

## **School Web Site and Email Communication Strategies**

Many busy parents and interested community members appreciate the ease of keeping abreast of school happenings. Parents can learn about hot lunch menus, upcoming special events, annual calendar (in particular, early release days), student handbook information (the paper version often gets misplaced at home), newsletter distribution, school policies, board agendas, and meeting minutes to name a few.

An increasing number of schools are providing password access to the school web site for parents to review their child's grades. Additionally, many teachers establish list-serve email communications with parents to provide ready access to the latest classroom happenings. Parents often request the email addresses of other parents to maintain their own internal communications network.

With a little guidance from a district technology director or citizen skillful in electronic communications, school leaders can begin email outreach between teachers and parents. Electronic grade book web access is a bit more challenging and will need to be guided by a highly skilled professional to set up confidential password access for parents.

## **Public Access Cable Television**

A surprising number of small Vermont communities have the ability to broadcast school board meetings and other school events on public access cable television. Board members have differing opinions on the value of televised board meetings. However, the majority of school leaders recognize the importance of transmitting school board meetings into the homes of taxpayers. Board members often receive feedback from citizens who watch cable broadcasts at all hours of the day and night. School leaders consistently agree that the more people are informed the easier it is to pass school budgets and bond votes.

There are 37 public access cable television stations statewide. See the attached list for the station contact in your area. By FCC edict, local access stations are required to provide programming for public, education and government broadcast purposes. This means there are cameras available for school filming. What school leaders need to do is to request technicians from the station or hire an individual (often an interested high school student) to tape board meetings or other education events. The video tape is then given to the station manager for inclusion in the local program schedule.

## Radio Talk Shows

Hosting and appearing on talk radio is a very effective strategy for communicating about education issues to voters from throughout your region. The idea is not to wait until a month or two prior to the annual school district budget vote to advocate for community support. The most productive philosophy is to *“Get the Public on Your Side Before You Need Them”*. One way to accomplish this goal is to feature different school leaders or local education experts on area radio station talk shows.

The attached list of radio stations identifies key contact people in your area.

Possible topics of interest might include:

- ✓ Student Assessment
  - How it’s used for local program improvement
  - State Act 68 compliance
  - Meeting Federal No Child Left Behind mandates
  
- ✓ Co-curricular Activities
  - What’s the value
  - Student participation rates
  - School accomplishments
  
- ✓ Technology as a Teaching Tool
  - Acceptable use policy
  - Federal Internet filtering requirement
  - Intellectual property
  
- ✓ School Safety Issues
  - Creating a positive school culture
  - Discipline incidents
  - Student emotional safety in classrooms
  
- ✓ Teacher Quality Issues
  - College preparation and licensure
  - Increased standards (NCLB Highly Qualified)
  - Supervision and evaluation process
  - What parents can do if they have a complaint

Radio talk shows are the most beneficial when they allow an open microphone for local callers.

An effective strategy to get started is for the superintendent/principal to meet or talk with the station manager to inquire about their interest in hosting a series of talk shows on important education topics. Then identify key individuals to research specific topics, locally, statewide, and nationally. The final step is to coordinate schedules with the key speakers and the radio station manager.

## School Newsletters

Most schools prepare and periodically distribute newsletters to parents on a weekly or monthly basis. However, parents only comprise roughly 20% of the voters in any community. A lesser number of schools distribute newsletters to the full postal list.

By developing a collaborative working relationship with your weekly newspaper editor, school leaders may be able to have the school newsletter inserted within each newspaper being distributed to local box holders. Communicate with the editors identified on the attached weekly newspaper list to see if this cost effective distribution strategy will work in your area.

- (Broken down) News and Letter – personally communicate to stakeholders
- Play vital role in school communications
- Powerful personal nature – direct, personal communication with crucial audiences
- Keep people informed – create credibility – power of voice
- Successful newsletters never written for mass audiences
  - Lesson – Don't write for the whole community; appeal to each parent or taxpayer individually – direct conversation between newsletter, school, and reader – Create feeling that the newsletter is “just for me”
- Perception is community members have “no time to read”
- First impressions – cover stories and headlines – make or break your newsletter
- Newsletter has 6-8 seconds or 11 words to catch reader with headline
- Typical 8 page newsletter – headline 80% of decision to read newsletter
  - Headline must draw them in
  - Create reader focused headlines
- Create many hooks – Know your audience!
  - Solicit feedback from your key communicators
  - Identify core emotion
  - School
    - WIFM – “What's In It For Me”
    - Benefits all children
    - Focuses on your child
  - Never Use Acronyms in Headlines
  - Get publications to move beyond the mail box clutter
    - 15-20% open rates
    - School newsletters greater readership
    - Fewer than 1-3 people subscribe to newspapers today
- Decisions to read made in split second and almost always based on cover headlines
  - Weak headlines could kill strong story
  - Strong content inside never seen without strong headline
  - Repeated strong headlines and covers create loyal readers
  - Headline reviews and critiques became standard practices
  - Let draft article sit for a day – 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> line often becomes a better headline
  - Good headlines tell and sell – “Grab readers by their lapels”
    - Tell people enough to make informed choice
    - “Test Scores Hit New Highs: Gains Set At All Levels”
    - Give me headlines that scream!
    - “Plan Seeks to Aid Students With Stronger Program, More Choices”

## **Building Community Support Through School Events**

One of the best target audiences for communicating school success needs no coaxing to travel to your school. They are the parents and community members who frequent theater productions, chorus/band concerts, and spectate at sports competitions.

Here's how you can take advantage of a target audience who is already at your school:

### **Drama Productions**

- Share with the audience the number of graduates who have gone on to study theater or theater related programs after high school (maintain student data files)
- Identify volunteers who have helped with set construction and other roles
- Talk about the linkage between drama productions and student standards
- Promote upcoming elementary/high school drama events
- Have students present a short vignette in costume promoting a future play at the half-time of a basketball game

### **Chorus/Band Concert**

- Share with the audience the number of graduates who have gone on to study music or music related programs after high school (maintain student data files)
- Talk about linkage between musical performances and student standards
- Promote upcoming elementary/high school music events
- Have band members play and/or students sing the national anthem at sporting events
- Host joint elementary/middle/high school concerts
- Have students sing or pep band play at sports events

### **Sports Events**

- Identify students who have achieved special academic awards at the half-time of basketball games
- Present distinguished faculty, staff, administrator, or volunteer awards at the half-time of basketball games
- Share with spectators the number of graduates who have gone on to compete on athletic teams or who have received partial or full scholarships at the collegiate level (maintain student data files)
- Elementary students demonstrate sports skills at half-time of athletic competitions
- Host mini-spelling bee at the half-time of basketball games

### **Other Advocacy Strategies**

- Include all scheduled co-curricular events in school marquee
- School administrators speak about education issues at civic events/senior center
- Include info in school reports:
  - Graduation and attendance rates
  - Volunteer hours and activities
  - Student/teacher ratios
  - College enrollment % and cumulative dollar value of college scholarships

# Key Communicators Development Guide

## Create Key Communicators Group

Select 20 opinion leaders in your community and provide monthly school information

- Parent leaders
- Staff members
- Senior citizens
- Business leaders
- Citizens

Post names of Key Communicators on web site and in school newsletters

## Successful Initiatives

- Build alliances – empower others – focus on initiatives
- Utilize research to acquire facts
- Pay attention to trend changes

## Alliance building projects

- Focus groups
- Create task force
- Be organized and flexible
- Delegate and empower
- Create buy in... Make it their event
- Understand capacity of volunteers
- Trust them... They will see you as a leader
- Produce pamphlets
  - What my child should know and be able to do
  - Parenting skills
  - Homework support
  - Dealing with drugs and alcohol

## Educating the Public About Public Education – National School Boards Association

Center for Public Education [www.nsba.org/PublicEd](http://www.nsba.org/PublicEd)

Public trusts teachers and administrators more than the press

33 million hits on a Google class size search – need facts

### NSBA site

Five Reasons for Local Control of Public Education

School Success Stories

Community Engagement

National Assessment of Education Progress Data

Class Size Research

Polling Data

Core Facts and Talking Points

## **Communicating with and Engaging the Public**

The Vermont School Boards Association has developed a strategic alliance with the national Study Circles organization to engage students, educators, parents and community members in an effective public engagement strategy. Study Circles convene groups of 8-12 people from different backgrounds and viewpoints to dialogue about key issues and then to make recommendations to school and/or community leaders. Everyone has an equal voice and participants are encouraged to understand each other's view points.

VSBA, working with a New England Study Circles consultant, provides workshops for school and community leaders on how to develop a local or regional Study Circles program. VSBA also helps to deliver small group facilitator training for individuals who are interested in guiding a Study Circle process.

The Study Circles organization is a resource that provides at no cost dialogue guides on the following topics:

- ✓ Education reform
- ✓ Crime and violence
- ✓ Diversity
- ✓ Youth concerns
- ✓ Building strong neighborhoods
- ✓ Neighborhoods supporting families with children
- ✓ Police-community relations
- ✓ Racism and race relations
- ✓ Growth and sprawl
- ✓ Immigration

For more information go to the Study Circles web site at:

**[www.studycircles.org](http://www.studycircles.org)**

VSBA has recently developed a modified public engagement strategy based on the Study Circles model which we have retitled Study Forums. This new resource is being successfully incorporated within school board governance analyses currently underway in a number of school districts and supervisory unions. Contact the VSBA office for more resources and information.

# Strategic and Action Plan Comparisons

## **Strategic Plan**

- Broad, multi-year school goals and strategies
- Driven by mission, vision and beliefs
- Analyzes current strengths and challenges of the school system
- Generally involves many school and community stakeholders in development
- Establishes direction, parameters and potential resources
- In addition to academics, drives decisions in broad planning areas; e.g. facilities, public relations, enrollment, community-based learning, etc.

## **Action Plan**

- Annually plan identifying specific student performance goals linked to assessment data
- Directs instructional strategies, education programs and learning activities
- Links professional development and curriculum work to annual targeted goals
- Planning team involves an administrator, board member, parent, community member and teachers
- Often identifies implementation components for broader strategic planning goals

# Planning: A Joint Venture

*From the Tennessee School Boards Association*

## What To Plan

The board's plan should be the framework of all that happens in the school district. The plan should define the ideal for each segment of the board's operation and project what will be accomplished toward the board goals during each year included in the plan. A timetable should be included with target dates for reaching milestones.

## The Challenge to Local Boards

The need for local school boards to engage in educational planning has never been greater. As boards confront educational reform, a major challenge is to manage reform and not be the victim of it-to direct rather than react. To do this, boards must move from operating only in crisis situations toward systematic planning. Without clearly-defined goals incorporated into well-defined plans, a board can always expect to be responding to one crisis after another.

Success is seldom a matter of luck. If schools are to be exceptionally good, it is imperative that boards consider uncommon goals and uncommon methods of reaching them. Boards should resist the temptation to be overly conservative since boards tend to accomplish the goals which they establish by this process.

A basic principle of this planning procedure is that the board is responsible for establishing the purpose of the plan and the staff is responsible for establishing the methods. The purpose springs from a vision initiated by the board. It includes both the mission statement and the goals.

Method includes objectives for each goal and strategies for achieving each objective. When adopted by the board, it becomes the action plan.

A more detailed discussion of this planning procedure follows:

## Planning Procedures

Who's Responsible?	Planning Activity
<p data-bbox="297 1606 418 1633"><b>BOARD</b></p> <p data-bbox="565 1501 651 1711"><b>1</b></p>	<p data-bbox="764 1434 1192 1465"><b>Make a commitment to plan.</b></p> <p data-bbox="764 1470 1433 1686">The school board and superintendent should have a preliminary session on planning. In this session, they should consider the possibility of adopting a mission policy of the school district, set up beliefs of the board of education, and outline a calendar of planning activities. All members of the board must make a commitment to plan. If the board does not make a commitment but gives planning a high priority you cannot expect staff members to consider it a very high priority.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BOARD</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 48pt; color: #0056b3;">2</p>	<p><b>Establish a guidance system for planning.</b></p> <p>A guidance system consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Beliefs-A list of statements which summarize the board's basic beliefs.</li> <li>B. Vision-A mental model of an idealistic future for your school system.</li> <li>C. A Mission Statement-A statement which describes the ultimate purpose and scope of the school district</li> <li>D. Planning Categories-Key result areas used to record school district goals and objectives and to divide the plan into manageable parts.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BOARD</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 48pt; color: #0056b3;">3</p>	<p><b>Involve the community.</b></p> <p>Plan and conduct a series of meetings where the community is given the opportunity to react to what is happening in the school district. Primarily, the board is seeking suggestions for improvement in the school district, not hearing gripes. Three rules should probably be observed during these community sessions: 1. The persons conducting these meetings are not there to answer questions but to hear information, Therefore, persons conducting the meeting should not defend the school system but simply hear suggestions and complaints and thank people for them. 2. It's okay for participants to complain, but only if they offer a suggestion for improvement. 3. Do not promise that what is suggested will be done. Promise that the board will consider all suggestions.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STAFF</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 48pt; color: #0056b3;">4</p>	<p><b>Analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.</b></p> <p>This phase involves the collection and analysis of data about the school district. This will require a review of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in order to build on strengths, eliminate weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities and avoid threats.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BOARD</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 48pt; color: #0056b3;">5</p>	<p><b>Set goals.</b></p> <p>The board should go through, a process of brainstorming in listing all of the potential goals that are suggested. Then, a system of putting a priority on the goals should be used. Each goal should be considered in terms of importance, cost, and the effort required to accomplish the goal. Goals judged important by every member of the board should be included in the long range plan. Other goals maybe added by majority vote, but it is recommended that, except in the most unusual circumstances, only those goals accepted by every member of the board should be included in the plan.</p>

<p><b>STAFF</b></p> <p>6</p>	<p><b>Develop objectives and strategies for each goal.</b></p> <p>The staff should be assigned the responsibility of developing objectives and strategies for each goal. Frequently, each goal is assigned to a committee headed by a staff member. The committee works on measurable objectives and strategies. Objectives are divided into annual objectives and longer range objectives. Each objective should be measurable and include a timeline. Additionally, resources which will be required to implement any objectives should be identified in the proposal made to the board.</p>
<p><b>BOARD</b></p> <p>7</p>	<p><b>Adopt the plan.</b></p> <p>The board considers each objective and strategy in view of the resources necessary to accomplish the objective and the relative importance of each. The board then adopts an annual and long range plan.</p>
<p><b>BOARD/STAFF</b></p> <p>8</p>	<p><b>Promote the plan.</b></p> <p><i>Present the plan to the staff.</i></p> <p>Generally administrators and staff have already been working on the plan, but they should have the opportunity to hear a presentation of the entire plan from the superintendent and/ or the board. It is important that the administrative and supervisory staff be committed to the plan before it is presented to other staff members. In fact, administrative and supervisory staff members usually present the plan to the staff. Most staff members will already have some involvement in developing at least one objective' of the plan but this is their opportunity to see the entire plan. An enthusiastic person who is totally in support of the plan should present it.</p> <p><b>Present the plan to the community.</b></p> <p>Community meetings such as PT A meetings, civic clubs, and other groups should be scheduled when possible to consider the school district's plan. School board members should be involved in the presentation of these plans as often as possible. This is a great public relations opportunity for school board members.</p>
<p><b>STAFF/BOARD</b></p> <p>9</p>	<p><b>Evaluate the plan.</b></p> <p>Each objective in the plan is measurable and has a deadline for completion. At the specified time, the plan should be evaluated and 1 report of the success or lack thereof should be presented to the board. As a result of the evaluation, the plan may be modified and the process begun again for a new year.</p>

# **Stakeholder Groups**

The school board should seek out key opinion leaders from the following list of stakeholder groups and involve them in public engagement activities or when developing a school's strategic planning process.

## **External**

Parents  
Taxpayers  
Small Business Owners  
Large Employers  
Labor Union Leaders  
Town Officers  
Social Service Providers  
Senior Citizens  
Low Income Tenants  
Renters/Homeowners  
Non-Profit Directors  
Farmers  
Religious Leaders  
Second Home Owners  
Higher Education Leaders

## **Internal**

Students  
Teachers  
Principal  
Superintendent  
Aides  
Custodians/Secretary  
Parents  
Volunteers

## Identifying 5 Classes of Influentials

When developing a public engagement strategy use the list below to align with individuals in your community who match the roles of “influentials”, For maximum impact, concentrate 80% of your advocacy effort on these key people who community members tend to respect opinions thereof.

Type	Role	Effect on Others
1. Role Models	Act out the desired behavior, show how to do it	Admiration, emulation
2. Opinion Leaders	Influence behavior & opinion by giving (or withholding) social acceptability, providing expertise	Peer pressure, desire to go along; trust
3. Power Leaders	Provide official approval or sanction	Fear based on power to reward or punish
4. Cheerleaders	Add emotion, adrenaline, team spirit; wave the pom-poms	Boost morale & can-do feelings, even in incredulous situations
5. Celebrities	Gain attention for the topic through their visibility	Attraction, awareness

## Strategies To Gain Public Support

1. Be clear who your *customers* are
  - Learn all you can about them
  - Don't think you know, or trust conventional wisdom
  - This may require research...
2. Know who the real *stakeholders* are within that large category of customers
  - Many of them are *unwilling* customers
3. Engage the school family<sup>B</sup> or else
  - It's the only person power at your disposal!
4. Make educating your customers & stakeholders the *number 1 priority*
  - Sounds like heresy, but..

# How We Learn Best

## People remember:

- 20% of what they are told
- 30% of what they see
- 50% of what they see and hear
- 70% of what they say
- 90% of what they do

## Strategies

### That Address Constituent Groups

1. Which of these advocates for change are in your district?
  - Tear Down list probably not reachable; don't waste your time
  - Cost Cutters are the real problem because it's in vogue
  - Reorganization advocates can be allies; e.g. magnet schools
  - Rule: make critics part of the solution whenever possible
2. Make a behavioral list:
  - What precisely do they do or attempt to do that must be dealt with?
  - What would you like them to do, not do etc.
3. Research (formal or informal) to know the true level of support they actually have vs. the noise they make
4. Know how the stakeholders will make their decision
5. The only solution today: build relationships with opinion leaders and make them your third party advocates
  - They have credibility, which earns you trust

*Source: Jackson, Jackson & Wagner*

# VSBA School-Community Relations Model Policy

## **Policy #H1**

It is the policy of the \_\_\_\_\_ School District to encourage the involvement of the community in its schools.

## **Implementation**

An effective community outreach program is a necessary component of a school system's organization and operation. Therefore, the Board will provide the means necessary to develop and implement such a program.

The school system's community outreach program should:

1. create a planned, systematic, two-way communications process between the Board and the school community;
2. encourage a better understanding of the objectives, accomplishments and needs of the school system within the community;
3. create opportunities for school involvement through volunteerism, business/organizational partnerships, sponsorships, internships and other joint projects;
4. use a variety of media including but not limited to meetings, letters and e-mail, circulars, web sites, seminars, publications, communications media, and personal contacts;
5. provide the channels necessary for resolving grievances and eliminating misunderstandings;
6. inform concerned persons as to their rights, privileges and responsibilities.

The Board delegates to the (Principal, Superintendent, or community relations officer) the responsibility for developing a community relations program which conforms with the above principles.

## **Working With the Media**

Frequently it appears to boards that the media are preoccupied with the negative. In reality, the media also do much to promote schools. Local newspapers often carry feature articles about the good things happening in schools; they present valuable information to the public. For example, a local Vermont paper had a great picture and story of "I Love to Read and Write" activities on the same page with an article based on budget information for forthcoming town meeting.

Working effectively with the news media requires an understanding that, even in adversarial situations, boards and media depend on each other. The media need boards and schools as a source of community news, and boards need the media as a means of communicating with their communities.

Newspapers are more likely to report school news than any other news medium; radio and television coverage is less common. Obviously, more extensive coverage of a school board is likely to occur during a crisis.

When there are hot and controversial issues that make the headlines, boards need to know how to deal with the quick-paced spotlight and the stress that goes with it. If this happens to you, look to your resources to assist you in coping.

# Practical Language For Talking With The Press

*George Bernard Shaw once termed the English and the Americans as “two peoples separated by an ocean and a common language”. To make sure you don’t erect a language barrier between the local press and your board, use straightforward, plain talk. Here are some examples of right and wrong ways to respond to questions when you’re meeting the press.*

1. Question: *What will the new tax rate mean to an average homeowner?*

Bad Answer: First of all, you have to consider that property valuations have increased, thus the tax rate was adjusted downward. I would say, based upon this and our rising need for school operating revenues, the increase is nominal. I believe it will raise the taxes on a \$90,000 residence by about \$8 a year.

The Problem: This answer is defensive in tone, offers information the reporter did not seek, and turgidly puts off the conclusion in deference to a buildup.

Good Plain-Talk Answer: The impact will be slight. It will mean an increase of about \$8 per year on a \$90,000 residence.

2. Question: *What is the purpose of this field trip?*

Bad Answer: Our school district believes that significant enrichment of the educational experience occurs when out-of-facility functions include multiple levels of participation between our personnel and our patrons.

The Problem: The buzz words of education-speak make an untimely appearance.

Good Plain-Talk Answer: The trip will bring together our teachers, students, and parents to share a learning experience. They will find out more about the subject and each other.

3. Question: *What will the district do if the teachers walk out?*

Bad Answer: We might try to keep classes open by using volunteers or supervisory personnel. If it is not possible, we might close the schools and try to make up the time

by adjusting the school calendar at a later date. We have a number of options, and these are some of them.

**The Problem:** Answering hypothetical questions is not productive. This answer opens a whole can of emotional worms and is likely to provoke public concern over options that might never be employed.

**Good Plain-Talk Answer:** We have a number of contingency plans and, as appropriate, we will discuss them when they'll be put in place. It is not useful to talk about Aifs. At this time, negotiations with our teachers are proceeding, and we continue to seek a reasonable agreement.

4. Question: *You voted against closing the school, but lost. What will you do now?*

**Bad Answer:** I plan to report to my constituents and see if I can get the matter reconsidered. As I said in the board meeting, I think this is a terrible inconvenience to the students and parents involved.

**The Problem:** This answer oversteps the bounds of working together as a board. Reasonable persons can disagree, but majority rules. If there is significant interest in reconsidering the issue, your constituents will make their feelings known to the board. There is no point in exacerbating an already difficult situation.

**Good Plain-Talk Answer:** I offered my opinions during the meeting, and the board heard the public input. The majority still felt that closing the school was in the best interests of the school system, and I must defer to the majority.

*A good overall rule of thumb: Don't speculate if you don't want your answer to appear in print. And, sometimes, plain talk can be a replacement for what isn't said. Rather than refusing to talk to a reporter or not returning a reporter's telephone calls, employ the plainest talk of all: Say, I have no comment at this time, and explain briefly why you can't speak or choose not to speak.*

*Having the reporter write that you declined to comment is more desirable than reading school officials were not available for comment or repeated calls to school board members went unanswered. A "no comment" indicates some reasoned judgment for withholding information. No response implies you are hiding information.*

*Source: Pennsylvania School Boards Association*

# Media Interview Plan

1. In one, brief paragraph please state the key point or objective in doing the interview. This statement should reflect what you, the school board, would like to see as the lead paragraph in a newspaper story or broadcast news report about your story.

2. What are the three facts or statistics you would like the public to remember as a result of reading or hearing about this story?

a.

b.

c.

3. Who is the main audience or population segment you would like this message to reach

Primary:

Secondary:

4. What is the one message the audience needs to take away from this report/interview?

5. Who in your school district will serve as the primary point of contact for the media?

Name:

Phone:

Date and time available:



# School Crisis Press Release

\_\_\_\_\_ Public School

At \_\_\_\_\_(time) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) the following accident (incident)

occurred:\_\_\_\_\_

At this time we have: (A) no confirmation of the injuries or damage:

or

(B) confirmed the following injuries or damage.

*(Do not identify students by name, merely state the number of students involved and/or any property damage that has occurred).*

The prognosis for those involved is (good) (fair) (critical).

The school district is responding in the following manner:

\_\_\_\_\_

At the current time the matter is being investigated by local authorities and is considered to be a criminal investigation. The school district does not wish to take any action that may interfere with a pending criminal investigation. Therefore information will not be released without the prior approval of local authorities.

We will keep you updated as we learn further information.

We ask the general public to avoid traveling in this area unless it is necessary.

We ask parents of children in the school with questions to contact us at

\_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for your cooperation.

*Source: Oklahoma State School Boards Association*

# Communicating With Legislators

## MAKE SURE YOUR LEGISLATORS KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT AN ISSUE

- A. Write a short letter that gets to the point, is easy to read, and therefore will likely be read.
- B. Phone as a follow-up to a letter or instead of a letter.
- C. Testify at public hearings and before legislative committees
- D. E-mail - some legislators use the state system
- E. Be cordial and thoughtful when communicating. If a letter ends up being long and angry sounding, use it for venting, but don't send it.
  - 1. Be careful about accusations about "the state" or the universal "you" as it is likely to make legislators defensive.
  - 2. Making your points with specific data; "anecdotes" can be effective.
  - 3. Bringing students to testify can be effective depending on the subject matter.
  - 4. Whether testifying, talking on the phone, or writing a letter, being brief and to the point is most likely to be convincing.
  - 5. If you have several people who want to testify before a committee or at a public hearing either divide up the testimony or have one person testify and then introduce the others who are there to support the position.
- F. Maintain credibility. Check out rumors before reacting, use reliable sources; don't give your legislator a chance to "write you off" because of bad information.

## KEEP INFORMED

- A. Use your professional association as a source.
- B. Check the Legislature's web page: [www.leg.state.vt.us](http://www.leg.state.vt.us). This site includes a legislative directory, weekly schedule of events, the bill tracking system, the full text of bills, acts and resolves, daily postings of journals and calendars, and the Vermont statutes and constitution.
- C. Newspapers may be useful for basic information, but check out the issues raised in the articles (details might be misleading).
- D. Use your Legislators
  - 1. Be patient—they might not know particulars but should be willing to find out.
  - 2. Can have material mailed to you.

## PROPOSING LEGISLATION

- A. Your Legislator should be willing to propose a bill for you; don't be shy about asking
- B. Work with your professional association to support larger issues.

*by William Talbott and Martha Heath*

# VSBA Annual School Report

## Model Policy

### **Policy #H6**

It is the policy of the \_\_\_\_\_ School District to develop and use the annual school report to communicate with the public about the effectiveness of educational programs and about how resources are utilized to improve student achievement. The annual report is intended to be an accountability instrument and a communication tool for delivering factual information broadly throughout the community and to initiate formal and informal opportunities for community members to become involved with their local schools.

### **Implementation**

The Superintendent by (specify when) will recommend for the Board's approval a format and modes of distribution that are easily understandable and accessible to the general public. The Principal, in collaboration with the Superintendent, will work with other school personnel to prepare an annual school report of student performance. A distribution system for the annual report should take advantage of all modes of communication including but not limited to:

1. School Report Night(s)/Day(s)
2. Local School/Town Report(s)
3. Internet/World Wide Web Site
4. Media (daily/weekly newspaper or radio)
5. School Newsletter(s)
6. Presentation(s) to Community Organizations
7. Cable TV

Under no circumstances will reporting of student assessment results reveal personally-identifiable information on individual students. The school report will include information about:

1. progress toward achieving learning standards from the most recent measures taken;
2. health and social well-being of children in the School District;
3. progress toward meeting the goals of the annual action plan;
4. other statistics about the school and community that will create a context for examining student performance; this may include community issues such as dropout, transfer, and retention rates, course enrollment patterns, gender differences, student poverty, and access to technology;
5. early reading instruction provided under 16 V.S.A. 2903(c);
6. early care and education opportunities available to children;
7. community support available to families;
8. a description of how the school ensures that each student receives appropriate career counseling and program information regarding availability of education and apprenticeship program offerings at technical centers;

9. how student performance results are used to develop school programs;
10. student attendance, including unexcused absences and student discipline;
11. how the school budget supports the annual action plan goals and objectives, and other long-range plans;
12. any additional information as appropriate.

In addition, the school report for secondary schools will include:

1. data describing student participation in technical education, regional job opportunities and the number of graduates from the previous year who have entered post-secondary education, the military and the job market.
2. drop out and graduation rates

*\*\*\* See VSBA 2001 Vermont Model Policy Manual for other policies on this topic.*