



*Student Achievement Leadership Team*  
**Resource Kit #6**

Showcasing academic success  
to promote public schools

*November 2002*

Ohio School Boards Association  
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# Contents

Message from OSBA President Linda R. Anderson . . . . .	1
Your Success is Our Success! . . . . .	2
Akron City	
Alternative Learning Center Program (ALC) . . . . .	4
Cuyahoga Heights Local (Cuyahoga)	
Student Achievement Public Relations Project . . . . .	6
East Muskingum Local (Muskingum)	
SUCCESS (Students Understanding Culture through Community, English and Social Studies) 7	
Elida Local (Allen)	
The History Connection . . . . .	8
Fairview Park City	
Tech Expo 2002 . . . . .	10
Franklin City	
Maximum Awareness of Successes . . . . .	12
Oakwood City	
Using student achievement to promote your district is as easy as A.B.C. . . . .	14
South Euclid-Lyndhurst City	
Kindergarten Intervention Program. . . . .	16
Whitehall City	
How to better tell your success stories . . . . .	18

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Dear School Board Member:

When our schools are making great strides in helping students achieve in the classroom, we need to tell everyone we know. Too often, we don't do a good a job at selling our successes as we should.

Accountability has focused public schools on proving that they are doing their jobs. Previous SALT Resource kits addressed the accountability issue. Now, after several years of local district report cards, proficiency tests and being under the public microscope, we are showing in classroom after classroom that students are achieving more than before. That should be good news to everyone.

This resource kit was created to showcase schools that do a good job of promoting academic successes in their communities. We've collected nine case studies from schools, large and small, urban and rural, to help your district do a better job of selling its successes. Teachers teaching and students learning is not really news, but our communities need to know that its public schools are doing their jobs and doing them well.

Linda R. Anderson  
OSBA President  
Member, Fostoria Community City  
Board of Education

**Name of initiative:** Your Success is Our Success!  
**District:** Akron City  
**Students in district:** 29,922  
**Contact person:** Karen Ingraham, executive director, communications  
**Phone number:** (330) 761-2927

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

A public relations and image-building campaign for Akron City Schools was sorely needed. At the end of 2000, Akron City, an urban school district, was facing budget cuts, media attacks, community schools competition, poor state test results and an angry mayor threatening to take over the district. In a bold step, the board of education allocated \$200,000 (general funds) for a public relations campaign to improve the district's image and promote student achievement.

**Communication activities:**

Akron Schools were in a downward spiral after the following series of events in 2000–2001:

- with rising costs for insurance, utilities, additional teachers and no increase in local revenues for seven years, the district was facing a huge deficit;
- Akron Schools were losing millions of dollars to eight new community schools established in Akron;
- Akron's local newspaper questioned the district's ability to prepare students for the workforce and college;
- a series of articles on schools with high minority enrollment suggested unequal educational opportunities for minorities;
- the superintendent announced his retirement;
- the board of education struggled over the selection of a new superintendent. Local business leaders and the Akron mayor interpreted their actions as indecisive and ineffective;
- 2001 Ohio testing results rated the district in "Academic Emergency;"
- Akron's mayor threatened to take over the school system if improvement was not immediate.

The district could not consider seeking an operating levy until it improved its image to voters and restored the public's confidence in its ability to educate students. A public relations campaign was designed to:

- inform the public/parents of the district's vast array of academic offerings,
- show evidence of student achievement,
- illustrate that Akron's workforce is strong and teeming with successful Akron Schools' graduates,
- generate community pride in the district through the testimonials of its graduates.

The formal campaign was conducted from March 2001 through the summer, ending just prior to a fall levy campaign. The in-house portion continues today. Campaign tactics included:

- **Graduates:** The campaign featured a diverse group of graduates from each of the eight high schools working in a variety of careers. As an element of fun, celebrity graduates were included. Each participant's high school picture was used in the campaign.
- **Collateral materials:** A four-color, A-Z booklet featured 26 graduates working in diverse

fields, from automobile dealership owner to nurse to zookeeper. Each graduate's story included how an education at Akron Schools contributed to his or her success. The Akron curriculum relevant to each career was included.

● **Paid advertising:** Radio and television spots were produced. High school pictures of these graduates with clues to their identity were featured on billboards, movie theater slides and metro bus signs. Newspaper ads showcased successful graduates, careers and the Akron Schools curriculum.

● **In-house activities:** The district used its local cable public access station and its radio station to run additional promotional spots. As the campaign evolved, new spots were created for dozens of graduates who asked to be included in the campaign. Collateral materials such as posters, mini-billboards and other print materials were produced.

● **Theme:** The campaign tag line, "Your Success is Our Success," became the theme for individual schools within the district. Each school showcased its own graduates in school newsletters and activities.

● **Web site:** The district Web site featured district graduates during the campaign.

### **Campaign evaluation:**

A key to the campaign's success was the great respect and pride our graduates showed for their schools and teachers in the Akron district. Each graduate we called and asked to participate in the campaign; even the angry mayor was flattered to be involved. Celebrities such as Melina Kanakaredes, actress; James Ingram, singer; Leon Harris, CNN news anchor; Ara Parseghian, college football coach; and Rita Dove, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet; willingly shot spots at their residences or studios and sent us tapes.

As the campaign progressed, it snowballed. Local talk shows praised the campaign, the district and its outstanding graduates, and encouraged graduates to call. Local business magazines featured entrepreneurs who graduated from Akron and included their high school pictures. Graduates explored alumni organizations. The local newspaper wrote about the campaign and it even caught the attention of *PR Week*. The local billboard company donated 100 free billboards; and metro bus system donated additional space. Graduates were calling and writing to be included in the campaign.

In September, a pre-levy community survey of potential voters showed a 45%-50% chance of passing a levy. This was far greater than the results of previous surveys and provided hope. The survey showed that more voters believed the district was providing sound educational opportunities for students, and its students were achieving.

In November 2001, this campaign was credited with helping the district pass an 8.9-mill operating levy by the largest margin in its history — 10 percentage points.

**Name of initiative:** Alternative Learning Center Program (ALC)

**District:** Cuyahoga Heights Local (Cuyahoga)

**Students in district:** 794

**Contact person:** Al Pavlish, director of pupil personnel

**Contact phone number:** (216) 429-5792

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

Cuyahoga Heights Schools has achieved a high level of student success in the areas of attendance, achievement and proficiency results. Yet, after careful reflection, the school board, administrators and teachers noticed that a small population of students consistently did not reach the level of achievement typical of the school district. The board developed a new program called the Alternative Learning Center to directly pursue and promote the success of challenging students.

The ALC serves students with autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Tourettes Syndrome, attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), fetal alcohol syndrome and emotional disturbances. The goal of the program is to offer students continuous support throughout the school day to decrease the number of disruptions to their learning and increase their general sense of confidence in academic and social situations.

The second part of the ALC program focuses on including and educating parents to strengthen the home-school relationship and create an environment in which the students can succeed. Traditionally, the parents of students involved in the ALC program have felt frustrated with their children's experiences in school. Many of the parents have disconnected themselves from the school community and rarely attend conferences, open houses and parent meetings. To prevent this from continuing, the ALC teachers create nontraditional ways to include parents in the school community, as well as educate them about techniques that work in maximizing success for students with behavioral concerns.

**Communication activities:**

The first goal of the Alternative Learning Center was to get information about the program out to the families. Teachers scheduled home visits in the summer to meet each family and review the goals of the ALC. Teachers have continued to arrange quarterly home visits to discuss each child's progress.

The second activity focused on educating families on mental health issues and linking parents with the appropriate community agencies. Teachers arranged for parent field trips to conferences on a range of topics, including "Oppositional Defiant Disorder" and "Surviving the Middle School Years." The families and teachers met at a local restaurant and took a community van to conferences. This allowed for teachers to follow up immediately on how the new information can be used, both at home and school.

Finally, each quarter a Family Night is planned where parents, administrators, and teachers interact in an informal way. Activities include: movie night, bowling trip, magic show and an Easter craft activity. Awards were given at each activity to focus on positive events that occurred in school over the past quarter. These awards focused on successes appropriate for

each child, including handing in homework, listening to teachers and acting appropriately with peers.

**Evaluation:**

At the end of the first year, the Alternative Learning Center's students have had many successes. There has been a significant decrease in the number of office referrals and suspensions, and an increase in attendance and grade point averages. Teacher rating scales have shown increases in participation, class work completion and positive interactions with peers. Students also have been involved in many extracurricular activities, including plays, concerts and athletics.

Attendance at parent conferences is around eight to 15 parents per event. Parents have begun to bring additional family members to conferences, as well as other parents, to hear the message. Participation in Family Night almost is always 100% of the families involved in the ALC program.

Finally, the ALC recognizes that the best public relations for the program is each successful day that our students have. Every time a child has positive story about their school day, the message comes home that he or she is included, improving and succeeding.

**Name of initiative:** Student Achievement Public Relations Project

**District:** **East Muskingum Local (Muskingum)**

**Students in district:** 2,277

**Contact person:** Doug Winner, director, curriculum and instruction services

**Contact phone number:** (740) 826-7655

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

To recognize academic excellence in the district.

**Communication activity:**

The purpose of this project is to provide our community/general public with an ongoing “inside look” at school activities related to all areas of student achievement and to provide this in high-traffic, high-visibility non-school locations.

Groups, organizations, clubs, advisors, students and principals representing all five schools and all grade levels in our district will be asked to create mini-student achievement displays that are poster or tri-fold presentation board size. The displays could include district activities, such as the Arts Festival, as well as building activities (O.P.T. Pep Rally) or even classroom project activities. These displays are to include pictures and a brief written description of the student activity. The displays will be placed in various community sites, including stores, restaurants, the library, fire departments, etc. The displays will be rotated among the sites on a monthly basis and new displays created to reflect current seasonal activities. Resources for the display materials (film, posterboard, developing) will be provided by a grant from the district student endowment fund.

To satisfy service learning requirements, high school students from Key Club, National Honor Society and Honors Government class will be responsible for moving the displays.

In essence, this project will create a local version of the Student Achievement Fair featured at OSBA's Capital Conference.

**Name of initiative:** SUCCESS (Students Understanding Culture through Community, English and Social Studies)

**District:** Elida Local (Allen)

**Students in district:** 2,721

**Contact person:** Dave Desenberg, SUCCESS teacher/facilitator

**Contact phone number:** (419) 331-4155

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

To promote the success of SUCCESS.

**Communication activity:**

Share the SUCCESS story with the media and community.

The SUCCESS program is a service learning course that ties the curriculum to volunteerism in the community. It is an elective, year-long course taken in the 12th grade .

The program is intended to be a springboard that will enable students to develop the skills and schemes to understand and appreciate the various cultures of the United States. Through an interdisciplinary approach that includes service learning, students explore culture as a class and individually. Students who successfully complete the course will receive three credits: English, social studies and community service.

Elida is one of 16 schools in the country named as a National Service Learning Center School. The school serves as a regional model site.

**Evaluation:**

Students receive pre- and post-tests to determine their success. Results show that students in the program outperform the Elida general school students significantly on the senior proficiency test. The community is more aware of the SUCCESS program's success through a story in the *Lima News*.

**Name of the initiative:** The History Connection

**District:** Fairview Park City

**Students in district:** 1,900

**Contact person:** Kathy Ingersoll

**Contact phone number:** (440) 356-3500 ext. 108

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

The goal is to create opportunities for collaboration between adults in the Fairview Park community and students at the high school, plus to increase community awareness of school activities and the community/school connection. The district also wanted to share historical information about Fairview Park with community members and schoolchildren through an easily accessible media, and increase students' (and the community's) appreciation of Fairview Park history.

**Communication activities:**

We started a collaborative venture between the Fairview Park Historical Society and high school students to create a Fairview Park Historical Society Web page. Our goal is to put as many photos with accompanying text onto the Web site as possible. These pictures and the related information will be used by schoolchildren in Fairview Park as a source for research, projects, etc. (our intermediate students study their city as part of the social studies curriculum). Another goal is to make the material at the Fairview Park Historical Society museum (currently open one Sunday a month) more accessible to members of the community. The materials and information in the museum will be accessible through the Web site, making the scope and reach of museum materials much greater.

This year there are seven high school students involved in the project. Since this is our pilot year, we kept the number of students small to insure the project's manageability. There are several adults from the community working with these students to scan pictures, provide textual information and guide the students in working with artifacts from the museum. So far, students have created photo collections on Fairview Park century homes, the fire department, the police department, shopping malls and Bain Cabin (a significant historical building in the city).

Next year, students are planning to write a monthly History Connection feature for the local newspaper based on their research of Fairview Park history. This will be another avenue for students to reach out to the community, share their knowledge, promote activities at the high school and "advertise" the historical society Web page.

**Evaluation:**

The project is moving more slowly than we initially anticipated. It is often difficult to arrange time for community members to meet with students, and students are using their study halls and free time to work on the project. However, there have been many exciting and rewarding aspects to the project, especially in the relationships that have formed and the interest in local history that has been sparked in the students. One student, working on the fire

department photo collection, found that many of the photos in the museum's collection lacked names, dates, etc. Her grandfather was a Fairview Park fireman for over 30 years, and was able to identify many of the people in the photos and give dates for photos and events that we did not have. Not only did the project bring grandfather and granddaughter together to review local and family history, but it also provided the historical society with much needed information. Another student interested in century homes has discovered that her elderly neighbor is very knowledgeable about the history of some of the city's buildings. She is presently developing questions for a personal interview. One of the first teachers to teach at Fairview High School (back in the 1930s) has agreed to be interviewed by students working on the project. This will become an oral history independent study project for a student next year. These examples are the kind of intergenerational collaboration we are aiming for between the community members and the schools, and what makes the History Connection so effective and unique.

The historical society Web site will eventually be linked to the Fairview Park city Web site, and the Fairview Park Schools' Web sites. Currently, it is accessible to anyone who knows the address. (The site can be reached through [www.soarweb.org](http://www.soarweb.org), although at this time, there are collections in progress that have not been posted for public viewing.) Once it is more polished and complete, we will more broadly advertise the site.

Although this project is still in its infancy, it is a long-term endeavor and one that will hopefully be sustained over many years. New students will join and continue the project, more community members will become involved, and educators and the general public will gain awareness of the information contained on the Web site and use it. The collaboration between community members and students will build a stronger community spirit for students and create support for the schools among community members. As all this happens, the project's success will be clearly evident.

**Name of initiative:** Tech Expo 2002

**District:** Franklin City

**Students in district:** 3,102

**Contact persons:** Jean Creech, technology/EMIS coordinator, and Frances Jutras, media coordinator

**Contact phone number:** (937) 743-8648 or (937) 743-8601

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

Our goal is to showcase the many ways that teachers have integrated technology into our curriculum and the many ways that Franklin City Schools' students are proficient at using technology to enhance learning and gain critical life skills.

**Communication activities:**

Franklin City Schools turns one evening in April into a technology showcase to demonstrate to our community how students in all grades are using technology to learn critical skills. With an open invitation to the community, visitors are welcome to view the many exciting ways that students are engaged with technology in the classroom. Visitors interact firsthand with students, who are responsible for explaining the projects and the technology they are using.

The event is held at Franklin High School, so that the hundreds of visitors who attend only have to travel to one location. The evening is both informative and festive; visitors are eligible for many door prizes, and enjoy refreshments and balloons. At this year's event, the cast of our recent high school musical provided entertainment.

This is truly a community event, one that would be impossible without the partnership of key community members, such as our parent-teacher organizations, who volunteer with refreshments and assist with student hosts and hostesses. Local businesses and individuals contribute money and gifts. Our local paper, the *Franklin Chronicle*, provides invaluable press coverage, both before and after the event.

For the 2002 Expo, several hundred students showcased 34 projects, which are collaborative, project-based and crosscurricular. A sample of these include:

- **Immigration/Ellis Island — Sixth Grade Project.** Students used the Internet, Avid Cinema, and PowerPoint to show the work they did in their study of immigration and the immigrants who came to America.
- **Stock Market — Junior High Project.** Students had \$10,000 to invest in the stock market. They were required to track their results and all transactions on a daily basis, which they analyzed via an Excel spreadsheet and also viewed on a timeline.
- **Olympics 2002 — Second Grade Project.** Students used the Internet to research a country, track the medal counts and record the data on a spreadsheet. They created graphs and a flag from their country. They formed their own teams for a mini-pentathlon, using Corel Gallery to develop a name for their teams and to create iron-on transfers.

● **Create-a-Magazine — Fourth-Sixth Grade Talented and Gifted Students.** Students used PowerPoint to invent a title and create a cover page for the theme-based magazines they invented.

● **Explorations in Technology — High School Project.** Students demonstrated the course modules they were taking in biotechnology, computer-aided drafting, electricity, fluid power, information technology, advanced laser, plastics technology, statistical processing control and structural technology.

● **Intellitools, Intellitalk and Balanced Literacy Software — Third Grade.** The Intellitools and Intellitalk software allow lessons to be adjusted for sensory keyboard use, allowing the student to hear each letter, word or sentence that is typed. Balanced literacy moves the student step-by-step through learning skills to improve language arts skills. This software was demonstrated by a visually impaired student and would be useful to those who have other disabilities.

● **River Project — Seventh Grade.** Students researched and tested the water of the Great Miami River and interacted via distance learning with experts who helped them analyze their results. They posted the information on a ZEBU Web site. They presented their findings via PowerPoint presentations.

#### **Evaluation:**

We gauge the success of the Tech Expo by the number and variety of projects that students and teachers are eager to demonstrate, and by the number of visitors who attend and see our students actively engaged with technology. The only Franklin City Schools' event with higher attendance is our high school graduation. Additionally, teachers are able to share their best practices with their peers, and many of the projects are replicated in other district classrooms.

On a districtwide level, we can evaluate the success of this project by the number of area districts who now offer similar technology nights for their communities. In addition, several years ago, Franklin City Schools was privileged to present this project at the SchoolTech Expo and Conference in New York City on the topic "Community Technology Night — A Public Relations Tool."

We will continue this showcase on an annual or semi-annual basis, as it has the enthusiastic support of the board, superintendent, administration, staff, students and community.

**Name of initiative:** Maximum Awareness of Successes

**District:** **Oakwood City**

**Students in district:** 1,980

**Contact person:** Dr. Judy Hennessey, superintendent

**Contact phone number:** (937) 297-5332

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

The goal is to achieve maximum community awareness of the district's many student successes.

**Communication activities:**

Use of student achievement for district promotion.

While Oakwood City Schools has met all 27 state criteria since they were adopted, this district has placed emphasis upon many other forms of student achievement as it promotes the total quality of the district to its community. Among these are:

- all extracurricular and cocurricular activities;
- student participation rate in the above activities;
- student attendance;
- student success in a multitude of competitions, such as music, athletics, Electric-Cart Club, subject-area testing, service recognitions, speech-debate, sportsmanship awards, Destination Imagination, Academic Quiz, visual arts, etc.;
- scholarships received;
- community survey results.

The Oakwood Schools and the city of Oakwood jointly publish a bimonthly newsletter that is sent to all home addresses within the city. Some of the school district space is used to highlight the many and varied successes of our students. We also have a local community weekly newspaper (the *Oakwood Register*) delivered free to all residents. Between the two publications, there is a major stress on student achievement. Short and feature articles are used to communicate such success as winners in the Spanish, French and Latin language examinations, as well as the millions of dollars of scholarships earned by each graduating class.

A biweekly column in the local newspaper focuses almost entirely on our school system. Several weeks after the major daily paper in the region printed all of the district results of the latest fourth- and sixth-grade proficiency tests, this column gave a much more detailed focus on our own school district. For example, it clearly pointed out the fourth-graders of 1999 had a "pass all five tests" rate of 71%, but two years later as sixth-graders their rate had grown to 81%. The fourth graders of 2000 had a rate of 57%, which in two years grew to 84% for the same pupils. This has enabled us to show how our students continue to grow and consolidate their learning as they progress through the system.

Less than 10% of Ohio high schools are awarded the Ohio High School Athletic Association Sportsmanship Award. Oakwood High School has received this award for the past two years. The presentation is always made to the school during a home football game for maximum adult participation and, of course, also given maximum attention via the media.

We are fortunate that our students are highly active and participate in many different activities — sports, clubs, fine arts, publications, etc. Some quarters this participation figure reaches almost to 90% of the student body.

The correlation of active involvement with higher academic success is made known to our community in the usual ways and the less common ways discussed below.

There are a number of key community groups that the Oakwood City Schools makes sure are well-informed about our student successes. Our local Realtors are among the first we are sure to inform as they help spread the word to those moving into our community. We also work closely with our local clergy. Over 60 residents serve on one of the four Superintendent's Advisory Councils, and thus serve as key communicators for the district. Our Oakwood Alumni Association publishes a newspaper twice a year, and many of these achievements are included as stories along with class news for the alums. The Oakwood Education Foundation is kept very well-informed, and this group has been able to provide initial funding for several of the projects.

The district hired a professional firm to develop a special survey and focus group process. These results — both the good points and the negative ones — are shared with the community via the media, parent teacher organization meetings, etc.

Special emphasis is given to showing how we are addressing areas of concern so that our student achievements can become even stronger.

**Evaluation:**

Our May operating levy for 6 mills passed with a 69% “yes” vote. Our previous levy passed with a 71% “yes” vote. This comprehensive program does seem to be effective in building public confidence in the quality of our student achievement.

**Name of initiative:** Using student achievement to promote your district is as easy as A.B.C.

**District:** **South Euclid-Lyndhurst City**

**Students in district:** 4,202

**Contact person:** Rosemary Gornik Brickman, executive director of instruction

**Contact phone number:** (216) 691-2007

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

The goal is use student achievement to successfully promote the district to the community.

**Communication activities:**

One of the most creative ways the South Euclid-Lyndhurst City School District used student achievement to successfully promote our school district to the community was the manner in which we communicated the results of the state's local district report card. This plan was implemented using five tactics that were carefully and strategically executed to tell our wonderful story of student achievement ... and as easy as A.B.C.

Recognizing that student achievement in our district increased by 30% within a two-year period, we wanted to share it with the world, and our superintendent created a very clever strategy to accomplish this goal.

The first marketing strategy creatively used the existing report card from the Ohio Department of Education. With careful placement of colorful labels, we highlighted our strengths and strategically directed the readers' attention. The information on the labels was customized to reflect and highlight each school's accomplishments. These report cards were sent to every parent in the district.

Our second strategy was a distilled version of the local district report card and was sent to every resident in the community. The purpose was to communicate our success to people who do not have kids in our schools. We know that approximately 80% of the residents in our community do not have students in our schools. We felt it was imperative to tell the story of our success in our own way, rather than leaving it up to what might be heard at the grocery store or read in the newspaper. Since we believe that "strong schools create stronger communities," we made a point to communicate our success to every resident in the community.

The third strategy came in the form of a newsletter created by our superintendent, which told the story of real students and real teachers in a way that numbers cannot. We wanted the world to know that our success was not an accident, luck or random chance. We wanted the world to know that student achievement, as measured on the local district report card, is the result of careful planning, purposeful spending and, most importantly, a tremendous amount of hard work on the part of our teachers, students, staff and parents.

The fourth strategy was posting signs in front of every school building and across the major thoroughfare in the district. These signs were put up at the same time that the report card, with the enclosed newsletter, arrived in each home in the district.

In order to foster two-way communication, strategy five brought all the other strategies

together. Invitations were sent to parents/guardians in our district to meet the superintendent and the executive director of instruction to engage in a dialogue on the specifics of the report card and student achievement in general. Three community meetings were scheduled as a person-to-person follow up. Post cards and fliers were also sent inviting all community members to attend our annual Community Back to School Days to continue the dialogue.

We are proud of the gains our students have made and fully anticipate continued increases in the future. Our goal is to reach Excellent status by 2005. This is one chapter of our evolving and ongoing story of hard work, determination and excellence in the South Euclid-Lyndhurst Schools.

**Evaluation:**

We will evaluate our communication program by counting the number of people who attended the three parent meetings on student achievement and the report card. We also will count the number of people who attended our Community Back to School Days. We also are counting the number of calls and general feedback from parents and community members regarding the strategy and student achievement. In addition, we are monitoring the rate of home sales between this time last year and the present, and its impact upon districtwide student enrollment figures.

**Name of initiative:** Kindergarten Intervention Program

**District:** **Whitehall City**

**Students in district:** 2,947

**Contact person:** Susie Carr, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction

**Contact phone number:** (614) 417-5018

**Promotional campaign's goal:**

The goal is to increase student achievement and increase the number of students entering third-grade reading at or above grade level by providing acceleration in reading and writing in kindergarten.

**Communication activities:**

A group of teachers, literacy coordinators and administrators began studying current programming for kindergarten students based on identified needs in the district. According to district data, 25% of second-grade students were reading below grade level. The board of education had indicated an interest in all-day kindergarten as a possible strategy to remedy this situation.

As part of the study process, registered voters were polled by telephone to determine their opinions on offering an all-day kindergarten program. A partnering college assisted in the data collection by providing students majoring in education to make the telephone calls and collect data. Parents with preschool children and kindergarten students also were surveyed via questionnaire and asked about their preference for an all-day kindergarten program. However, only a small percentage of parents actually responded to the questionnaire.

The study group reviewed best-practice research regarding effective kindergarten programming. The research indicated all-day kindergarten programs produced best results for those students who were in need of extended learning time. Research did not support full-day kindergarten services for all students. After five months of work, the kindergarten study committee developed the following recommendations:

- implementation of an intervention program at each of the three elementary schools in the district to serve the most at-risk students by extending the students' day,
- provide intensive intervention based on the Literacy Collaborative model during the extended time,
- use of specific assessments to determine participation in the program,
- realignment of Title 1 personnel and literacy coordinators to serve these students,
- collection and analysis of student participation and data to determine program improvements and further recommendations.

The program development planning team included kindergarten and reading intervention teachers, as well as speech therapists and administrators, who worked eight weeks to develop assessment tools/screening instruments, and determine location, personnel, data collection

mechanisms, curriculum, and a working schedule and guidelines for parent communication and involvement.

Students were screened for the program during the first three days of the school year. A staggered schedule allowed Reading Recovery teachers, speech therapists and literacy coordinators time to assess students using letter identification, a modified Concepts About Print, and name-writing and oral language assessments.

The intervention curriculum was delivered to students in the afternoon, four days a week. The students attended a kindergarten session during the morning and their afternoon session focused on literacy instruction provided by a literacy coordinator and Title 1 teacher trained in Reading Recovery. The student-to-teacher ratio for the program is 15:2. Fridays were used for parent participation activities, that included how to read with children, fostering writing in the home, fun with letters or a parent conference time. Weekly learning take-home packets were provided for parents and students.

Whitehall teachers made a presentation on their program to the board of education, that was reported in the *Whitehall News*. Once the 2002-2003 school year results are known, the district plans to use this success story to promote the district.

## **Evaluation**

During the 2001–2002 school year, 23.8% of kindergarten students at Beechwood Elementary participated in the intervention program, 31.8% at Etna Road Elementary and 33.8% at Kae Avenue Elementary.

Data collected on kindergarten students in the fall indicated that the average score for letter identification was 23.4 out of a possible 54 points. The average score for students selected for the Kindergarten Intervention Program (KIP) was 4.29. These students were significantly below the average of the total kindergarten population.

In January, the average score for letter identification for all kindergarten students had increased to 42.93; an increase of 19.55 points. The students that participated in KIP scored 37.02 in January, increasing 32.73 points during the same period.

Out of the 75 students served districtwide, 14 discontinued service during February.

Data collected in May indicated that the average score districtwide was 40.01. The students that participated in the intervention program scored 45.55, virtually closing the gap between the two groups.

Parents were surveyed in the spring regarding their child's participation in the intervention program. Fifty-nine percent of the surveys were returned. Of those surveyed, 71% felt that the program met the needs of their child, with 80% stating that their child had a positive experience in the program. Parents indicated that they saw improvements in letter recognition, reading and writing, a positive attitude toward reading and school, an improvement in interest in learning and more willingness to learn new things.

One parent wrote, "I had a child in kindergarten only two years ago. I now have one in KIP. The improvement I have seen in my youngest, compared to my second-grader when she was in kindergarten, is amazing. If this program had been in place then, I truly feel she would not be struggling as much with reading, writing and spelling as she is now. Proud 'Kipper' Parent."

## **How to better tell your success stories**

The news media can play a vital role in helping you provide your community with information about success in your schools. Understanding the media's role and how reporters and editors view public schools will help in sharing your success stories.

Remember, public schools are considered local government by the media. Reporters and editors cherish their responsibility of being a watchdog of all governments.

### **Why do we need to foster a good working relationship with news media representatives?**

- By developing a relationship based on trust, we will have more opportunities to encourage news media coverage of "good news," not just controversial or bad news.
- The news media can help us achieve our goal of providing the community with an ongoing, solid core of information about its schools.
- The news media is a valuable communications channel that reaches parents, non-parents, senior citizens and others in your community on a regular basis.
- Radio, television and newspapers can all play a major role in promoting the understanding and awareness of education, and in encouraging support and cooperation for change.
- The news media can provide a quick way to thwart rumors and misinformation.

### **Why should we adjust to media needs?**

Most of us realize radio stations, television stations and newspapers are not promotional mouthpieces for schools. Their primary purpose, in most cases, is to deliver hard news as quickly and efficiently as possible, particularly in large metropolitan areas. Space or air time is tight, and schools are generally not considered a top priority. However, most news media, particularly rural or suburban newspapers and radio/TV stations, regularly cover school happenings. Our goal should be to make this coverage as easy for them as possible.

### **How can you find out what is happening that might be newsworthy?**

- Set up a news network and recruit a representative from each school and department who is responsible for relaying newsworthy activities to the community relations office or a designated district spokesperson.
- Distribute news tip sheets at schools, cafeterias, support staff sites, offices, etc., that ask staff and students to submit ideas.
- Request news tips through district newsletters and community newspapers.
- Ask school board members and parent organization leaders for tips and ideas.

### **How can you make the news media aware of stories that are representative of your entire school district?**

- Provide news tips to radio stations, TV stations and newspapers on a daily basis.
- Provide a biweekly media tip sheet that summarizes 10 possible story ideas and furnishes the names and phone numbers of people to contact for more information.
- Provide story ideas on your district's Internet home page.
- Hold news briefings whenever there is a need to explain details of a story to all reporters at the same time. (Know the deadline schedules of all news media that cover your school district, and schedule briefings at times that will allow reporters to meet those deadlines. If your district is covered by a large number of news organizations, vary the scheduling of such briefings so

that you don't always favor one newspaper over another or one electronic medium over another.)

- Provide reporters with ideas for colorful feature stories editors can use to fill extra space or air time.

### **What are some common characteristics of a good news release?**

- Be brief and describe who, what, where, when, why and how. Remember, you are competing for an editor's attention with stacks of other news releases and paperwork.
- Use an easy-to-read, quickly recognizable format.
- Discard educational jargon and use language that is clear and concise.
- Provide supplemental materials for complicated information, such as test results, budgets, educational restructuring, new legislation and bond/levy proposals.
- To increase credibility, share bad news just as quickly and as accurately as good news. In other words, present information directly and honestly when a crisis occurs.
- Don't waste an editor's time with promotional "puff stuff." Be sure information is newsworthy.
- Alert reporters to school programs/events that tie in with national or local holidays.
- Clearly identify all individuals and locations in still photos or videotape. Also, make sure appropriate release forms have been signed for any still photos or videotape that you produce or authorize.
- Be sure information is timely.
- Know and respect deadlines.

### **Additional ways school districts have successfully worked with the news media:**

- Publish the district's annual school report as a supplement to the local newspaper and print extra copies for distribution to residents who don't receive the newspaper.
- Prepare a monthly report for use as a community service by radio/television stations. Use this technique to introduce a new superintendent or to give your community a state-of-the-schools address.
- Produce television programs on topics such as test scores, educational restructuring or the district's mission that can be aired on a local cable channel. Consider including time for questions from a panel of journalists and distributing a written summary of the main points to local newspapers.
- Prepare a brief, but catchy video, showing education in action by featuring students in a variety of classroom settings.
- Arrange for reporters to interview the superintendent, school board members, administrators, teachers, support staff or students on pertinent, timely issues.

This tip sheet was written by Ann Hagen, communications consultant, and it first appeared in OSBA's *CommunicationPlus*, a subscription service. It also is part of the OSBA *Don't stop the presses — work with them!* media resource kit, which is available on OSBA's Web site at <http://www.osba-ohio.org/OSBAComm.html>.

OSBA also offers a database of Ohio media outlets on the Web site at <http://www.osba-ohio.org/mediasearch.htm>.



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