After a very successful press conference on Tuesday, April 23, the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (AL CCRS) are still on track for full implementation beginning next Fall. Thanks to your many voices of support for AL CCRS, Senator Del Marsh, President Pro Tem of the Alabama Senate, has decided that the Senate will not take up bills dealing with the Common Core State Standards for the remainder of this legislative session that ends next month, according the South Union Street blog of the Montgomery Advertiser.

(Continued on next page)
Please reach out to your legislators for their continued support and understanding as Alabama schools do what’s right for students as they continue to implement Alabama’s rigorous College- and Career-Ready Standards. You can find contact information for your legislators using this website:

http://www.legislature.state.al.us/misc/zipsearch.html

The challenge of showing all Alabama parents and citizens the benefits will continue. We must throughout the next year, continue to showcase the good work that our schools are doing in creating more challenging curricula and daily work, to increase student success!

Here are some resources that you can use to promote the AL CCRS in your district.

- ALEX AL CCRS page
- Two Local Schools’ Implementation of AL CCRS
- AL CCRS Myths vs. Facts
- Support AL’s CCRS (A+ Facebook page)

ALSDE Communication encourages you to create and send any testimonials (in print or video) that we can use to promote the wonderful programs and people in our public schools. Email comm@alsde.edu at any time to contribute or request resources on AL CCRS.

In response to the change of heart regarding the Common Core Repeal, Dr. Tommy Bice wrote, “I could never craft a response that could be more appropriate at this time than that of our 2nd President John Adams who when faced with a similar challenge of fact vs. fiction stated ‘Facts are stubborn things: whatever may be our wished, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.’ Throughout this debate I have remained laser focused on just that—the facts—supported by irrefutable evidence with the belief that truth does prevail. In the end truth has prevailed and the students in Alabama schools will now be afforded the education they each deserve in preparing them to be college and career ready.”
A school day like any other, until the call comes in, “Gun found at the high school. We are in lockdown.” Phone lines at the district office light up with parents demanding to know what’s going on and reporters are descending on the school looking for a story.

This is not the time to wonder if your communications staff has the training to craft the message for your community and the media. Did you know the damage inflicted on an organization’s reputation is determined more by its handling of a crisis than by the seriousness or outcome of the crisis itself? That includes how your district communicates with various stakeholders.

NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nationally, most school districts have suffered budget cuts due to the economy and other outside factors. When making the hard decision about what line items to cut, it may be tempting to eliminate professional development for all but teachers and building administrators. Districts know that it is imperative that the instructional staff has access to, and is trained in, best practices and the latest research to help students succeed. No argument here – but let’s apply this same logic to your communications staff and their need for professional development.

Your communications staff needs to be familiar with all of the new and emerging communication tools to determine how to best reach your community. In the case of a gun at the high school, sending out a news release, an e-mail blast, or robo-call isn’t going to cut it. Your staff needs to be using social media to keep parents and the media informed throughout the lockdown. Mastering the skills to build a following on social media and communicating what your patrons want to hear from you are not something you want to leave until you need them in a crisis.

TOOLS ARE CHANGING

The basic knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be a communications professional may not have changed much over the years, but the tools to execute a sound communications plan have.

By Carol Fenstermacher, APR, Director of Community Relations, Evergreen Public Schools, NSPRA Northwest Region Vice President @ Carol.Fenstermacher@evergreenps.org

One of the best ways to ensure your community relations staff is getting the professional development they need is through their membership in the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and, if available, through your state’s school public relations association. For more information on professional development opportunities from NSPRA, visit www.NSPRA.org – the return on your investment in professional development for your communications staff will pay for itself when the next big crisis or issue hits your district.
looking for insight on improving parent involvement?

The folks at Public Agenda have released a new report—Ready, Willing and Able? Kansas City Parents Talk About How to Improve Schools and What They Can Do To Help—based on a survey and focus groups with parents in the Kansas City region. It provides a view of parents’ diverse feelings on involvement in schools and offers educators practical advice for boosting parental involvement and engaging parents in broader questions about education reform.

The report categorizes the different ways parents approach involvement by creating three distinct groups: Potential Transformers, who are comfortable shaping education policy; School Helpers, who prefer more traditional activities; and Help Seekers, who need support to improve their involvement at home. Look for a series of practical recommendations in the report based on this research and Public Agenda’s deep expertise in K-12 stakeholder engagement.

HAVE YOU HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE?

Here’s a new blog for Communicators to ask questions and get answers from NSPRA professionals and other colleagues — http://www.shenet.org/GrapeVine/Default.htm
Exemplary school PR program leaders realize that their work is at the heart of the mission of their districts: the success of students. Those that think big and “Go for the Bold” can create programs that use communication to build relationships that meet critical needs, grow effectiveness, or address issues.

For example, to solve student hunger problems, teachers would best be able to explain the impact of hunger on students when it most often presents itself and when it should be addressed. The issue for some kids may be lagging attention on Monday mornings, thus requiring a weekend feeding program, where others may lag in the afternoon and may need a snack during the school day.

Research could then extend to borrowing from the best practices being used by education and social service programs around the country. There are snack and backpack programs that are serving hundreds of kids every day. Internal and external allies may include school volunteer coordinators, principals, counselors, as well as faith, service organization, business, and social service leaders.

When programs were completed, evaluation of the campaign showed increased safety awareness for students, improved daily student attendance, an increase in interest in the student performance, more than four million positive impressions of the campaign, and a city proclamation.

Clearly, in these examples, school PR leaders and their superintendents have proven how the communication function can produce great results for their students and their systems.

Joe Krumm, APR, NSPRA President, Executive Director, Community and Government Relations, North Clackamas Schools, krumm@nclace.k12.or.us
What is it?

An out-of-date policy manual that is not periodically reviewed and updated can quickly become obsolete. Laws change and so do regulations, administrative directives, court decisions and research-based best practices for more effective educational administration. As a result, school systems face the ongoing challenge of keeping their policy manuals up-to-date.

Take advantage of the collective experience and wisdom of the Alabama Association of School Boards’ expert policy consultants. Use AASB’s cost-effective Comprehensive Policy Revision Service to review, update and customize your school system’s policy manual. It’s prompt, easy and highly beneficial.

How to subscribe?

To request cost and service information, email AASB Administrative Assistant Donna Norris at dnorris@AlabamaSchoolBoards.org or call her at 800-562-0601. Those who use AASB’s Comprehensive Policy Revision service also get 10% off the first year they subscribe to The Policy Pipeline service.

ABOUT AASB

The Alabama Association of School Boards represents all of the state’s public local school boards. Since 1949, AASB has served education leaders and the interests of local decision making in public education. The association’s mission is to develop excellent school board leaders through quality training, advocacy and services. To view a full list of services, click here.