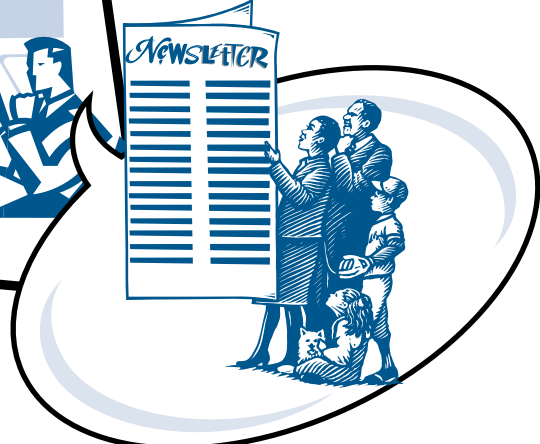




# SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING







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Refer to the District's Website ([www.browardschools.com](http://www.browardschools.com))  
for a current list of department phone numbers.



## Introduction

Broward County Public Schools Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department developed the following plan to help you improve the image of your school. The goal of the booklet is to improve communication and to increase awareness in your community, and throughout the county, of the high quality of education received by students at your school in a safe and secure learning environment.

Every school has an image, so the question is not whether your school has public relations – it does. What it may need is a plan designed to encourage two-way communication between the school and its various publics, so that public relations is not something that just happens. Good PR/communications is not a one-time activity or a part-time effort. It needs to be a full-time effort that is consistent year to year, and it must involve each and every member of the school staff.

It is important not to overlook the necessity of positive PR *within* your school. Without positive *internal* public relations among administrators, teachers, support staff, and students, external PR efforts are unlikely to succeed. For that reason, internal, as well as external public relations and communications ideas and suggestions are included in this plan.

Support is available from the Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department on any steps or items in this report.

**Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department  
754-321-2300**

The District's Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department provided assistance in developing this booklet. The Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department is available to assist you in facilitating a positive working relationship between your school and local government leaders. The Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department is available to help schools build relationships with the community, including parents, business partners, volunteers and mentors.





## Community Outreach

### Administration

The positive reputation of a school is something that is built over time and needs to be constantly nurtured. School administrators play a vital role as advocates of their schools. They need to be visible in the community and participate in civic organizations. Not only do these activities promote the school in the minds of community members; they also increase positive relationships with community and business leaders. Those positive relationships may lead to both short and long term benefits for the school, staff and students.

The principal knows his or her school better than anyone. He or she also knows that test scores are not the only way to evaluate how a school is doing. By becoming pro-active, the principals can prove that their schools are continuously improving, and if there are areas needing improvement, communicate what is being done to correct the situation. A pro-active approach will also enable the principal to anticipate concerns and stay on top of potential issues.

- While it may not be possible for the principal to personally attend all functions or meetings in the community, he or she should make every effort to attend meetings of key groups. Those groups will vary from community to community, but may include the Chamber of Commerce, homeowner's associations, city commissioners, and other government officials.

**NOTE:** Links and partnerships that currently exist between your school and various organizations or groups in your community need to be maintained and nurtured. Because a relationship has already been established does not necessarily mean it needs less attention than those that are newly developed.

Listed below are other items to consider:

- Take a student to civic club or organization meetings. When introducing the student as a guest, mention a few of his or her accomplishments.
- Work together with city officials, representatives from the District, and other schools in your Innovation Zone to develop and host an "education summit." By spearheading the summit, your school can demonstrate to the community that it is a leader in seeking out new ideas, school improvement, and education reform.
- Most Broward schools have a diverse student population. It is important that the lines of communication remain open among school personnel and all parents and community members. Create a diversity committee at your school. The District's Diversity and Cultural Outreach Department can assist your school in finding the leaders of various segments of the community and establishing links.
- Be sure that all school activities, committees, focus groups, forums and panels represent the diversity of your school and your community.



- Be sure that potential school volunteers who speak other languages are aware that a volunteer application in their language is available from your school's volunteer coordinator.
- Offer interpreters at all important school meetings and functions. Non-English speaking parents should be encouraged to be involved in their children's education. The fact that interpreters will be provided should be well publicized. Important school information should be available in a translated form for non-English speaking parents. Be sure parents know the District Website ([www.browardschools.com](http://www.browardschools.com)) is accessible in Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole, as well as English.
- Work with the District's Diversity and Cultural Outreach Department to develop ways to celebrate differences and promote tolerance.
- Increase the number of two-way school-business partnerships.
- Encourage area businesses or organizations to become involved in Service Learning or Career Shadowing programs for students.
- Link with community organizations to hold special events (health fair, technology night, etc.).
- Add civic, business, government and community leaders to the school's mailing list. Include county and city commissioners, the Broward County Sheriff's Office, or your city police and fire department, the parks and recreation department and public libraries.
- Invite civic, business and government leaders to join school committees or to serve as judges at school events. Include county and city commissioners, the Broward County Sheriff's Office or your city police department, the fire department and the parks and recreation department.
- Establish a "Student for a Day" program. Invite local government officials and business leaders to the school for a day, so they can experience life as one of today's students by sitting in on classes, eating in the cafeteria and interacting with students.
- Participate in the "Principal for a Day" program. It is a great way to bring community and business leaders into your school. Contact the Partners In Education Coordinator for more information.
- Establish a "Staff Member for a Day" program. Local government officials and business leaders will have a better understanding of the rewards and challenges of school personnel, if they have an opportunity to be in their shoes for a day.
- Keeping diversity in mind, encourage community members to become mentors to your students. Contact Broward Schools' Youth Mentoring Program, 754-321-1972.



- Identify roles that can be carried out by volunteers in classrooms and school support activities, and seek out volunteers. Don't forget to identify roles that can be filled by volunteers who are employed. (i.e. early morning or after school activities, judging student competitions) A volunteer might be able to schedule a vacation day to help at a special school event or join a field trip. Contact the Volunteer Services Department for assistance, 754-321-2040.
- Encourage senior citizens and other community members to become tutors and mentors. Contact the Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department for more information, 754-321-1970.
- Include senior citizens in focus groups and as sounding boards when developing school plans. Contact the Volunteer Services Department for assistance.
- Develop a welcome packet for new students and families. The packet will provide an opportunity to "sell" your school and should include more than just required forms.

Items that could be included when applicable:

- Welcome letter from the principal
- Calendar for the school year
- School hours
- Parent group meetings and volunteer opportunities
- Report card and state testing information
- Contact information
- Your school's and District's Website addresses
- Staff list (names, titles, room numbers, phone numbers, E-mail addresses)
- Staff bios. - brief, friendly (not just college degrees)
- District administrators, titles, phone numbers
- History of school
- Information on the library and media center



As you reach out to the community, the question of what is and what isn't appropriate regarding community involvement may arise. School Board Policy #6300, Advertising, explains what your school can and cannot do regarding the sponsorship of its academic or extracurricular programs by businesses or organizations. Before making any decisions regarding sponsorship or advertising, it would be wise to review the policy.



## Staff

Research has shown that people get information about schools from secretaries, custodians and cafeteria workers, as well as teachers and administrators. For that reason, it is important that all staff members have accurate, up-to-date information about your school, including the successes of staff and students.

The community considers all members of your staff—principal, teachers, support staff, aides and volunteers—to be experts on the educational programs at the school, no matter what role each individual may serve at the school. Everyone needs to be “in-the-loop.” It may be necessary to tailor information to each group, but the message should be consistent and pervasive. Rumors are the result of either no information or the lack of accurate information.

If this legion of school ambassadors has current, accurate information, they will feel both informed and involved. The messages they carry out into the community will be positive, and their enthusiasm will be contagious. If they are not informed, or if they have negative attitudes, the messages will be inaccurate at best and could damage the reputation of your school. It is important for staff members to understand that they have a central role to play in building positive attitudes, support and involvement in your school.

- Consider holding full staff meetings at least once a month, that include office personnel, food service employees, custodians and classroom aides, as well as teachers. In the way, everyone feels they are part of the school team and has input into the decision making process. A school team meeting is especially important at the beginning of the school year.
- Substitute teachers and school volunteers also carry messages about the school into the community. Substitutes and volunteers should feel welcome and supported by administration and staff. Add them to the school’s mailing list.
- All staff, not just teachers, should be encouraged to participate in professional development.
- Throughout the year, the accomplishments of all staff should be recognized in some way (i.e. personal note, school/staff newsletters, in-house recognition program, press release to media.).
- Encourage teachers and other staff to communicate positive news about students to parents, using notes and phone calls or during casual meetings.



## Students

Your students need to be visible in the community, doing positive things.

- Encourage students to volunteer in your community, as well as surrounding communities and notify the Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department of their activities. Possible activities could include community beautification projects, volunteering at city and county festivals and events, food or clothing collections for the needy and charity fundraisers.
- Service Learning and Career Shadowing programs provide an opportunity for the general public to see just how great your students are.
- The school chorus or band should be offered as performers at community meetings and functions or events.
- JROTC and Color Guard groups should be part of any large event the city is planning.
- Partner with high school TV and video production students or Broward Teen News to produce a school video highlighting the successes of your school.
- Display student artwork and other projects at City Hall, shopping malls and other highly visible locations in the city.
- In cooperation with the city, establish a student government day, when students may shadow city officials.

## Students, Staff and Administration

- School administrators, staff members and students should be encouraged to attend city and county ethnic celebrations.
- Ensure diverse photographic representation in all school publications and other visuals.
- Create a student/teacher speakers' bureau. Seek out speaking opportunities inside and outside your community.
- Middle and high schools may host a "get to know your school night" for students from feeder schools and their parents. Student council and national honor society members can serve as tour guides. Emphasize that your school is a place where learning is going on; high expectations are set for students; and teachers are well trained.
- Plan a community celebration around the first day of school. Be inclusive. Keep the diversity of the community in mind.
- Host a "back to school breakfast." Invite area business and civic leaders, including the mayor or city manager; city commissioners; officials from the parks and recreation department, sheriff's office or your city police and fire departments, members of the School Board, the Superintendent; teachers and other school staff members. Funding for food may be available through a school business partnership, the Food and Nutrition Services Department, or possibly your school's parent groups. At the breakfast, have students conduct tours of the school.
- Working in conjunction with the Department of Athletics & Student Support, middle and high schools may designate a football game to salute VIP guests from your city, including the mayor or city manager and city commissioners. Introduce each honoree and call them to the center of the field during half time. Present each honoree with a school T-shirt.



## Customer Service

The most powerful impact on the image of a school are one-on-one conversations and interactions among administrators, staff, students, parents and community members. The focus at your school needs to be on fulfilling customer needs — from providing an excellent education for students, to responding promptly to parent inquiries and concerns, to the school being a good neighbor in the community.

A commitment and buy-in from all staff and administrators is needed, because the satisfaction of customer needs is vital to the success of the school. In order to meet all customer needs, all members of the staff – professional and support staff members alike—must have effective communication that is open and honest, and provides opportunities to listen, as well as provide information. Every school staff member, no matter what his or her job, must understand that he or she is a highly regarded communicator and a PR image maker — an ambassador — for your school.

When the first contact a parent or other community member has with a school, either in person or on the phone, is a frustrating one, future involvement by that person is lost. Be sensitive to non-English speaking parents who call or come into the school. Be accommodating and seek-out a staff member to interpret—don't rely on a student for that purpose. Also, human nature is such that people tend to be quite vocal when they have had a bad experience. Not only do they tell others about their negative encounter; those listening pass on the information to an even broader audience.

The only way your school will develop loyal supporters is to provide a quality product (education) and top-notch service to its customers — students, parents, business and civic leaders and community members. All processes in your school — from enrollment, to scheduling, to parent-teacher conferences should be reviewed to see if they could be made more user friendly.

Listed below are items to consider:

- Ask members of the school's PR Committee or a parent group to periodically call the major "customer centers" in your school (front office, guidance office, attendance line) to see how your phones are answered. All guests or callers should be greeted in a friendly, timely, welcoming manner and receive helpful, timely responses to questions and concerns.
- Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate in the school. Ensure that office staff greetings, and any other interaction with guests and callers, are creating a climate in which parents and others feel valued and welcome.
- Are concerns that are voiced by parents, students or teachers researched and responded to promptly with a plan of action?
- Publicize the process for dealing with concerns. If a parent has a problem, do they know who to go to? Do problems get resolved?
- Are school volunteers and school partners given worthwhile work to do? Do they feel welcome? It is a mistake to ask for volunteers and partners, then not give them the means to become part of the school team. Include volunteers and partners in school activities. Invite volunteers to special events at the school, even if it is not their day to be at the building.



## Physical Environment

The physical appearance of your school has a dramatic affect on what people think about your school. It can influence how staff, volunteers and students feel about coming into the building each morning, and it certainly affects the image of your school in the minds of parents and the community.

When people see a building that is well cared for, they assume the school is in good hands. But if it looks run down, they wonder whether attention is given to other things, and may wonder if their child should attend another school.

Listed below is a checklist of questions and suggestions to consider:

- Can visitors easily find the school office? If not, create some colorful, welcoming signs pointing the way to the office, auditorium and media center from all the access points. It is important that the signs be welcoming, not just "All Visitors Must Report to the Office."
- Is the front office cheerful and welcoming?
- Is student work on display in the building?
- Is the building clean?
- Are the bathrooms clean and the hallways brightly lit? Would you want to eat lunch in the cafeteria? (Host contests for students, staff and parents for the best suggestions for keeping the bathrooms clean, or brightening the hallways and rearranging or decorating the lunchroom.)
- Are hallways clear of old furniture/computers?
- Does old gum need to be scraped off the floor?
- Is it time to change a bulletin board or the school's marquee?
- Is fresh paint needed?
- Is litter picked-up daily around the grounds?
- Is it time to buy a new flag?
- Are "adult -sized" chairs available for guests in the school office?
- Is landscaping inviting? Involve the community in school beautification projects. Classes could take turns weeding flowerbeds. Have students plan and plant a class garden as part of a science unit. If you are concerned about vandalism, place plants or small palms in flower pots that can be brought inside after school.





## Website

In today's technological world, more and more people rely on the Internet as an information gathering tool.

The District's Website receives over 2.5 million visits each month, and hundreds of thousands of users go on to select links to individual school Websites. Your school's Website reaches far beyond those in the community served by your school.

Who visits your Website? Teachers contemplating a move to South Florida, parents of students wanting to learn more about what your school has to offer, potential school volunteers or business partners and educators from all across the country, just to name a few.

The impact your Website can have on parent and community involvement at your school should not be underestimated. The site conveys a powerful message about your school, its "feel" and its "personality." Based on your Website potential, volunteers or business partners may draw conclusions about how their efforts would be welcomed, utilized and appreciated. Ask yourself, "What impression would I have of my school if the Website was my primary source of information?"

The content of your school's Website needs to be kept up-to-date, reviewed, and proofread carefully. Typographical and grammatical errors, misspelled words and incorrect word usage found on the site will reflect poorly on your school. All material should be proofread by someone other than the writer prior to being posted on the site. Having material proofread by three people is preferable.

Members of the school's technology staff or others with Website design knowledge need to be assigned the task of maintaining the site on a regular basis. Your Website should be interactive. A contact person's E-mail address should be included and feedback encouraged.

It is also important to review District Policy #5306. In addition, there is a wealth of information on the District's Intranet that you should review in regard to Website requirements/guidelines. Some highlights of the requirements/guidelines are listed below. You will find a complete list at (<http://web/developer>) or you may contact ETS Technical Support Service for assistance.

- The round version of the District's logo (an apple with the words "Broward County Public Schools" around it) must be prominently displayed on your school's homepage as a link to the District's Website ([www.browardschools.com](http://www.browardschools.com)). Copies of the logo may be obtained from BECON Graphics, 754-321-1055.
- The director or principal from each department or school interested in creating a Website must designate one person, a BCPS employee, responsible for the coordination of Webpage and Website development.
- The Principal's or Director's designee at each contributing site must become familiar with the policies and procedures associated with BCPS Website development. This is done by reviewing the training documents found at (<http://web/developer>).
- All information posted by a school or department must be kept current, and must contain the most recent updates of that information published in other formats.



- Each page in a BCPS hosted or linked Internet or Intranet site must include a reference to the school or department that posted the content.
- Content of Webpages and sites cannot violate copyright laws. Never assume ownership of the intellectual property of others.
- Web pages or sites published on the BCPS Internet or Intranet may not contain or include – directly, via hyperlink, or pop-up windowing – any form of commercial advertising, without express written permission from District administration.
- Webpages should contain a notation of the date on which the page was created or most recently modified, and authorship (i.e. *ETS/Miller 07/27/09 09:50 AM*).
- Each Webpage in a Website must have a navigation tool (button, buttons, or navigation bar) linking back to the site's homepage.
- Caution should be taken when white text is used against a dark background, as it will not appear when the Webpage is printed.

Department Directors and School Principals:

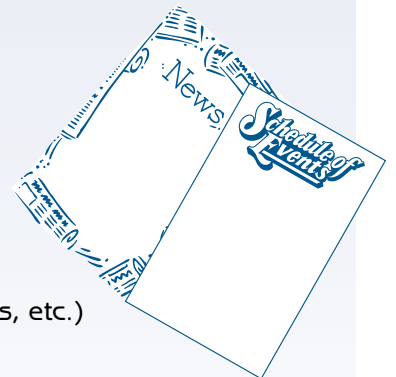
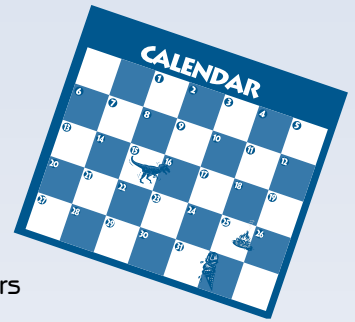
- Accept responsibility for the web content created and posted at their location.
- Acknowledge above responsibilities by completing and forwarding to ETS a signed BCPS Internet/Intranet Website Authorization Form. The form may be obtained at (<http://web/developer>).
- Recognize that the actual creation of web content is the responsibility of the school or department, and that ETS will assist with, but not assume this task.
- Notify ETS when personnel changes occur with administrative position (director or principal) or the site-based web designee, so that publication security on school or department web folders can be modified by ETS.

Below is a list of information that, if added, would help your school's Web site become more informative and user friendly.

- You may wish to explore the possibility of establishing a school-business partnership with an outside Web design company in the design your school's Website.
- Provide a short introduction on how to use the page
- Include a current picture of your school
- Design a map showing location of the school



- Include photos of principal, teachers, and students (students must have media releases on file at school). Photos showing activity, rather than portraits are best.
- Provide important phone numbers
- List test scores
- Incorporate emergency bulletins
- Include information from school handbook
- Provide club/activity news (students listed/pictured must have media releases on file at school)
- Add copies of school forms that may be downloaded [PDF]
- List links to instructional departments, etc.
- Include volunteer opportunities, including who to contact
- List dates of parent meetings
- Provide advisory and PTA/PTO information including a list of officers
- Display staff, student and school accomplishments (students listed must have media releases on file at school)
- Include honor roll (students listed must have media releases on file at school)
- Provide the latest issue of school newspaper (students listed/pictured must have media releases on file at school)
- Display library information - new books - special exhibits
- Give facility construction updates
- List sports schedules
- Include calendar of school events
- Provide information on staff members (years of experience, degrees, etc.)
- List homework assignments
- Provide school enrollment information and information/requirements for enrolling in special programs/classes
- Include school history





## Newsletters

### Parent/Community Newsletter

Not only does a school newsletter provide valuable information to parents and community members, it also offers a way to publicize the positive things happening at the school.

A minimum of four newsletters (print, E-mail or online) should be published each school year in order to keep parents and community members informed about what is happening at your school. The newsletter need not be elaborate, but should be informative and include positive stories for readers to brag about when talking about the school with others in the community. These items could include staff, student and school accomplishments. The newsletter should be sent not only to parents, but also to civic, government and business leaders, school volunteers, and substitute teachers.

Your newsletter should be a two-way communication tool, providing not only an outlet to spread good news about the school, but also a way for readers to express opinions and make suggestions. This feedback will also provide valuable information pertaining to the success of your school's PR efforts. Feedback can be obtained by adding a "We Want to Hear From You" box to each newsletter.

Guidelines and suggestions for school newsletters are listed below:

- Recognize teachers in the school newsletter for awards, new classroom initiatives and other successes.
- Highlight student and school honors and accomplishments.
- Include in each newsletter a mini-poll (one or two questions), seeking opinions covering a wide range of topics over time. Use feedback in making school and program decisions and evaluating the school's PR efforts.
- Check with front office personnel and guidance office about the types of calls and questions they receive from parents and community members. Keep track of frequently asked questions and comments and address them in the newsletters.
- Be consistent in publishing the newsletter – adhere to deadlines.
- Don't include too much copy – use graphics or photos to make it more reader friendly.
- Use clear, easy to read fonts. (Not ALL CAPS, *all italic* or script.)
- Use student-written articles and artwork. Be sure to give students credit for their work.
- Double-check directory information–phone numbers, Web site addresses.
- Consider what parents need to know, as well as what you want them to know.
- Use the newsletter as a forum to say thank you to business partners, volunteers and others who assist staff and students.
- Double check spelling and grammar. Have at least three people proofread all copy.
- Double check the accuracy of calendar days and dates listed.
- Keep the audience in mind. For example, in listing dates it is important for the reader to know there is "No School" on an "Employee Planning Day", and it would be better to list a holiday as that, rather than listing it as a "Paid Employee Holiday." The last day of school for students should also be indicated, along with saying it is the "End of 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter."



### **Guidelines for Photos in Newsletters**

- If using photos – make them large enough for readers to see what people in the photos are doing.
- Whenever possible, photos should show action, even if you need to stage it.. Avoid handshakes, check presentations and certificate presentations, also known as “grip and grin” photos. They do not make interesting photos.
- Use captions – check the spelling of names and titles.
- Be sure proper releases are on file for any students whose photos are used in the newsletter.
- Pay attention to the background of the photo.
- Keep diversity in mind! Photos should reflect the makeup of the school.

### **Internal Staff Newsletter (By staff for staff)**

If you do not already have one, consider publishing a staff newsletter. A regular staff newsletter not only provides needed information, it can also help to develop and foster acceptance and teamwork among staff members. Newsletter space could be used to pull staff members together, by including such things as staff accomplishments and unique teaching techniques and successes, and personal items such as births and marriages. It is important that the staff newsletter be distributed to ALL staff members, not just the teaching staff.

Listed below are guidelines for staff newsletters:

- Newsletter should be brief and easy to read.
- Include a list of upcoming events and deadlines.
- Include social news (i.e. weddings, births).
- Include staff accomplishments and honors.
- Include a humorous anecdote or tasteful cartoon.
- Newsletters should be interactive with a clip-out comment or suggestion form included in each issue. This form might be used by staff members to ask a question, make a suggestion, comment or inform you of up-coming volunteer needs.





## Other Ideas

- Use your school's ParentLink (automated calling) system to keep parents informed and to remind them of important upcoming meetings.
- A PowerPoint style presentation could be developed to highlight the programs, staff and students of your school. The presentation could be used by speakers at open houses, public forums or orientations.
- It is important that links be established between your school and the business community. Company personnel could be invited to school functions and events and invited to serve on school committees. Student groups (band, chorus) could be offered as entertainment at company functions. Student artwork could be provided to decorate offices and lobbies in company buildings.
- It is important that gifts from the city, an organization or group be promptly and properly recognized. Whether in the form of money, services or equipment, the group or individual should be recognized in as many ways as possible. (Newsletters, personal letters, athletic events, meetings and news releases.) NOTE: If money is received for an unspecified purpose, it is important that those giving the money be notified as to how the funds were used.
- One simple, yet effective way to communicate good news about your school and give employees the ammunition they need to counter negative comments is to supply each employee with a "WOW Card" listing positive news. List recent district, school, staff and student accomplishments on index cards and pass them out to staff members. If you wish, the cards may be laminated for added durability. You may also want to give cards to school volunteers, business partners or others who have frequent contact with your school. Accomplishments listed can be big, "FCAT scores are up across the District," or small, "Our fifth grade class collected over \$300 for the Humane Society." If you are unsure what items to include, hold a brainstorming session during your next staff meeting.
- Use the school's telephone "on-hold" message to promote school, student and staff accomplishments and honors.
- Bring back successful alumni as guest speakers to inspire and motivate students. Established links with alumni may also be of benefit when working on future school projects.
- Use your school's outdoor message board to promote student, staff and school achievements to the community. The board can also be used to recognize school partners and volunteers.
- In media releases and school newsletters, highlight the background of staff and honors.
- Develop a school theme or slogan for use on letterheads, newsletters, outside message board and Web site.



- Put a suggestion box in a prominent place, and encourage students, parents, staff and visitors to use it. Remember to check it often. Indicate that suggestions may be made in parents' native language.
- Develop "Question and Response Cards" and hand them out to parents and community visitors at special programs or other school activities. The cards could also be placed in public places. The cards will facilitate feedback on the school's PR efforts, and enable parents to make suggestions or ask questions.
- To encourage community members to visit your school, host a "come and see for yourself event." The event should feature student-conducted tours and student performances and academic demonstrations. Open the event to the entire community, but extend special invitations to government officials, business leaders, business partners, school volunteers, parent organization leaders, realtors, neighborhood senior citizen groups, the Superintendent and all School Board Members. Middle and high schools could also invite students and parents from feeder schools.
- Establish an "Alumni Hall of Fame" at your school. Biographical information and photos of former students could be compiled, framed and displayed in a hallway at the school. Not only would this inspire current students, visitors to the school would realize the high quality of education these former students received.
- Every effort should be made to encourage membership in parent groups.
- Every attempt should be made to draw the community into special events at the school to foster school spirit.





## Challenges

### **Low FCAT or Other Test Scores**

Your school may have made good progress in raising its grade during the most recent round of FCAT tests, but you should demonstrate to the community that you are committed to continuously improving.

It should be made clear that the help and support of parents and the community are needed to be successful. An academic task force could be formed, consisting of business and civic leaders, community members, parents, staff members and students to discuss what additional measures might be taken at the school to improve student achievement. The efforts and decisions of this group should be publicized at every opportunity.

#### Additional suggestions:

- Outline the specific steps being taken at your school to improve scores. Be sure that all staff members, students, parents and community members are made aware of those steps. Include the steps in the school newsletter and outline them at all school meetings. Share that information, when attending community meetings.
- Whenever administrators or staff members discuss the school's A++ grade, the importance of support from parents and the community should be stressed.
- Encourage tutoring by community members and parents. Make it a group effort.
- Celebrate other school successes—FCAT is not the only measure of a quality school.

#### Media Tips:

It is our hope that no Broward County school drops a letter grade or more under the state's A++ program. However, should that happen—the local news media might be calling.

Below are some tips you may find helpful, if your school receives a lower grade:

- Never say – “No Comment” to a reporter.
  - ▶ It is acceptable to ask a reporter to allow you some time to review the data prior to being interviewed.
- Carefully review all of the data.
  - ▶ There may be bright spots, where your students performed better than the previous year - highlight the positives.
- Do not conduct an interview prior to reviewing the numbers.
- Do not blame the students for the school's lower grade.
  - ▶ School demographics are not an excuse for low achievement.
- Do not make excuses – keep all of your comments positive.
  - ▶ Instead of talking about what didn't work this year—tell the reporter what you're going to do to improve next year.



Some of the following phrases may be helpful during interviews:

- “Our school had great success in the areas we focused on” (then discuss the positives).
- “Our students have made a lot of progress—and the test scores show it—but they also identify some areas where we need a little bit of work.”
- “Next year’s school improvement plan will include special components to help us turn our weaknesses into strengths.”
- “We will continue to work hard to make this school something our students, staff and the community can be proud of.”
- “The grade we received encourages our teachers and staff to work even harder in the coming year to help all of our students achieve at their highest potential.”

### **Negative Perceptions**

Seeing is believing. The best way to fight inaccurate, negative perceptions about your school is by getting the naysayers into your building to see for themselves. In this book, you will find numerous ways to bring members of the community, not just parents, into your school. Seeing the positive activities happening in classrooms; understanding the security measures in place; and meeting teachers and administrators firsthand will go a long way toward changing negative perceptions about your school.

In addition, every effort needs to be made to get the good news out about your school. The media needs to be effectively utilized to increase awareness, as well as to publicize good news from the school.

The principal should designate a staff member as PR liaison. That person should watch for good news and innovative teaching at the school; write press releases when appropriate (copy to Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department); and encourage media to attend school events and programs. Having a point-person will facilitate the flow of positive news to the media and encourage the development of a working relationship between the media and the school. The Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department is also available to assist school personnel in publicizing positive stories about the school.

Keep in mind that many ethnic groups have their own community newsletters, newspapers, radio and television stations. These are additional outlets for important school information and positive school news. The Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department can provide you with a list of those media outlets. If an interview is requested, media will generally ask that it be conducted in their own language.

Members of the media should be personally invited to the school. They could be invited to have breakfast or lunch with the principal and then tour the school.

Tips and techniques for effectively working with the media can be found in “Media Relations Made Easy,” a publication of the District’s Public Relations & Governmental Affairs Department. Included in the booklet are sample news releases. The booklet may be downloaded at ([www.browardschools.com/prga](http://www.browardschools.com/prga)).

Your external PR efforts cannot be successful if internal PR needs are ignored. Making staff members feel appreciated, important and included will ensure that they will be advocates of your school.



### **Realtors Convey a Negative Image of the School to Prospective Home Buyers**

Negative messages may result from the realtor's lack of knowledge about your school. A good school might be portrayed as bad by an unscrupulous realtor trying to lead a homebuyer to a more expensive area. A more expensive home means a higher commission for the realtor.

Accurate information about your school should be provided to area realtors. Realtors should be added to the school's mailing list, and they should be invited to school functions and to serve on school committees. By inviting realtors into the school, they will be able to see for themselves. This will address the lack of knowledge issue, and may also foster a feeling of "community responsibility" regarding your school among realtors.

Hold a "Realtor Appreciation Day." Invite area realtors to the school for breakfast with the principal. Provide copies of the welcome packet (see page 4). The choir or band could perform, and student council members could conduct tours of the building. The goal of "Realtor Appreciation Day" is to establish a relationship with realtors, provide them with accurate information about the school and encourage their goodwill.

### **Low Number of School-Business Partnerships**

School-business partnerships expand the educational opportunities of students, but just as importantly they foster a positive relationship between community and school. Through partnerships, members of the business community are brought into the school where they have an opportunity to see learning taking place; bond with students, teachers and administrators; and, in turn, carry their positive impressions of the school out into the community.

Every effort should be made by your school, in conjunction with the District's Coordinator of Partners In Education, to expand current partnerships and develop new ones, including a partnership with a media outlet, if possible.

The District's coordinator of Partners In Education has materials helpful in attracting and establishing new partnerships. If your school's current partnership coordinator is a teacher, here is something to consider. A teacher's schedule does not lend itself to returning phone calls and attending meetings during the business day. At most schools, an assistant principal holds this position. It is suggested that the duties of partnership coordinator be assigned to an assistant principal, or to some other person with more flexibility in their daily schedule. Contact the District's Coordinator of Partners In Education for more information, 754-321-1974.

The Partners In Education Board of Directors offer grant opportunities to schools interested in replicating proven partnerships programs. This is done through the Impact II grant program that is provided by the Broward Education Foundation. Contact the Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department or the Broward Education Foundation for more information.

In addition to school level partnerships, the District has a large number of district level partnerships, many of which can be duplicated at the school level. The Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department maintains relationships with all of the community's major non-profit organizations, health and human services agencies and many of the cultural institutions. These groups may be of help whether you are attempting to enhance classroom programs, after school or field trip activities, or just looking for new ways to get information about your school out to the community. For more information on which district partnerships or contacts might be appropriate for your school, contact the Parents, Business & Community Partnerships Department.



## **Sources**

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Leader’s Manual – School Communication Workshop, National School Public Relations Association, 1996

101 Public Relations Ideas You Can Use Now...And More!, National School Public Relations Association, 1986





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