It's back-to-school time. And you know what that means? According to the Merritt Group, it's time to freshen up on media relations essentials!

Whether you're a first year school public relations professional or have a decade or more of experience, these tips from the Merritt Group can teach (or remind) you how to be an asset to both reporters and your clients.

1. Never make promises you can’t keep. PR pros are known for their dedication and ‘never give up’ attitude, but pushing the limit on this by lying or making empty promises can be detrimental to relationships. Reporters are loyal to those who act as resources and provide unique insight for their stories. Always err on the side of caution and if you're unsure about the answer to a question, you can always go back to them later with more information.

2. Exercise caution with embargoes. While many reporters will honor them, not all do. Know the publication’s policy and cultivate a relationship with the reporter to ensure any pre-announcement outreach will go off without a hitch. Nobody wants an inbox full of emails from the media asking why they didn’t get an exclusive on the news.

3. Pay attention to the subject line. Reporters receive hundreds of emails every day, so how can you make your email stand out? Be clear and concise and don’t forget to personalize. Also, try not to overdo it with capitalization and punctuation.

4. Follow reporters on social media. A great way to learn more about reporters is by following them on Twitter. Keep an eye out for what they post and think about it before...

For more tips, click here.

It's back-to-school time. And you know what that means? According to the Merritt Group, it's time to freshen up on media relations essentials!

Whether you're a first year school public relations professional or have a decade or more of experience, these tips from the Merritt Group can teach (or remind) you how to be an asset to both reporters and your clients.

1. Never make promises you can’t keep. PR pros are known for their dedication and ‘never give up’ attitude, but pushing the limit on this by lying or making empty promises can be detrimental to relationships. Reporters are loyal to those who act as resources and provide unique insight for their stories. Always err on the side of caution and if you're unsure about the answer to a question, you can always go back to them later with more information.

2. Exercise caution with embargoes. While many reporters will honor them, not all do. Know the publication’s policy and cultivate a relationship with the reporter to ensure any pre-announcement outreach will go off without a hitch. Nobody wants an inbox full of emails from the media asking why they didn’t get an exclusive on the news.

3. Pay attention to the subject line. Reporters receive hundreds of emails every day, so how can you make your email stand out? Be clear and concise and don’t forget to personalize. Also, try not to overdo it with capitalization and punctuation.

4. Follow reporters on social media. A great way to learn more about reporters is by following them on Twitter. Keep an eye out for what they post and think about it before...

For more tips, click here.

Start of New Academic Year is the Perfect Time to Freshen Up on PR Essentials

It’s back-to-school time. And you know what that means? According to the Merritt Group, it’s time to freshen up on media relations essentials!

Whether you’re a first year school public relations professional or have a decade or more of experience, these tips from the Merritt Group can teach (or remind) you how to be an asset to both reporters and your clients.

1. Never make promises you can’t keep. PR pros are known for their dedication and ‘never give up’ attitude, but pushing the limit on this by lying or making empty promises can be detrimental to relationships. Reporters are loyal to those who act as resources and provide unique insight for their stories. Always err on the side of caution and if you're unsure about the answer to a question, you can always go back to them later with more information.

2. Exercise caution with embargoes. While many reporters will honor them, not all do. Know the publication’s policy and cultivate a relationship with the reporter to ensure any pre-announcement outreach will go off without a hitch. Nobody wants an inbox full of emails from the media asking why they didn’t get an exclusive on the news.

3. Pay attention to the subject line. Reporters receive hundreds of emails every day, so how can you make your email stand out? Be clear and concise and don’t forget to personalize. Also, try not to overdo it with capitalization and punctuation.

4. Follow reporters on social media. A great way to learn more about reporters is by following them on Twitter. Keep an eye out for what they post and think about it before...

For more tips, click here.

August is Civics and Government Month

One of the foundational goals of public education is to educate and equip the next generation of citizens, our students, with a strong understanding of their civic and governmental responsibilities.

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is designating the month of August 2015 as Civics and Government Awareness Month in all public schools across the state to bring awareness to this important learning goal.

The ALSDE is encouraging you to call on school leaders to participate, if possible, in activities customized to meet the individual and collective needs of students and the teachers, support staff, and administrators who teach, assist, and lead them on a daily basis. Civics and government learning standards are found in all grades, with emphasis in 7th grade and 12th grade.

Educators can use this month to:

- Review the roles and responsibilities of local school board members, State School Board Members, County Commissioners, and City Council members.
- Visit a meeting conducted by any of the above governmental entities.
- Invite school board members and other elected or appointed officials to visit a classroom in one or more of their schools.
- Review the three branches of state government and focus on the roles and responsibilities of their State Representatives and Senators in the Alabama Legislature.
- Invite their legislators to visit a classroom in one or more of their schools.
- Review the structure of the three branches of federal government and focus on the roles and responsibilities of the U.S. Congress and Alabama’s Congressional delegation.

ICYMI: State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice Addresses Educational Priorities

Speaking of back-to-school, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice recently discussed various education related topics during a press conference at the Montgomery Public Schools Transportation Department.

Among the issues discussed were Back to School Statistics, a review of PLAN 2020 outcomes to date, and the Special Legislative Session. Click here to view the press conference.
Resource: Using Strategic Communications to Build Support for CCRS

The National School Alliance Public Relations Association (NSPRA) reports that The Learning First Alliance has released a blog post highlighting the key factor in building public support for College- and Career-Ready Standards — strategic communication. Although the Common Core has become a contentious, polarizing movement in many places, a report from The Hunt Institute shares why Kentucky and Tennessee in particular have not seen the same effects. The report highlights eight important factors for why this may be, all relating back to effective communication:

- **Proactive Communication.** Proactive communication tailored to various audiences – particularly educators – builds widespread support which will be necessary when resistance emerges.

- **Coordinated Communication.** Coordinated communication among the governor, the chief state school officer, general assembly, and other prominent stakeholders and messengers is essential.

- **Educator Engagement.** Engaging and communicating directly with educators is a requirement when taking on major changes in schooling. Their support is essential.

- **Simple Messages.** The development of a few simple messages with a focus on improving student outcomes helps to communicate successfully and avoid over-complication.

- **Engaged Partners.** Engaging other organizations (e.g., businesses, non-profits) to assist with communications to various audiences is an effective way to ensure that all stakeholders get the information they need.

- **Planning for the Inevitable.** Efforts to guide the conversation about inevitabilities that could be viewed negatively (such as lower test scores) is an effective communication strategy; implementation will raise new communication challenges that are not always anticipated in policy making.

- **Students, Education and the Economy.** Tieing education reform efforts to improved student outcomes helps to communicate the value of the statewide effort.

- **Meeting with Stakeholders and Listening.** State listening tours, town halls, and small meetings with stakeholders help build trust and give attendees the opportunity to voice their points of view. Governors and chief state school officers can learn from stakeholders and carry what they have learned to the larger public to make the case for taking action.

To learn more, click [here](#).
Happy New School Year!

Students will soon fill our hallways (if they haven’t already arrived). Many of us attended professional development opportunities this summer as we geared up for the new school year. The same is true of a dozen members from the Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA) who attended the national conference in Nashville July 12-16. It was four jam-packed days that left us renewed and energized for a new school year and ready to tell our system’s stories! We saw top-notch school public relations practitioners who are leading the effort in the fight for public education and communicating what’s good in our schools. The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) is an excellent resource for ideas and products that can be used to implement your communications program.

I know that not all school systems have a dedicated full-time public relations practitioner, but all schools can benefit from sound public relations and community engagement efforts. That’s where ALSPRA can help!

Earlier this summer, we surveyed superintendents and those responsible for public information as defined by the Education Directory to see what kinds of professional development would be most beneficial. As a result, ALSPRA is working to meet those needs.

Overwhelmingly, respondents said they wanted professional development on community relations. Additionally, more than half expressed an interest in social media. On September 18, we’ll host Jennifer Hogan, an assistant principal in the Hoover City Schools, and co-founder of the wildly popular moderated-Twitter discussions #ALedchat and @USedchat.

This presentation is sure to offer those responsible for school communications at all levels, practical methods for increasing community engagement through digital resources.

Since becoming president of this organization in June, I am focused on providing more resources for those responsible for communicating what is happening in schools. I invite you—especially if your school system doesn’t have a dedicated public relations practitioner—to become part of ALSPRA today! Of the state’s 136 school systems only a percentage have a dedicated public relations practitioner on staff, but all have stakeholders with whom they need to communicate: students, parents, employees, taxpayers and more! We’re here to help. ALSPRA offers four meetings a year to provide case studies of public relations programs happening here in our state and feedback on how to strengthen your school communications practice.

We know that the story will be written. But how it’s written is an opportunity to engage your community. What will your story be this school year?

Lesley Bruinton, APR
ALSPRA President

Agenda:

- 9 a.m. - Welcome Lesley Bruinton, APR Tuscaloosa City Schools @lesleybruinton; @TCSBoardofEd President
- President’s Update
  - Survey Says
  - Membership Has Its Benefits
  - Mitch Edwards, APR Memorial Award
- 9:35 a.m. - Treasurer’s Report Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR Alabama State Department of Education @_mjvh; @AlabamaDeptOfEd Secretary-Treasurer
- 9:40 a.m. - Who Are Our Stakeholders And How Do We Reach Them? TBA
- 10:10 a.m. - Introduction Jason Gaston, APR Hoover City Schools @HooverSchools
- 10:15 a.m. - Keynote Jennifer Hogan – Hoover City Schools @Jennifer_Hogan; @HooverSchools
- 11:30 a.m. - Lunch courtesy of ALSPRA Off site
- 1 p.m. - NSPRA 2015 Conference Wrap Up Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR Cindy Warner – Shelby Co. Schools @cindyjowarner; @Shelbyedk12alus
- 1:30 p.m. - Committee Work
  - 2016 Conference Planning
  - Membership Recruitment & Renewals
  - PLU Creation
- 2:45 p.m. - Committee Work Reports
- 3 p.m. - Adjourn Lesley Bruinton, APR

Make Plans to Attend the Upcoming ALSPRA Meeting!

Friday, September 18 · 9 a.m.
Council of Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS)
926 Pelham St, Montgomery, AL 36104
Please RSVP by September 11.