people. Many school districts staff public relations professionals with the goal of engaging teachers and staff, families, and community members while highlighting the many ways goals are achieved. Others rely on administrators, teachers, or others to tell the district's story. However, a collaborative effort is always the best option.

Increasingly, schools are beginning to rely on social media to quickly get information out to their stakeholders. If one were to look at a district's Facebook followers, the vast majority of those followers would be families

with children currently attending the district's schools. This means many important stakeholders, including taxpayers, community leaders, and business owners, may not see information pertinent to them.

Members of the community who don't have school-aged children are more likely to follow the account of an elected school board member. As a member of the board of education, you will be an important link between the district and the community when sharing the district's stories, successes, and information. How can you help spread the word?

## Set Up a Dedicated Social Media Account

It is good practice to set up an account dedicated to your work as a school board member where you can share or retweet school and district posts. This isn't to say personal anecdotes or family photos can never be shared, but the main

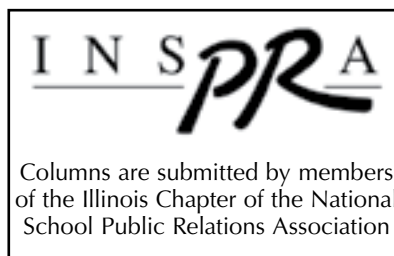
focus of such an account would always be the district, schools, students, staff, or education in general.

There is a #SchoolPR community on Twitter that consistently offers examples and tips on how to develop social media accounts centered on school public relations. For those who are new to the school board, or to social media, this community may be very helpful. There are also regular Twitter Chats (#K12PRChat) that may also answer many questions that come up. The school public relations community is welcoming and offers advice to anyone seeking it.

## Use a Hashtag

Does your school district use a hashtag? If so, use it whenever posting information relating to the district. Some districts have a different hashtag for each school. Sometimes there are specific hashtags for events or campaigns. For example, our CCSD 146 team uses at least three different hashtags throughout the year: one for the first day of school, one for a district-wide reading initiative, and one general hashtag.

If your district also has multiple hashtags and you are unsure of the best to utilize in each instance, reach



out to your school's communications team or superintendent for guidance. I assure you they will be thrilled to have a new partner in school PR.

### Showcase Events

Show your support by attending as many events as you can and use your dedicated social media account to showcase some of the wonderful things happening in the schools. Don't forget to use the hashtag. Some possible posts that would garner interest could be:

- If you are at an open house at the beginning of the year, introduce your followers to a new teacher.
- Are you attending a science fair? Tweet a photo with a young scientist (with a parent's permission).

- Enjoying a band concert? Share a quick 15-second video with your followers.

At District 146, we are lucky to have board members who always attend events, even if they have no children participating. They come to support the students and staff. From book fairs to musicals, I know I will see at least two or three board members at any event I attend.

### Do it for Them

Board members, administrators, teachers, staff, and even the public relations team are all in their positions for one reason: the students. We are here to assure our students receive a quality education, and to illustrate that to our families, staff members,

and community members. If you ask anyone why they chose to be in education, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone who says they are in it for the glory. The answer will always be the students.

Being a school board member can sometimes be a thankless job, especially in today's climate. It will not always be easy, but you can be proud of the fact that you are helping provide students with the best education your district can offer. You can go on to share that pride with the larger community by becoming an active advocate for your schools. ■

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