

Prioritize communication as essential

Committing to communication that is designed around parent convenience

“Parents often judge the quality of your teaching by how you communicate with them.”

Dan Krause, President
GraceWorks Ministries

Did you get that? Read the quote again and think about the implications for the importance of accurate, consistent, complete communication.

Commit to prioritizing communication as an essential--not an extra.

Since parents, even classroom volunteers, don't see your teaching all day, every day--they fill in the blanks based on their overall experience with your school. This is similar to a phenomenon in the healthcare world that is documented by research: patients evaluate a physician's *clinical competence* based on how *organized, efficient and easy to work with the office staff* are.

What does this mean for your school?

Create a communication plan

You plan for how you will teach your students. You need a plan for how you will accurately, consistently communicate completely with your students' parents.

Base your plan on what is convenient for parents--not what is convenient for teachers

Parents are your customers--not teachers. Smart organizations structure their services to be convenient and simple for their customers. Smarter organizations structure their services to be convenient for their customers while also being efficient for their staff. (Next week I'll give you an idea for communication that is convenient for parents and efficient for teachers.)

Let me say that again: Parents are your customers.

Insist that all teachers follow the plan

Each teacher communicating with parents in their own way, on their own time schedule is chaos for parents. Let me give you some examples (and while the names have been left out, the information is real).

- Music teacher A is trying hard to communicate with parents so (s)he sends emails with quantities of useful information. But since parents don't know **when** to expect these emails the messages easily languish in overfull inboxes until after the events described.
- Teachers B, C, D and E believe high school should take responsibility for their own schedules. While this is laudable it ignores the fact that high school students may not yet have a drivers' license or a car to drive, so families still need to coordinate getting their student to school events.
- Teacher G (we will not label anyone Teacher F) calls parents individually when drivers are needed for a field trip because (s)he knows who is likely to say yes. This means that the same parents drive 95% of the time. Parents not asked often feel left out and not fully part of the community--even if they couldn't drive--because they are never asked.
- Teacher H sends permission slips home on Monday for a field trip on Thursday--and informs them of a \$10 fee. Parents on very tight budgets are stressed or choose not to let their child attend. Parents who would have liked to drive but can't rearrange their work or personal commitments on three days notice are frustrated.
- Teacher I plans an after school event which students need to participate in and notifies parents two days in advance. All parents feel disrespected that family plans are assumed to be flexible with no notice.
- Principal and staff J reschedule events after the school calendar is published at the start of the year and update the new time/date in the online calendar. But parents who enter events in their personal calendars at the beginning of the year and plan personal events around them are frustrated because they don't continually check the online calendar for changes. (And think about that for a little bit: Is it realistic to expect parents to read through all the year's events in the online calendar to find the one item that has changed? And how often should they have to do this? Every month? Every week? Every day?)
- Teacher K puts notices in the school newsletter about upcoming events but doesn't include cost, when the students should arrive or special attire that students need to wear.
- Teacher L helps sports teams design and order team hoodies personalized with each students' name but doesn't tell parents until the hoodies arrive and each student owes \$40 for their personalized sweatshirt.
- School M has several teachers who maintain their own websites and are proud of their proactive approach to communication. Parents are frustrated because they have five different sites to log in to in order to get information for three students (grade N, grade O, grade P, music program, sports team info).

- Teachers Q, R and S teach through amazing simulations and active learning events. Parents with students in those classrooms are mostly, but not fully, aware of all the great learning that is happening. Parents of students in other grade levels are only marginally aware. All parents could be more effective sharers of great word of mouth about the school if they had more complete information.
- School T has great service activities and amazing stats from their standardized testing but few parents and almost no non-parents are aware because there is not a venue for sharing that information beyond the school board.

Unfortunately, I could go on but I hope that you and your teachers are beginning to see a picture of what makes life simpler or more difficult for parents. As well as opportunities for giving your parents fodder for sharing about your school in your community.

Next week: The recommended solution

Delegating:

You don't need to delegate anything yet, but you do need to share this with your teachers and staff.

Credits:

Thank you Dan Krause for allowing me to share the results of your meta-analysis.

Binder tab: September

School size: All

Marketing process step:

- 1) Who are we?
- 2) What do families want?
- 3) What needs to change?
- 4) How do we tell our community?
- 5) How do we track results?