

8 Failsafe Ways to Kill Support in the Community

(from National School Boards Association, copyright 1973)

- 1.....**School secretaries:** Hire the grumpiest, rudest kind you can find. This step alone can almost guarantee you will reach the goal of having bad public relations. People often form lasting impressions of an entire organization from the way they are treated by a secretary or receptionist.
- 2....**Answering telephones:** Have students answer them. Parents love having to restate their business to two or three different persons. Ideally, have telephone calls routed as follows: (a) to a student; (b) to a teacher aide; (c) to a school secretary; (d) if absolutely necessary, to an assistant principal; and, (e) as a last resort to the principal. The goal is to keep the principal as inaccessible as humanly possible.
- 3....**Contact with parents:** Avoid it at all costs. If that isn't possible, try to limit such contacts to occasional P.T.O. meetings. Never invite parents to informal coffee-and-rolls meetings or to tours of your schools. After all, parents just irritate school officials and teachers with their highly impractical suggestions.
- 4....**Impressing parents:** When you must meet with a group of parents, be sure to do your best to impress them. Here's how: (a) dwell on your years of educational experience; (b) rattle off your various degrees; (c) sprinkle your remarks liberally with impressive terms such as "meaningful learning experience;" and, (d) tell them that you're the "professional" – and they're not.
- 5....**News media:** Never send any information about your schools to local news media. Reporters are just busybodies who are interested only in sensational news like robberies and murders. If, however, a reporter should call your office, have a secretary or somebody tell him you are unavailable for comment.
- 6....**Passing the blame:** If you are a secondary school official, always blame Johnny's reading and math difficulties on the incompetent teachers he had in elementary school. Never miss an opportunity to belittle the job another school is doing because this, of course, can't help but enhance your own school's image.
- 7....**Central administration:** Assume everyone in the central school administration is incompetent. Try to ignore central office requests for information, and if such requests can't be ignored, then always deliver the information several weeks late. Central administrators should be told that they never understand the unique problems in the schools.
- 8....**Cover up:** If, somehow, an unfavorable occurrence takes place in your school, try to cover it up at all costs. If word of it does leak out, try denying that it ever happened. If that fails, lay the blame for the problem elsewhere (poor parental influence, unruly children, etc.).

STRIVING. ACHIEVING. EXCELLING.

50 (PLUS!) EASY WAYS TO MARKET YOUR SCHOOL





Easy PR ideas:

1. Update your school website! Our research shows that parents get the majority of their information from their child's school – so keep your site fresh and updated.
2. Share good news and successes with parents through Connect-ED.
3. Use part of your school website as a bulletin board – post good news, upcoming events and successes there.
4. Create a parent email list and share great news and information about your school through regular emails.
5. Create an electronic newsletter and send it out weekly.
6. Ensure up-to-date information about your school is available for teachers, volunteers and school staff – especially those who answer the phone and greet visitors!
7. Print school business cards with your school mission on the front and fast facts on the back. Hand them out to everyone on staff – plus volunteers! – to distribute and keep a stack in the front office to give to visitors.
8. Share great news with district relations (goodnews@gcsnc.com).
9. Have students create a good news newscast and share it with GCSTV.
10. When district relations and GCSTV staff cover your good news, share the web story and GCSTV segment with staff, current and future parents and students. Post the link on your school website. Send it via email to all parents, as well as local businesses, Realtors, community organizations, houses of worship and elected officials.
11. Contact the news media about events and story ideas. Collect stories about student, staff and school successes and share your news stories with everyone you know.
12. Add a PR twist to programs and events you already have planned. For example, give senior citizens a “Golden” pass to attend the school musical or spring performance for free, or consider hosting a dinner theatre for them that is hosted by students.
13. Celebrate and recognize student, staff and volunteer accomplishments more. Create a Hall of Fame at your school near the front office that highlights what's going well.
14. Send student artwork (with parents' permission) to the News & Record to be printed in the Life section.
15. Help fuel more positive word of mouth by sending kids home primed each day to talk about what they liked about school, a new lesson, a field trip, etc.
16. Create a school Facebook page or Twitter account and share that with your parents and community members. Just make sure you are using it with updates at least once a day!

Look Outside:

17. Take a walk around your property with a friend or family member who hasn't been there before – and who will be honest with you. They may see things that send a negative message and don't strike you, because you look at them every day.
18. Make sure your school marquee is up-to-date and parent-friendly.
19. Post welcome signs at the doors.
20. Clearly communicate where the main entrance and main office are located in a friendly way.
21. Drive into your parking lot – is it really clear which entrance visitors should use? Are the parking and directional signs facing the street? It's annoying to drive into a “buses only” driveway or circle around to park someplace far away from the main entrance.
22. Take another look at your parking spots. Are the closest spots reserved for parents and guests, or for staff?
23. Work on your school's curb appeal. Trash, overgrown shrubs, rusty signs, broken benches and dirt don't say “Welcome. We're glad you're here.”

Easy Community Outreach:

24. Have multiple open houses at times and days that are convenient for working parents. Have an open house on a day and time that is convenient for “different” groups of parents – try a Saturday afternoon.
25. Better yet, bring your open house to your area's biggest employers or gathering spots. Try a popular park, shopping center, library or community center. Host a virtual open house and school tour.
26. Send a mailer or email about your school to targeted groups of potential parents: young families with first children entering school, parents who need before- or after-school care, families with special needs, families looking for strong discipline, families looking for strong community-agency support and opportunities.
27. Create partnerships with local businesses, and ask them to spread the good news about your school.
28. Recruit parents to build a strong PTA to champion your school.
29. Forge relationships with leaders in your school community. Serve on community boards to develop these relationships.
30. Start a key communicator program. Invite the public into your school when classes are in session to see your great students and teachers. Provide your key communicators with training and a toolkit to contact 25 people each or speak to five community groups.
31. Find ways to highlight your students at community events.
32. Find volunteer opportunities for students.

33. Invite people from churches, senior-citizen homes, community-service groups over to your school for a day. Adults – especially those without school-aged children – may have a negative view of GCS and our students shared by the media and naysayers. When they come into schools and meet our kids, their views will change.
34. Be visible around your school and the community.
35. Be a cheerleader for your school: offer to speak to civic and social groups.
36. If your school is used by the community, stop by to visit the sports team, community organization, church or other group who is already visiting your campus. Give them a behind-the-scenes tour and build a relationship.

Working With Your Parents, Students and Staff:

37. Customer service is key. Expect outstanding customer service from your staff: answer telephones within two rings, greet callers with the name of your school and the staff member's name (“Thank you for calling XX school. This is XX; how can I help you?”). Do NOT transfer people without checking to see if the person on the other end is in their office. If they do answer the phone, explain what the caller needs before putting the caller through. This saves a caller from explaining their question or issue over and over again. Do NOT transfer callers to voice mail without asking first: “I'm sorry, she isn't answering her phone. Would you like me to transfer you to her voice mail?” Answer all emails within 24 hours. Greet visitors to your school immediately.
38. Be visible to parents – stand outside and greet parents and students when they arrive for the day or wave goodbye as they go home.
39. Provide overall school-achievement information to parents at parent conferences, not just information specific to their student. Create your own set of school “wow” facts.
40. Print business cards or small brochures for your teachers that include contact information for your school and your key messages on the back. Encourage teachers to hand them out to friends, family members, parents and community members.
41. Hold family meetings and celebrations – include the kids in the sessions.
42. Make building staff, parent and student morale among your highest priorities – happy staff and customers spread the word!
43. Use every opportunity to communicate the good things about your school and GCS – correct misconceptions when you hear them, whether it's in the line at the grocery store, standing on the sidelines at your child's soccer game, or enjoying coffee after church services.

44. Ask current parents to host in-home sessions with light refreshments with prospective parents and the principal/ leadership team. Keep things light, informal and fun, but have parents cued up to provide testimonials about why they chose your school and how well their children are doing.
45. Create a marketing committee of parents, staff and volunteers to develop and execute a PR plan.
46. Create yard signs that tout your school and are easy to read in one second or less. Ask parents to put them in their yards and ask local businesses to post them in high-traffic areas.

Finding New Families:

47. Invite potential students to be a “Tiger (or Eagle, or Viking) for a Day,” where they spend half a day experiencing your school and its wonderful teachers and students. Pair them with student leaders who make them feel welcome and excited about what your school has to offer.
48. Use a video camera to capture student and parent testimonials and post it on your website and YouTube.
49. Have student ambassadors who give tours.
50. Have parent ambassadors who share your good news with community groups.
51. Create a school fact sheet or brochure.
52. Partner with local hospitals to give new parents a bib saying “Future Bulldog” and a new book, with a label inside from the school.
53. Give your school fact sheet or brochure to Realtors who sell the most houses in your neighborhoods and the managers of the largest apartment complexes, or the local housing authority.
54. Go door-to-door and meet parents in the neighborhoods surrounding your schools. Leave a doorknocker behind in English and Spanish that touts what your school has to offer and who to call to schedule a school tour.
55. Investigate whether there are “feeder” preschools in your area, where many parents send their children. Get information to those parents to sell them on your school.
56. Host Guilford Parent Academy events at your school, and market them to families in the area – even if they don't have children in your school.
57. Have a parent or teacher committee develop a script for school tours and train volunteers, staff and students to provide the tours upon request by parents, Realtors, and other interested parties.
58. Find out where the parents in your community already gather and go there with information touting your school – to recreation-league games, community centers, houses of worship, etc.
59. Invite business and community leaders to tour your school, attend student performances, speak with teachers, etc.

Send us your best school marketing ideas: feedback@gcsnc.com

