Building Futures Together: October is Parent Visitation Month

October 1st marks the start of the Alabama State Department of Education’s annual statewide campaign to raise awareness of the importance of parental involvement and the key role that parent’s play in their child’s education. Parent Visitation Month provides an excellent opportunity for school systems to host an open house, schedule parent-teacher conferences, put on workshops that appeal to a variety of interests, or showcase student work – all with the goal of sharing with parents how they can become partners in their child’s education. This year’s theme is Homes and Schools: Building Futures Together.

Over 30 years of research have proven parent involvement is one of the largest determining factors related to student success. When parents are involved in their children’s education in positive ways, children:
- Achieve higher grades and test scores.
- Have better attendance at school.
- Complete more homework.
- Demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Graduate at higher rates.
- Have greater enrollment in higher education.

Each year Alabama hosts a very successful parent visitation month, but it requires each of you to make it happen locally. To assist you, the ALSD Instructional Services Section has posted materials and tools for your use located here. The Guide for Schools contains a wealth of information on how to make plans for local parent involvement meetings and activities. Please take the time to work with your staff on the importance of this effort. Alabama’s Statewide Parent Visitation Month is an excellent way to establish partnerships with parents that can be sustained throughout the school year.

Best Practices: HERE – Have Everyone Ready to Educate

“Alabama Attendance Awareness Month” has wrapped up, and we want to hear from you! How did your school system use social media pages, newsletters, websites and other promotional resources to help students and parents become more aware of the crucial need to be at school, on time, every day?

The Tuscaloosa City School System’s HERE (Have Everyone Ready to Educate) campaign is a great example of how a district is working to increase the understanding of educators, parents, students and community partners of the major impact school attendance has on the success rates, both academically and behaviorally, of our students.

Lesley Bruinton, APR, Coordinator of Public Relations of the Tuscaloosa City School System, recently gave a great presentation on the HERE program at the Alabama School Public Relations Association Fall Quarterly Meeting.

Bruinton said the foundation of the campaign is built on a simple truth: students can’t learn if they’re not here. However, in the short- and long-term, students are not the only ones affected by the negative effects of poor attendance.

If too many students are chronically absent, it can slow down instruction for the entire classroom as teachers repeat material for absentee students. If students aren’t in school, they aren’t able to develop the education and skills necessary to enter the workforce, Bruinton said.

To learn more about Have Everyone Ready to Educate, click here.

Share your other best practices by sending an email to epippins@alsde.edu. Photos are welcome, too! We may use them in an upcoming edition of PROS.
Did You Know?

**Future of Public Education Tour Wraps Up**

“The Future of Public Education Tour” was a great opportunity for parents and members of the community to learn how Alabama educators are working to prepare students to be college- or career-ready when they graduate from high school.

Nearly 2,000 people across the state have come out to hear State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice and business and industry partners, representatives from Alabama’s Community Colleges, and other education stakeholders talk about the importance of a quality, transformative education for all students.

From Huntsville to Dothan, Tuscaloosa to Selma, and several cities in between, the Future of Public Education tour has served the purpose of informing the public – and being informed by the public. Questions and comments gathered during the tour will be valuable tools as we move forward in making sure every Alabama student graduates, and is prepared for life after high school.

A big thank you to those districts who hosted stops along the tour – it would not have been a success without your efforts. To see photo galleries from the tour, click here.

**Resource:**

**Be True to Your School**

Brian Woodland, APR, Director of Communications for the Peel District School Board in Ontario, Canada, has created a guide to help school systems understand and powerfully communicate their district’s brand. The guide ask communication staff to discover their brand’s fingerprint by answering the following questions: What makes me great? What makes me unique? What makes me compelling? Download the complete guide.

**Resource:**

**Preparing Parents for Back to School Night: Great Questions to Ask About Technology Use**

As parents and students settle into their back-to-school routines, help them jump start conversations with teachers about technology use in their child’s classroom. This quick guide from Caroline Knorr, Common Sense Media’s parenting editor, suggests a series of questions parents can ask in conversation with teachers. The questions also serve as a communication framework for schools as they seek to understand what parents want to know about technology and their children.

**Resource:**

**ALSDE Civil Rights History DVD Available to Alabama School Systems**

On September 15, 1963, the world as we knew it changed forever. Dynamite blasted through the basement of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four little girls and bringing the Civil Rights Movement to an international audience.

Fifty years later, Regions Bank hosted an esteemed panel to recount memories of the day; the struggle; and how Alabama, the U.S., and the world were impacted. The forum was part of the city of Birmingham’s commemoration of the Civil Rights Movement. Led by Dr. Condoleezza Rice, a Birmingham native and former U.S. Secretary of State, and moderated by CBS This Morning co-anchor and O Magazine editor-at-large Gayle King, the result was a candid and provocative discussion.

The schools in your districts may receive a free copy of the DVD and accompanying study guide, “Beyond Suffering and Suffrage: The Past, Present and Future of International Civil and Human Rights,” by contacting the Alabama State Department of Education’s Communication Division at 334-242-9950 or rsmitr@aslde.edu. Additional copies of the study guide may be downloaded here.

The 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years coincide with milestone commemorations for seminal events in Alabama and United States history, making the discussion featured in the DVD and other lessons centered around the Civil Rights Movement even more meaningful during this time. Among them are:

- **The 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,** which abolished legal segregation. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, viewed as a critical turning point in the Civil Rights Movement, largely influenced the passage of that Act.

- **The 50th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March,** also known as “Bloody Sunday,” which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

- **The 60th anniversary of the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott,** which resulted in a U.S. Supreme Court decision that declared Alabama and Montgomery laws requiring segregated buses to be unconstitutional.
Tip: How to Reach an Evolving Parent and Student Base

Effective public education is ever-changing as students and communities continue to evolve. As our nation becomes more diverse, so do our schools. And as our students become more technologically proficient, our instruction seeks to keep pace.

National School Public Relations Association members Susan Hahn and Charles Herndon of Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland offer the following tips on ways to keep up and meet the challenges of an evolving parent and student base:

• **Brainstorm:** What is the best way to reach evolving student or parent groups? Consider plenty of ideas and try them out on colleagues, friends, parents, and students – do they resonate?

• **Outreach is everyone’s job:** Effectively reaching evolving student and parent bases means that everyone – from custodians to principals to superintendents – must communicate accurate and positive news about the school, school district, initiatives or issues. Marshal your human resources.

• **Get creative:** Even with few resources, there are plenty of effective and low- or no-cost ways of reaching out to evolving students and parent bases and going to where they are.

• **Have fun:** Take a more casual, less institutional tone as you communicate with evolving groups, including parents and especially students. Light humor, breezy headlines or punchy narratives all help create a personal, welcoming and positive tone!

Read the full tip sheet [here](#), or visit [www.nspra.org](http://www.nspra.org).

### Resource:

**NSPRA Supports Prudential Spirit of Community Awards**

*The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)* is a proud supporter of the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, the largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service in the United States.

The program’s goals are to applaud young people who already are making a positive difference in their towns and neighborhoods and to inspire others to think about how they might contribute to their communities.

For nearly two decades, more than 370,000 young Americans have participated in the program, which is sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). More than 100,000 students have been officially recognized for their volunteer efforts.

The process begins at the school level. After students fill out applications online and submit them to their principals, schools select their top youth volunteers. The top applicants receive the President’s Volunteer Service Award and are evaluated by a state-level judging panel, which selects the top middle-level and high school candidate in each state and the District of Columbia.

The 2015 online application form is available at [http://spirit.prudential.com](http://spirit.prudential.com) and [www.nassp.org/spirit](http://www.nassp.org/spirit). Students must submit their application and accompanying materials to his/her principal or designated school official by November 4, 2014. The top youth volunteers and distinguished finalists in each state will be announced February 2015.

The state winners will receive a $1,000 award; an engraved silver medallion; and a trip to Washington, D.C., for the program’s national recognition events.

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**Join us!**

**Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA) – Offering PR Tips and Professional Development**

Have you considered joining a local, state-led School PR association? [Check out ALSPRA](#) - a diverse group of school PR professionals charged with the positive promotion of local schools! Don’t miss out on great information, networking and knowledge about how to promote the best of public schools!