On January 14, Dr. Bice began his presentation to legislative members a little differently than in years past. He told the story of an average day in the life of an Alabama student. Beginning with the ride to school on a bus system that is funded at just 80%, with local schools picking up the rest. Then a trip to the lunchroom where 83% of students receive a free and/or reduced breakfast.

Bice described to the audience of legislators, district superintendents and others, how students and educators in local schools are challenged by underfunding. In the presentation Bice said the $4.16 billion budget request for K-12 schools would give teachers the resources they need to adequately instruct students, and announced that 

**Alabama’s graduation rate had hit 80%, the highest in the state’s history.**

The Department is also seeking $30 million for transportation; $5 million to expand the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative; and $5 million for the expansion of distance learning. Without distance learning, Bice said, many students in poorer districts would be unable to get instruction in advanced science courses, foreign languages and other projects. Bice became emotional as he discussed the work of teachers in the public school system, and received a standing ovation from those in attendance.

**DR. BICE’S BUDGET PRESENTATION:**
Alabama GRIT supports Alabama College and Career Ready Standards!

Our partner, Alabama GRIT (Graduate Ready, Impact Tomorrow) is helping to spread positive information about the AL College and Career Ready Standards with helpful resources, presentations and direct contact with parents, educators, legislators and others interested.

FOR GREAT INFORMATION & MATERIALS FOR PRINTING:

For more information, contact Jessica Hammonds at jessica@alabamagrit.org.

It sets higher academic benchmarks for every grade level, helping our kids gradually develop increasingly complex skills.

By expecting more from our children, they will achieve more.

Offering PR Tips and Professional Development!

Have you considered joining a state School PR association?

Check out the Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA) - a diverse group of School PR professionals charged with the positive promotion of local schools.

LEGISLATIVE TRACKING

The 2014 Legislative Session is now underway!

To view all pre-filed bills related to Education, CLICK HERE.
These tips will ensure your posts never get lost in the newsfeed again.

WHAT MAKES A WELL-CRAFTED FACEBOOK POST STAND OUT?

When analyzing what makes a well-crafted Facebook post versus what makes a message that gets buried in a user’s newsfeed, we must first consider Facebook’s newsfeed algorithm. The newsfeed algorithm determines what content shows up where in a user’s newsfeed.

A post’s placement in the newsfeed more or less depends on three things:
1. Engagement levels.
2. Relevance to the user. (Has the user interacted with you before? How frequently?)
3. The timeframe between when a person posts two posts.

HERE ARE A FEW GUIDELINES FOR A WELL-CRAFTED FACEBOOK POST:

1. **Stay in line with your strategy and brand identity.**
   You should have a good mix of fun posts and promotional messages that are in line with your overall objectives for your brand. Try to remember the 80/20 rule. Eighty percent of the content you post should be entertaining or of value, while twenty percent should be promotional.

2. **Post quality content.**
   Don’t post just to post. Be real. Only post updates that provide value to your followers.
   Will this post entertain, educate or offer something else of value to your followers? Also keep in mind that over-posting and flooding your followers’ newsfeeds can actually hurt you.
   Check out this well-crafted Facebook post by California Home & Design. Notice the photo, shortened link, call to action and, in turn, engagement levels. Though this post went live 13 hours before I wrote this article, at the time I was writing it was pretty high up in my newsfeed.

3. **Use photos.**
   It is widely accepted that photos get more engagement and are more appealing to Facebook users. The ideal photo size for a Facebook timeline is 403 pixels by 403 pixels. If your photo is not the ideal size, make sure you use the “reposition photo” option after you post the photo to rearrange how Facebook displays it on your timeline.
   Even if you are sharing an article, use a photo that visually represents the article, and include a link in the copy.

4. **Use shortened links.**
   When you share a link, either delete the link in the text copy or use a shortened link. To delete a link but still get the article to show, (which you shouldn’t be doing if you are abiding by tip No. 3) just paste the link in the post copy and wait for it to populate. Once it shows up you can delete the link from the text copy.
   If you are abiding by tip No. 3-using a photo but still including a link-use a link shortener like bitly.com.

5. **Include a call to action.**
   Examples:
   “Click here.”
   “Like this.”
   “Share!”
   “What do you think?”
   Whatever the objective of the post-get higher levels of engagement or direct traffic to another website-make sure you include a call to action for that objective.

6. **Use hashtags and @mentions.**
   Use relevant hashtags to categorize your posts. Use @mentions to provide a live link to the company or news website you are referencing. (Type the @ symbol and then start typing that company’s Facebook page name.) Using hashtags and @mentions will help others interested in similar content find your post.

7. **Keep the copy short.**
   There is a direct correlation between post copy and engagement levels on Facebook. Posts with zero to 70 characters get much higher levels of engagement. I suggest you don’t post more than 140 characters of copy.

8. **Analyze.**
   Test different times of day, and days of the week. Facebook’s engagement reports offer valuable data. Don’t ignore it! Check it out from time to time to see if a certain post did better than another and why.
   All of these tips are best practices for creating a well-crafted Facebook post. However, the most important piece of advice I can give is to simply create good content for your target audience.

A version of this article originally appeared on MelissaLeiter.com.

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A version of this article originally appeared on MelissaLeiter.com.
There is no shortage of advice in communications regarding how to deal with the media, although, as we often see on the news, people tend to forget the fundamentals. Per our Facebook page, PR News readers shared some of the best advice they have received in dealing with the media.

**PR Tips: Working with Media**

- Speak in sound bites by including the question in your answer during an interview.
- Jennifer Lynn Keller: Write down three things you want to say and practice!
- There’s no such thing as “off the record.”

- Be clear. Be memorable. Be done.
- Read twice, post once.
- Three people can keep a secret if two are dead.
- Treat your media contacts like your best clients.
- Be honest.

- Don’t ever make something up just for the sake of filling dead air.
- Skip the BS.
- Take a deep breath before speaking.
- Do good deeds and tell others.

**Brr! School Closing Messages. Never Much Fun!**

The recent record breaking frigid weather is more of an exception for a large portion of NSPRA members, but the process of closing schools for unsafe weather conditions often is misunderstood. Most parents do not realize that various staff members are checking or projecting road conditions, weather predictions, and more.

- Dear Parents,
  I don’t need to tell you that it has been and is expected to be unusually cold over the next few days. When temperatures plummet to the -20 degree range, bus travel for our students can be dangerous. If multiple buses were to have problems, we would be in a state of emergency trying to reach them. In light of that, please be listening and watching for school news about late starts or cancellations next week, particularly Monday and Tuesday. We will use our best discretion in deciding what is the safe course to take.
  Mark Egli, Superintendent and Brenda Dobson, Transportation Coordinator, Manson Northwest Webster Schools, Manson, IA

That’s why we liked the tone and style of two messages from superintendents in Iowa which NSPRA picked up from our Iowa’s chapter list serve. Both of these messages, published last week, peek behind the decision process veil to share some insight that goes into the decision. They show more of a human touch than just a bureaucratic decision. These were published last week:

- Dear Parents,
  We wanted to alert all of you to discussions we are having regarding Monday, January 6. As of now, the weather models are forecasting a high of -7 degrees on Monday with gusty winds which equates to wind chills in the neighborhood of -41 to -30 degrees. We’re discussing options now, but a decision won’t be made until Sunday afternoon. We are not considering a two-hour late start as that really doesn’t address the issue ... we will either have school or we won’t. We’re not as concerned about our buses functioning as much as kids walking to the end of their lane to be picked up or the kids who walk to school.
  Please check your emails and/or the normal radio/television stations Sunday to see whether we’re having school on Monday. Thanks!
  Dr. Kevin Fiene, Superintendent
  East Sac County Community Schools, Lakeview, IA.

  *by Richard Brownell 01/10/2014*