

# CHARTER **F**ocus



COLORADO LEAGUE of  
CHARTER SCHOOLS  
*focus on achievement*

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Director of Member Business Services

Cover artwork created by Tori Kelly, 2nd grader at Monument Academy in Monument, CO. Tori was the first place winner in Grades 1-2 division of the 2015 Colorado Charter School Art Contest. Tori received a \$250 college scholarship donated by S&S Worldwide, a League-endorsed school supplies company serving Colorado charter schools.



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# MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS JULY-AUGUST 2015

## **Webinar - College: The Most Financial Aid in 12 Steps**

*Hosted by Mountain Financial and Colorado*

*League of Charter Schools*

**Date:** Thursday, July 23

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

**Location:** Online/Webinar

**Cost:** Free

**Description:** This one hour webinar teaches parents:

- About the importance of EFC (Expected Family Contribution).
- How colleges use the EFC to determine financial aid packages.
- How strategies can be implemented to maximize aid offers regardless of income or asset levels.

Rather than teaching you how to save more money, this event seeks to teach you how to reduce the total out-of-pocket cost of college. Email [tkallevik@coloradoleague.org](mailto:tkallevik@coloradoleague.org) to register.

## **Safety in Secondary School Science Labs (SSSSL)**

*Supported by the Colorado League of Charter Schools*

*Presented by The Laboratory Safety Institute*

**Date:** Tuesday, August 4

**Time:** 8:00 AM – 3:30 PM

**Location:** STRIVE Prep – Sunnyside, 4735 Pecos Street, Denver CO 80211

**Cost:** One person: \$495, 2-4 people: \$420 (Groups of 5 or more contact LSI for special pricing).

**Description:** Safety in Secondary School Science Labs (SSSSL) is an intensive one-day seminar covering the fundamentals of lab safety and effective lab safety programs. Topics include: scope of the problem, accidents, legal aspects, emergency planning, chemical handling, chemical storage, biological and animal hazards, eye and face protection, hazardous waste management, electrical safety and safety program planning.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

You will LEARN how to avoid accidents and injuries with simple, practical low-cost solutions. You will DISCOVER how easy it is to avoid costly and time consuming litigation associated with negligence suits. You will receive the RESOURCES needed to understand the fundamentals of lab safety, to develop or improve your lab safety program, and to comply with the OSHA Lab standard.

## **Who Should Attend?**

- Science, Art & Technology Educators/ Researchers
- Environmental, Health & Safety Professionals
- Laboratory Assistants
- Department Heads
- Administrators

## **Registrants Receive:**

- Seminar Notebook
- Certificate of Participation
- 0.6 Continuing Education Units (CEU's),
- Graduate Credit eligibility & ABIH CM Points eligibility,
- Follow up questions & review
- Discounts/Coupons for future trainings, consultation services & products
- Complimentary 1-Year Electronic Membership

**Registration:** Please use the following code when registering: SP2015

To register: Email – [Register@LabSafetyInstitute.org](mailto:Register@LabSafetyInstitute.org)

Online at: [www.labsafetystore.org](http://www.labsafetystore.org)

Online Form: [www.labsafetyinstitute.org/registration](http://www.labsafetyinstitute.org/registration)

Fax: form to 508-647-0062

Call: 508-647-1900

## **Lunch and Learn: Understanding Pensions and Retirement**

*Hosted by Appreciation Financial and Colorado*

*League of Charter Schools*

**Date:** Friday, August 7

**Time:** 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

**Location:** Colorado League of Charter Schools' Training Center, 4201 E. Yale Avenue, Denver, CO 80222

**Cost:** League Members - Free | Non-Members: \$25 per person. Lunch will be provided.

**Description:** Trying to provide more value to your staff? Please attend this informational lunch and learn on how to help your teachers, faculty, and staff be better prepared for retirement. Learn how to interpret PERA pensions, how it impacts social security, and how basic retirement vehicles (401(k), 403(b), and 457) will help everyone fill in the income gap in the PERA Pension. During this event you will learn: 1) How to calculate PERA Pensions; 2) How to purchase service credits and unused time; and 3) About 403(b) options that have minimal costs to charter schools.

**Registration Deadline:** August 5.

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# WHY MARKETING IS AN INVESTMENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

BY LISA RELOU

In public education, nobody's seeking to make a profit, but your school's budget is designed to offer students a holistic, comprehensive and quality academic experience. To deliver that, you need as many students as you have seats. If you are even a few students short of budget projections that can mean the difference between offering two fifth grade classrooms or three. It can hinder the ability offer the exploratory experiences that colleges want to see on student transcripts or even the capacity to support students in applying to college. All of these things are important to students and their parents and so they are important to you.

The saying "If we build it, they will come," was quite appropriately proclaimed in a Hollywood-constructed field of dreams. But there are no Hollywood endings here. You have to work at getting families to enroll in your school. So when you are next approached by your school principal or communications person for a marketing budget, think of it as an investment you can't afford not to make. But just like any investment there are smart ways to invest and there are many ways to lose money.

To make sure your investments are the former and not the latter it's critical that you don't just let marketing happen to you; you must take control of your school's marketing efforts. Don't get caught up in an endless cycle of addressing one-off needs—A brochure here, a mailing piece there—make sure there is a year-long strategy that approaches marketing in an intentional way, designed to meet specific goals.

So, before you get out your checkbook, define those goals by answering questions like:

- 1 How many students do we need to attract and in what grade-levels?
- 2 What are we trying to achieve—an immediate boost in enrollment, long-term buy-in and brand awareness or both?

When you do get out the checkbook, start with the end in mind. To decide how much to spend on marketing, determine how many kids you need to bring into

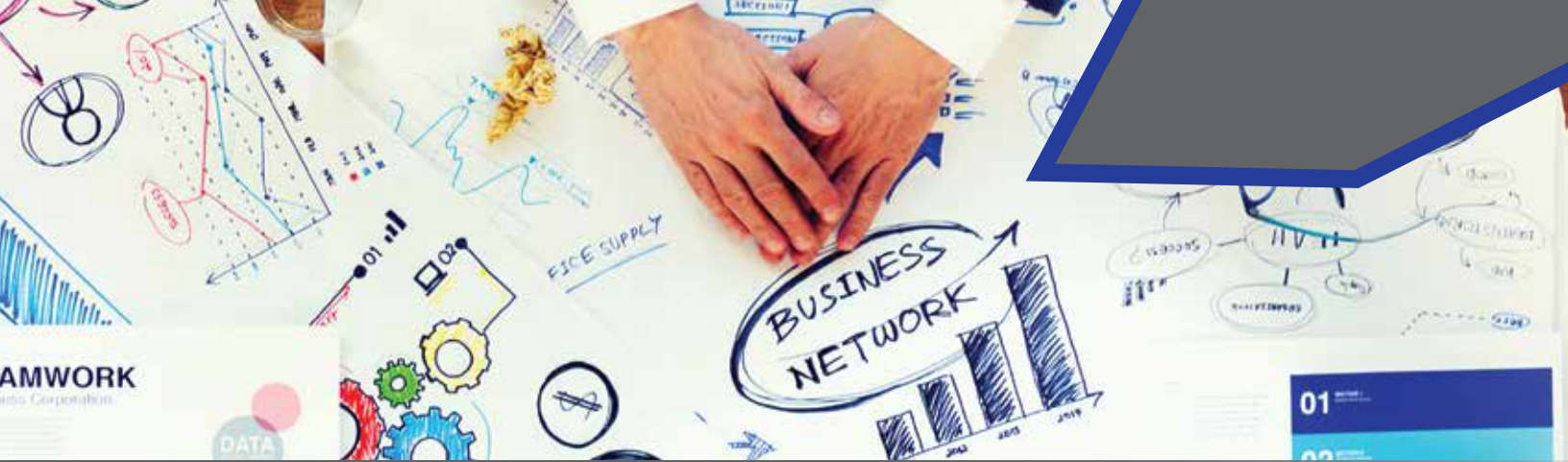
the school and place a per-pupil dollar value on that. Then ask yourself: *What is a satisfactory return on investment for bringing in 5, 10, 30 kids?* Just remember, it takes money to make money.

As you start to develop a marketing strategy around your budget, it's easy to get distracted by bright shiny objects like branded pens and expensive video productions. The question is: *What should you spend marketing dollars on?* To answer that question you have to acknowledge that schools aren't just any old product. Even when they aren't technically paying for it, there's no bigger investment a parent will make in their child's future than his/her education. Parents want assurances and don't expect them to take your word for it. Even if you are a network of schools trying to increase your overall brand awareness, television ads, radio spots and billboards are likely an overreach and will have minimal impact. They may spark interest, but they won't close the deal.

What will close the deal? A handshake. A conversation across the fence or in the condiments aisle at the grocery store. Word of mouth will be your highest yield marketing strategy. That said, it's not fool proof. When you count on others to deliver your message, you have to help them do it.

If you're thinking to yourself, "This sounds great! We don't need to spend any actual money if it's all about word of mouth." Not so fast. Remember, it takes money to make money. So let's circle back to *what* to spend your time and money on. In this order, I recommend focusing on:

- 1 Developing consistent and compelling messages about your school. It can be challenging to promote yourself, so you might hire some support to create these messages.
- 2 Training your ambassadors (staff, students, parents, community members) on how to use those messages. Not everyone is a born salesman.
- 3 A visual identity to match your verbal one. This includes a high quality, professional look and feel; more specifically a logo, templates (letters, PowerPoint presentation) and style guide.



You have to work at getting families to enroll in your school. So when you are next approached by your school principal or communications person for a marketing budget, think of it as an investment you can't afford not to make.

**4** On-hand materials that you can use to greet people at their door and yours.

**5** Grassroots tactics like advertising in your neighborhood newspaper, flyering local establishments and presenting to nearby neighborhood associations.

Is it possible to throw a great marketing party just to have no one show up? Of course and here's why. If you don't have a quality product to sell, it won't. Period. Even if you get people to sign up, they aren't likely to stay long.

Second, choosing a school can be as much or more of an emotional choice than an intellectual one. Parents get a feeling when they walk in the door. But if you think you can't influence that feeling, you're wrong.

Consider the following:

**1** How are people greeted when they walk in the door?


**2** Is your front-line staff equipped and ready with highlights about your school and are those the highlights you want them to share?

**3** How do you handle requests to observe classrooms and meet teachers or the school leader?

Third, don't just hope families will enroll, actively pursue them. Be prepared to follow-up with inquiries and don't forget to ask your currently enrolled families to stay. If you build it and market it in the right way, they will come. Building a brand and establishing a reputation in a community takes time, but it can be accelerated by consistent messaging, sweat equity by your school's ambassadors and an effective marketing strategy. So take one more look at next year's budget and put in an allocation for marketing. It's an investment that will pay off.

**FOCUS**

*Lisa Relou is the former Director of Internal Communications and Marketing for Denver Public Schools and has 15 years of experience marketing schools in Colorado. She is currently a strategic consultant in the field of education reform and philanthropy and specializes in collaborating with leaders and organizations to tell their story. For information contact lisa.relou@gmail.com.*




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# USING AN APP TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENTS

BY EVAN DECHTMAN, BLUETREEAPPS

Look around you, chances are high that your co-worker, spouse, son, daughter, mother and father have a smartphone. And chances are they are using their smartphone as the primary way to access the internet. Over 60% of all internet traffic comes from mobile devices, so it's no wonder that schools and organizations alike are scrambling to create a mobile presence.

**B**ecause of the pervasiveness of smartphones and apps today, you can't ignore that there is an enormous opportunity to connect and reach your school's parents and greater community in a very effective and meaningful way. One of the best ways is to communicate through Push Notifications. A Push Notification is simply a way to send a message to a smartphone. These messages can be weather notifications, event reminders or emergency messages. In addition to push notifications, a school app can combine and integrate the most important pieces of information a school needs to communicate. Including modules like: Calendars, News, Athletics, Staff Directories, Supply lists, Bell and Bus Schedules and many more. Imagine, all this information right in your pocket!

## Isn't a website enough?

True, most schools have websites, but the number of mobile users is skyrocketing – and those same mobile users are using their smartphones as primary devices to access the Internet now. Have you checked

to see if your school website is mobile ready? If not, Google will penalize you for not having a mobile ready website. However, is a mobile website enough? The short answer is no. The reason why is with a mobile website, you do not have the ability to create and communicate effectively with your parents through Push Notifications. While a mobile website is helpful, a native app for iOS or Android phones allows you to send Push Notifications.

## Why are Push Notifications so important and are they effective?

One of our clients, *Banning Lewis Ranch Academy*, for example, uses push notifications to deliver timely messages to parents. Alerting parents of impending school and road closures that could impact their daily routine. Go ahead; take action to usher in this effective parent communication tool. **COEUS**

*Evan Dechtman is with BlueTree Apps.  
www.bluetreeapps.com*





Connect

## Banning Lewis Ranch Academy



Banning Lewis Ranch Academy (BLRA) in Colorado Springs, CO has about 750 students and about 800 app downloads. BLRA uses the app to send weather alerts, news, schedule changes, and event reminders and links the notifications to web pages.

Sent on July 7,  
School Supply Lists are up and ready for you.



Push Notification Increases Website Traffic to 300%. Traffic jumps from 225 to 800.

Download and see for yourself!

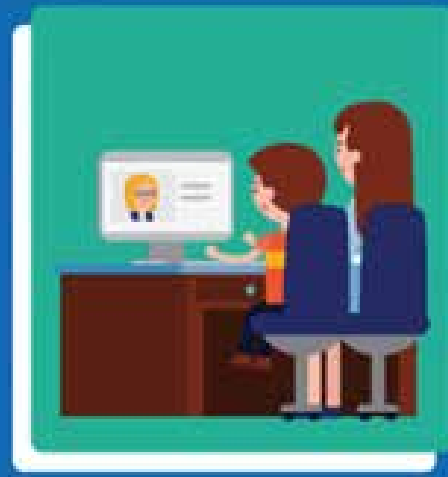
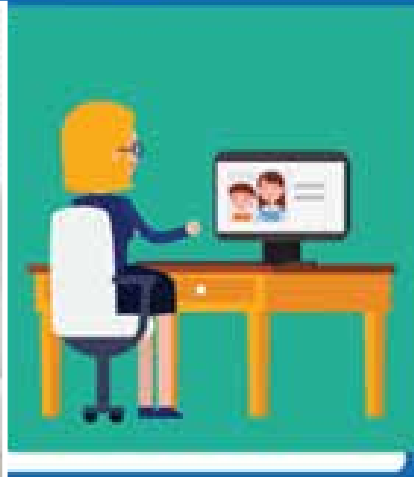


## Sending a Push Notification

- Takes under 2 minutes and can replace expensive robo call and text messaging systems
- Can link message to webpage
- Messages are delivered instantly
- Messages archive in Push Notification center for future reference

# ENGAGING PARENTS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES

BY BRANDY VASQUEZ



**T**he world of communication is ever changing. Once upon a time the best form of communication was landlines, newspapers, and face-to-face conversations. In today's world the leading form of communication is social media.

Social media is a term for online engagement that includes platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, but it also relates to online engagement via websites, mobile phones, apps, and email. There are literally millions of online platforms and engagement tools to choose from. So how should a charter school use social media to engage parents in school activities, encourage enrollment, and to keep families up-to-date on school happenings?

Unfortunately, social media channels (i.e. Facebook) have not always been kind to the public education community. Some administrators fear utilizing social media to engage parents because they're not sure how to handle potential negative posts about the school on a public forum. But this does not mean using social media for parent engagement is completely out of the question. In fact, it should be just the opposite. More and more parents are using social media as their number one source of communication and expect to be able to use it to stay abreast of school news and activities.

Many schools still create bright colored paper fliers, stuff them in the student's take-home folder, and hope they makes their way to parents. But is this really the most effective avenue of communication? First, colored paper and ink can be costly. Second, the fliers may or may not make it home to parents. And finally, if parents do receive the fliers, they may put them aside intending to read them later, but never getting around to it.

# Embrace the social media era and learn to effectively connect with parents. Use these tips to help create an easy and friendly communication strategy that will ensure better engagement with your school's families.

Why not use a strategy that engages the parent on a personal level and allows the school to track whether or not the information has been opened and read. Email platforms such as Constant Contact and social media channels include a variety of tracking and reporting tools.

Embrace the social media era and learn to effectively connect with parents. Use these tips to help create an easy and friendly communication strategy that will ensure better engagement with your school's families.

**1** **Ask parents how they would like to receive information:** Ask parents how they prefer to receive information from school.

Communicating via parents' preferred channels means better communication. Does this mean that various forms of communication must be used? Yes, but it's better to over-communicate versus under-communicate.

**2** **Create various groups and channels in social media for upcoming events, newsletters, and discussions:** Parents may or may not see the creative talent and hard work that you put into the brightly colored flyer that now sits crumpled up at the bottom of their child's backpack. But they will likely see school posts on social media outlets such as Facebook and Pinterest. Pinterest is a highly engaging platform (mainly for moms) that allows creative ideas, plans, parties, fundraisers, homework assignments, and activities to flow between the school and its families. Parents can follow Pinterest dashboards and receive the latest updates right from their phone. Teachers can create group chats on Facebook for homework related topics and questions, tutoring, meetings, and more. Google+ Hangouts or Skype are wonderful for face-to-face group discussions, study sessions, and activities. This allows people the

flexibility of meeting at various times when school hours are not accessible.

**3** **Coordinate activities, call-to-action events, and fundraisers via social media outlets:** Social media is a powerful method for generating interest and participation in volunteer and fundraising efforts. There are a plethora of free online signup sheets that are easily accessed and shared via Facebook, Twitter, email, and class blogs. Consider adding Google calendar or Facebook events to remind parents and students of upcoming activities. Schools can also use crowdfunding sites like DonorsChoose.org to generate additional means of cash flow without having to sell thousands of candy bars.

**4** **Use social media to engage and respond to negative comments and concerns:** Dealing with confrontation can be uncomfortable and it can run rampant on social media sites. A school's Facebook page could receive negative posts from upset parents. But believe it or not, using social media as a listening device is quite powerful and important. This is a great way to quickly learn about issues brewing at your school. Try to avoid the urge to air dirty laundry or get into an argument via a social media forum, but allow parents to express concerns then come up with solutions to move past the negative tension and create positive outcomes. Social media allows the "quiet" parent to express concerns in a way he or she is most comfortable. However, if questions and/or concerns are raised on your school's social media site, someone MUST monitor the page and answer questions and concerns in a timely fashion. The worst thing a school can do is create a forum or email, inform the parents, and never respond to posts. This will only make matters worse.

**5** **Utilize apps:** Using apps is a great way to reach families right on the smart phone that they are already using for social engagement.

- A. **"Celly" Can Facilitate Parent/School Communication** – "Celly turns classrooms, teams, and schools into **safe, private communication networks**. Schools around the world are using Celly for a variety of scenarios including afterschool homework help, classroom mentoring, and parent-teacher collaboration."
- B. **"Homeroom"** – This new app allows teachers to create photo albums for parents.
- C. **"Edmodo"** – Allows parents to track their child's work and learn how they can help meet their goals.
- D. **"Custom Apps"** – consider a custom app specific to your school that contains links to newsletter archives and allows for push notifications of more urgent messages. The Colorado League of Charter Schools has relationships with vendors who can create custom apps and the cost of this type of solution is often much lower than you might think.

Understanding social communication is key to building stronger relationships and increasing parental involvement in your school. By allowing the parent to choose their preferred method of engagement like Facebook, email, or text message shows the effort and eagerness for partnership. No longer should a parent miss parent teacher conferences or information because of a misplaced flyer. **FOCUS**

*Brandy Vasquez is the President of New Image Consulting, a marketing consulting firm that builds businesses from start to finish using both new age and traditional methods. [www.newimageconsultingcs.com](http://www.newimageconsultingcs.com).*

# Colorado League of Charter Schools Preferred Service Providers

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www.coloradosupport.com

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(913) 909-0809 (cell)  
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www.talentedk12.com

## Teacher Professional Association



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### COMMUNITY COMPUTER CONNECTION

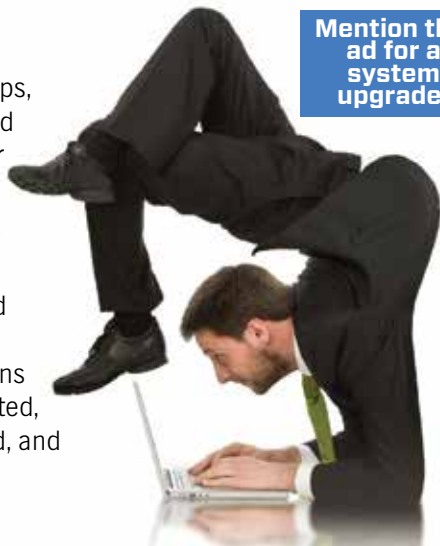
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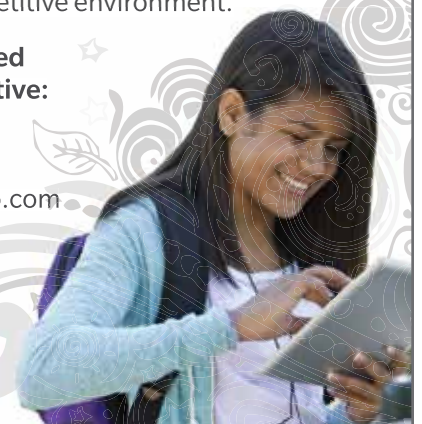
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# 5

## WAYS TO ENHANCE THE TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS VIA A TALENT MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM

BY TALENTED

The teacher evaluation process can be an important tool for increasing teacher effectiveness and accountability, but because it involves a variety of school employees, including operations, boards, school leaders, instructional coaches and teachers themselves, the process can be burdensome. Many charter schools across the country are currently searching for ways to manage the teacher evaluation process in an easy, efficient and cost-effective way. Choosing to operationalize the process with a technology platform can make everyone's role in the process run more smoothly, and can boost the real desired outcomes: improved teaching that leads to improved student achievement.

Below are five ways that implementing a talent management technology platform can help enhance the process of teacher supervision:

### 1 Technology strengthens communication and collaboration

Teacher supervision, at its core, involves taking observations, evidence, opinions and input from a variety of stakeholders to arrive at a clear and reliable measure of instructional performance. It's vital that all parties involved are working together and share a unified vision. A talent management technology platform can help facilitate meaningful communication and rich collaboration to ensure school leaders, instructional coaches and teachers are all operating in unison.

This is particularly important during the goal-setting process. Previous teaching metrics are shared and ideas for growth are generated so that an instructional goal can be written. Increasing collaboration with an on-demand technology platform promotes transparent and ambitious goals for teachers — goals that have universal, enthusiastic buy-in. This also allows mentors and instructional

coaches to share an agreed upon vision for success, which allows them to provide necessary guidance and support to new teachers.

### 2 Technology streamlines formative and summative observations

Students perform best when expectations for success are consistent and clearly stated. Teachers perform in much the same way. When the purpose of an observation is clear and consistent, along with the desired potential outcomes, expectations for success are much more likely to be met. Managing the content and the processes of formal and informal observations in an easy-to-use technology platform will help maintain necessary consistency.

Consistency also helps principals focus on collecting teacher and student evidence during an observation. Powering teacher observations in a technology platform and training staff on its use are ways to prevent bias from creeping in to an observer's report. Objectivity anchors a performance observation, and discussions about instruction should be a two-way street. This back-and-forth dialogue between the observer and the teacher lies at the heart of an exemplary teacher supervision process.

### 3 Technology helps teachers and principals focus on improvement

While the teacher supervision process ultimately leads to a summative performance evaluation, there are many chances throughout the year to make incremental improvements. Data gathered in a technology platform during formative observations can be used to make critical decisions at the school and network level. School leaders can use formative data to craft school-wide professional development plans that are meaningful and energizing, and can



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make better decisions when pairing teachers with a mentor or assigning grade- and content-level leadership roles.

Using the teacher performance goals set at the beginning of the school year, formative observation data can be used to track a teacher's progress. Formative data also can be used to adjust the goal during the school year, if necessary. This longitudinal data prepares principals to have critical conversations in a supportive manner, so that all stakeholders can stay focused on improvement and teachers can continue working on their targeted growth areas.

#### **4** Technology boosts compliance with state regulations

Because teacher evaluations are often directed by policy rules and legislative regulations, it is critical that the data be handled in a secure and carefully managed platform. Sending spreadsheets through email is impractical, and popular online file-sharing programs aren't encrypted well enough to handle such important staff information. A secure, cloud-based technology platform designed specifically for teacher supervision processes eliminates the possibility that mandated documentation is lost, mishandled or destroyed. Also, the ability to add legal digital signatures that are dated and time-stamped ensures defensibility.

Technology can help charter schools manage the teacher supervision process more easily and with fewer dedicated resources. Ensuring 100% summative evaluation completion can be done in seconds with an online report, rather than in hours collecting and combining spreadsheet updates. The content of the evaluations can also be protected, such as the specific and un-editable calculations by which teacher performance scores are determined. With a

technology platform managing this process on behalf of the principals, the possibility of errors is virtually eliminated.

#### **5** Technology maintains data integrity

Keeping data secure is crucial, and keeping data correct is equally important. If teacher performance data are housed in spreadsheets that are passed around for review and for submission, there is vulnerability to editing, erasure or omission. Leveraging a cloud-based platform ensures that data are entered and editable by the correct person, and data are saved and stored accurately every step of the way. This gives school leaders the peace of mind knowing that performance data submitted periodically and at the end of the school year are valid and reliable.

Because so many important school decisions are made using teacher performance data – contract renewals, pay increase determinations, building and grade-level assignments, and professional development programming to name a few – there can be no room for error. Adopting a technology platform designed for supporting and protecting teacher performance data not only mitigates the potential for human error, it also helps schools make better decisions.

Managing the teacher supervision process with TalentEd Perform provides numerous benefits to all stakeholders, including teachers, principals, instructional coaches, and operations personnel. **TOEUS**

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# CRITICAL FACTORS TO A SUCCESSFUL TECH IMPLEMENTATION

BY AGATA TWAROWSKA



**W**ith numerous high-profile failed technology implementations covered widely by the press, choosing the right classroom technology, and the best strategy for implementing it, can be a daunting challenge for any school. The comprehensive Project RED study examined thousands of districts and found four critical components (from a larger list of nine) that were most common in the success stories. We have reexamined these key factors, and applied them to recent examples of success.

## 1. Involvement in Intervention Classes

In terms of biggest bang for the buck, intervention classes seem to be the best investment. Project RED found that using technology in intervention classes was the single most significant factor in improving both high-stakes test scores and discipline rates. Many recent examples hint that it may not take much investment in this area to see an immediate benefit. A recent *THE Journal* article described promising research results from Stanford University that studied the effect of using two types of 45-minute online interventions. The study concluded:

*“The results showed that among students at risk for dropping out (one-third of the sample), both interventions raised grade-point averages and increased the rate at which the students performed satisfactorily in each course by 6.4 percentage points.”*

In a guest column for *edtech digest*, Candace Hall outlines the innovative intervention program she developed at the Fleetwood Area School District. She writes:

*Our district has seen technology work in the classroom, but we still have students in our intervention program who struggle. Working directly with the intervention program, I knew we needed to find a way to get technology to work for these students as well.*

She settled on a program that included mobile surveys (using cell phones in class), creating custom music video parodies and “Study Island”, a web-based program built around Common Core State Standards. The results have been impressive:

*Our students started off the year at 69 percent proficient on the PSSA in math and reading. By the end of the year, they were 96 percent proficient in both... The students who were being pulled out of regular class for special intervention are now back in class with their peers, and are learning in a way that makes sense to them. Bringing this technology into our school was a great decision.*

## 2. Change Management Leadership by Principal

We recently spoke with Matt Carlton, Principal at Landmark Academy at Reunion in Commerce City, Colorado. Matt saw the importance of introducing kindergarten students to technology to better prepare them for state testing in the third grade. He was heavily involved with teachers as they developed ways to familiarize students with the testing concept and improve the learning experience for the kids. As a result, MAP testing scores have improved significantly, and the school is waiting to see the impact on PARCC scores from this year’s testing.

The importance of effective leadership from the principal on technology implementations is clearly emphasized in the Learning from Leadership Project’s study of over 180 school districts. The report’s conclusion states:

*“We have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership.”*

Principals are essential to these efforts, and they need to create ways for teachers to get trained continuously in technology, freely exchanging hard earned firsthand knowledge of what works and what doesn’t. Without this, each teacher is left to figure it all

out on their own, and the chance for a successful implementation plummets.

## 3. Online Collaboration

Harvard Business School recently published an article reviewing how collaboration affected its own online education program. They made a couple of observations that would apply to any school. First, allowing students to ask and answer one another’s questions, without teacher intervention, forges trust in the group. *“Indeed, the power of collaboration comes when you trust the group so that they are strongly encouraged — forced, even — to resolve problems on their own. Let an expert intervene, and you could undermine collaboration itself.”*

The second observation is that when peers are helping peers, a different participation emerges. Women were twice as likely as men to ask and answer peer questions, a reversal of participation rates in traditional classrooms. Something in the collaboration process itself seems to drive a change in engagement.

A recent study conducted by a researcher at Northwestern University found that kindergartners who shared an iPad in class scored a remarkable 30 points higher on the STAR Assessment than either students with no iPads or



students using their own iPad. As the author states, “It’s the collaborative learning around the technology that made the difference, not just the collaboration in and of itself.” While generalizing from one small study is not advisable, the author did control for differences in demographics, observed teacher quality and self-reported pedagogical beliefs among other factors. At a minimum it suggests that creating collaborative environments through technology may unlock greater achievement gains than simply adding more technology to a classroom.

#### 4. Integration with Core Subject

Oakland Unity High School, a four-year public charter high school in Oakland, California was looking for a way to use technology to not only improve math performance, but also to alter study habits and incorporating the Khan system worked towards both goals. Since the math exercises are randomly generated, students cannot copy from other students. Management reports allowed the teachers to track student effort and progress, tailoring their instruction where it was needed most.

The results have been astounding, as their online report “Are We Asking the Right Questions” documents. In one year, the average mean on the most challenging test of the year doubled. In fact, the lowest-effort group that used Khan (those completing the fewest exercises and turning in the least homework) outperformed the entire class average of the previous year by double digits. The report concludes: “This is a clear example of a student “repairing” the bad habits that were preventing his learning. We believe that this approach is resulting in a fundamental change in student character – with responsibility replacing apathy and effort replacing laziness.”

#### Ignoring the Key Factors

In a scathing Hechinger Report article entitled “Why a New Jersey school district decided giving laptops to students is a terrible idea”, we see what can happen when these keys are

not applied. The article from last year chronicles the severe challenges faced by the Hoboken School District.

Technology was not integrated into the core or intervention classes. From the article:  
*Michael Ranieri, a junior at Hoboken’s high school, aspires to be an electrical engineer. He said when he did use the computers for school work, it was mostly for word processing and Internet browsing. He would write an essay on the laptop for English class, for example, or research information using Google.*

Principal-led professional development was not provided:  
*Superintendent Toback admits that teachers weren’t given enough training on how to use the computers for instruction. Teachers complained that their teenage students were too distracted by their computer screens to pay attention to the lesson in the classroom.*

Online collaboration was also missing:  
*“We didn’t really do much on the computer,” said Ranieri. “So we kind of just did games to mess around when we had free time. I remember really big was Crazy Taxis that we used play. If we found solitaire on line, we used to play it.”*

Ignoring any one, or worse, a combination of the four key factors can doom a technology implementation. The last thing any administrator wants is to provide very expensive paperweights / solitaire games to students, which points to the need for careful planning based on understanding the school’s or district’s starting point and what key areas can be improved by implementing technology.

#### Avoiding the Common Pitfalls

Reviewing resources like Project RED and other meta-studies permits us to learn through the trial and errors of others. The report’s critical factors are a good first step in planning any implementation. Using technology in intervention classes allows students to find a pace and style of instruction that fits their needs. It can also reengage students that have fallen behind and motivate them to continue. According to Project RED, this should be the first priority.

A process that is led by the principal and includes monthly professional development and collaboration is another “must-have”. Successful programs all share experiences and lessons learned between educators, and manage the process through an effective principal.

Technology that provides an engaging collaborative platform for students is more important than simply having each student independently work with an application. To gain the maximum benefit, this collaboration needs to happen on a daily basis, not sporadically or as an occasional change of pace.

Without integrating technology fully into the core curriculum, the chances of changing behavior and altering

performance are greatly reduced. Successful programs place technology at the core of this design process rather than treating it as a peripheral factor.

While the high-profile failures of school technology implementations are certainly easily found, there are common denominators to finding the path that will work for your specific situation. Following a few simple lessons learned will increase the odds that you can achieve some of the same results the success stories listed above have gained, without risking becoming the next cautionary tale. **EOBUS**

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	NetSupport	sales@netsupport-inc.com	(770)205-4456	www.netsupportschool.com
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This directory is an easily accessible source of vendors who support Colorado charter schools and want to help you succeed. We encourage you to support all of our participating vendors as you search for products and services. This directory is not an endorsement by the Colorado League of Charter Schools of any particular vendor unless specifically stated. In choosing any vendor, the League recommends that schools refer to applicable policies on competitive bidding, check references, and contact the League if additional information is needed. View the Colorado Charter Marketplace online at [cochartermarketplace.org](http://cochartermarketplace.org).



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# UTILIZING A CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TO MINIMIZE THE COSTS OF NEGATIVE PUBLICITY

BY STACY RADER

We've all heard the saying, "there's no such thing as bad press."

**T**his is far from true. Not only is bad press truly bad, one negative media story can potentially cost your school big in attorney's fees, communications consulting fees, as well as lost per-pupil revenue dollars.

In the past year alone, over 20 Colorado charter schools battled negative media stories. Some of those schools have reported losing anywhere from 17 to 100 students as a result of the bad press.

When it comes to negative media, schools face a real challenge and honestly are at a disadvantage.

For example, if a parent goes to the media with a student related complaint about the school, the school can only say so much to defend itself without breaking student privacy laws. Thus a school's first instinct is to ignore the media and hope the issue will go away. The problem: as soon as the media says you were unavailable or unwilling to comment, the school becomes the bad guy in the public eye. So what is a school leader to do?

All is not lost. With some pre-planning and proper messaging, your school can minimize the damage and expenses created by a crisis communications situation and get back to what is most important – educating students.

## Before a Crisis

In the public school world, it's inevitable. Chances are your school will face a communications crisis at

least once during the school's lifespan. It's best to be as prepared as possible for a potential crisis before it happens. Here are a few ways to plan ahead.

### 1. Identify Your Crisis Team

Determine, in advance, who you will convene during a crisis. This team needs to be willing to respond rapidly and should include, at a minimum:

- School's Attorney
- School's Communications Director (or the League's Communications Director)
- School Administrator
- School Board President

### 2. Identify your organization's primary and backup media spokesperson

Designate a primary and backup media spokesperson. This should be someone who is comfortable talking to the media and who will stay on message. Ideally this is your school's administrator or communications person. It could also be your board president.

Once your spokespeople are identified, consider sending them to media training.

Then, be sure that the rest of your staff and faculty understand that all media inquiries should go through the media spokesperson(s). Train your front desk staff how to answer media calls. This includes getting basic information from the media, including name and phone number and asking what their deadline is, then passing the message along to the school's spokesperson immediately. Front desk staff should never attempt to answer media questions or feel pressured to provide information.

### 3. Compile Critical Information into a Crisis Communications Binder

Create a crisis communications binder filled with contact information that you may need during

a crisis. This should include names and contact information for the following:

- School's Crisis Team with Home/Cell Phone Numbers
- School's Board List with Home/Cell Phone Numbers
- School's Full Staff List with Home/Cell Phone Numbers
- School's Attorney with Office/Cell Phone Numbers
- School's Authorizer (contact the authorizer in advance to find out who the point person is for a crisis communications situation)
- Local Media Outlets
- Law Enforcement
- Local Hospitals or Medical Centers

Be sure to keep one copy of this binder onsite and another offsite in the case that the crisis is something that would close access to the school, i.e. fire, flood, tornado.

### 4. Spot Red Flags and Address them Early On

If a situation is brewing at your school that you think could turn into a legal or media crisis, take action early on. Convene your crisis communications team, call your school's attorney and contact the League's communications department. It's never too early to discuss necessary messaging and a game plan even if you never end up using it. It's better to be safe than sorry.

## During a Crisis

If you find yourself in the midst of a crisis before you've had a chance to prepare – don't despair. Here are some important steps to take.

### 1. Determine messaging

You may first find out about the crisis when you receive a media phone call. Be sure that your front

Continued on page 22

Failure to respond to the media or rushing to send a poorly worded message can cause the situation to snowball out of control quickly. And that can cost your school unforeseen attorney's fees, communications consulting fees and even PPR if families decide to leave in response to the bad press.

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desk staff is trained to ask a reporter what their deadline is and to pass the message along to the school's administrator, communications director, or media spokesperson immediately.

Then either convene your crisis team or call the Colorado League of Charter Schools' communications department for assistance in crafting messaging. If the situation is related to a personnel or student issue, then it may be best to contact your school's attorney first to determine what information can be shared with the media.

## 2. Be careful what you put in writing

During a crisis it's best to contact members of your crisis team via phone versus by email or text. Especially in a potential legal situation – anything you put in writing can be used against you later. If you want to talk through a communications response – contact your attorney, the League, board president, etc. via phone if at all possible.

## 3. Consider your audiences

Depending on the crisis, you may need to get messaging out to your school's audiences sooner rather than later. Again, ask your school's attorney and the League's communications department for assistance with messaging. Consider which audiences need to know and how much they need to know. Potential audiences include: school parents, students involved, staff/faculty, your board, and your authorizer. Keep in mind that any message you send to parents will likely get forwarded to the media... so be transparent but careful. Again, what you say could be used against you later in court or in the media.

## 4. Appoint a spokesperson

If you haven't already, be sure to appoint a spokesperson for your school. You will need someone who can talk to the media and stay on message. Also determine who will act as the point of contact for families and staff that may have questions

or concerns. In many cases the administrator can be the spokesperson for both scenarios. However, in a case where the administrator is named in a potential legal situation, then having a board member or other school leader might be a better choice. This is a good question to run by your attorney and/or the Colorado League of Charter Schools' communications department.

## 5. Take control of the message

Many times it's better to be proactive with messaging and not wait to be on the defense. If the media is calling – get back to them in a timely manner (within their deadline). Then be prepared to get messaging out to your school's families and staff. You may be limited in what you can say, however it's better to be as transparent as possible versus having your school's families find out about the crisis via the media.

In addition, it's best to have your spokesperson onsite at the school and available to talk to reporters via phone or in person. If the media cannot reach anyone for comment, they could show up at your school. If you don't talk to them, someone else, i.e. an unhappy parent or student likely will.

These are just a few steps and tips that can be utilized during a crisis communications situation. However, every scenario is unique. It's best to have a rapid response team that you can contact for advice that, at a minimum, includes your school's attorney and the Colorado League of Charter Schools' communications department.

Crisis communications situations must be handled swiftly and carefully. Failure to respond to the media or rushing to send a poorly worded message can cause the situation to snowball out of control quickly. And that can cost your school unforeseen attorney's fees, communications consulting fees and even PPR if families decide to leave in response to the bad press.

If your school is a member of the Colorado League of Charter Schools, we are here to provide guidance to you in times of crisis. Please contact Stacy Rader, Director of Communications at the League at 303-989-5356, ext. 112 or [srader@coloradoleague.org](mailto:srader@coloradoleague.org) if you are in crisis or fear bad press is looming. We are here to help. **COLEUS**

*Stacy Rader is the Director of Communications at the Colorado League of Charter Schools, [www.coloradoleague.org](http://www.coloradoleague.org).*

## Top 10 Mistakes to Avoid in a Crisis

1. Not calling the CO League of Charter Schools for assistance!
2. Underestimating the power of parents.
3. Not returning a reporter's phone call.
4. Complaining to a reporter or their editor about a story in an emotional way.
5. Becoming defensive or saying "no comment".
6. Coming across as unsympathetic or arrogant.
7. Refusing to provide open-records information upon request.
8. Refusing reporters' access to your school.
9. Providing the media with sensitive/protected student information.
10. Finger-pointing/placing blame on parents or students.

# A CHALLENGE TO GROWING THE CHARTER SECTOR

BY DEVYN HUMPHREY



In the last 15 years, since the first charter school was founded, over 6,000 new charter schools have been created, and between the 2007-08 and 2013-14, school year student enrollment doubled from 1.2 to 2.5 million. Yet despite the fact that the number of schools has grown and demand has increased, charters make up less than 6% of schools nationwide<sup>1</sup>. So why aren't the numbers larger given the attention paid to burgeoning admissions' wait lists? Advocates will likely name politics (i.e. teacher's unions, lobbyists and school boards) as the major obstacle to the growth of the sector, but one less frequently discussed challenge is student enrollment.

When the demand for space in a school is greater than the number of seats available, charter schools are required to hold lotteries. Those not admitted are placed on wait lists. The media has captured images of these wait listed families crying over the fate of their child's education. These experiences are then generalized and people believe that all charters have wait lists but in fact, many do not. The unspoken truth is that in many cities around the country there are charter schools that are desperate to find students to fill empty seats. In our 10 years of advising charter schools, we have found that many well-intentioned school operators were too busy thinking about charter approval, facilities and teacher recruitment to recognize that enrollment, more so than academic performance, is a leading indicator of whether the school will be financially stable and ultimately renewed by its authorizers. And it is not just enrollment, but *full enrollment*, meaning seats are filled to capacity, that authorizers, board members, funders, elected officials and even the media want to see. Our team has seen schools overlook enrollment in its early days, then desperately scramble to identify students and fall short of enrollment targets.

Even when school teams expend a lot of energy and resources to recruit students and meet their targets, they are under enrolled the following year. That is typically when Yardstick is called for support. Below are five key enrollment related recommendations for all school leaders to think about. These recommendations are part of Yardstick's comprehensive recruitment and enrollment training.

## 1. You should not plan to outsource your student recruitment efforts.

For the reasons mentioned above, enrollment is critically important to the operation of any school. Most charter schools cannot afford to pay to an outside

team do the type of work that is necessary to recruit students on an annual basis. Instead of outsourcing, focus on building your team's internal capacity to do the work. Having an organization supplement your team's efforts is fine but recruitment is ultimately the work of the school.

## 2. Student recruitment is not seasonal, it is a year-round process.

Recruiting students should be planned and budgeted for annually. Schools should constantly be on the hunt for new students even if it is just to maintain an active wait list in the event that students transfer mid-year. Further, at minimum for schools enrolling one new class of students each year, making families and communities aware of the fact that you have openings in the off-season ensures you can focus on enrollment and retention during the enrollment season.

## 3. Everyone in the school is a recruiter.

Student recruitment should not just be on the mind of the school's community outreach coordinator; the *entire* school staff can and should be involved. Schools often overlook the fact that all members of the school staff have networks of families and friends who may be interested in enrolling. Be sure to arm your entire staff with the information they need to serve as a recruiter. You never know when a prospective student may approach a member of your staff while they are in church or at the gym.

## 4. Know thy self.

What makes your school special/different? Schools must recognize their strengths and weaknesses. When prospective families approach a school, each member of the school team must be equipped with at least three talking points to share with prospective parents. Schools are not one size fits all. Parents are informed consumers and schools should be equally informed on what they have to offer.

## 5. Know the competition.

If students are not enrolled in your school, they are enrolled somewhere else. It is important for you to know where and why. This is particularly true for schools that are within an easy commuting distance of your school. If your school is under-enrolled because families are opting to attend the school down the street that does not offer robotics or fine arts while your school does, you should know that. Schools must understand what families want, what the competition is able to offer and how your school can fill any voids.

The above recommendations, while important, are just a snapshot of what it takes to plan a winning student recruitment strategy to ensure full enrollment. The Yardstick team is happy to advise your school on how to create a comprehensive strategy to utilize year after year. **YARDSTICK**

*Devyn Humphrey is a Senior Consultant at Yardstick Learning. [www.yardsticklearning.com](http://www.yardsticklearning.com).*

<sup>1</sup>National Alliance for Public Charter Schools - <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/>.



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