

Proud of Your School? Blog About It.

Let a school leader who has been there dispel your misconceptions and fears about technology so that you and your students can move forward with confidence.

Patrick Larkin

The most important part of the job for leaders in any profession, including education, is communication. There is nothing more frustrating for stakeholders than finding out that they are out of the loop on important information. Thanks to the advances of modern technology, there are a number of channels that school leaders can use to bridge the gap. There are multiple options that I encourage school leaders to investigate (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, and so on), but one good way to raise the level of awareness in your school community is to start a blog.

Although blogs are not a new idea for some educators, they are still relatively underutilized by school leaders. Before I tell you how to get started, I have a few questions that I hope will convince you that you need to be blogging.

- Are you proud of your school?
- Would you like to improve communication with parents and the community?
- Do you have students who are doing newsworthy things in class and in cocurricular activities?
- Do you have great teachers who

engage students in ways you never thought of?

I'm going to assume that you went four-for-four in the affirmative. If not, well, I'll save that for another column.

Get Started

As the principal at Burlington (MA) High School for the past five years, my blog was my primary means of communication. We have saved time and resources by doing away with newsletters that had to be mailed to each household. To stay up-to-date on the latest at Burlington, parents have the ability to enter their e-mail in a box on the blog site and receive a daily e-mail with any new updates from the school. This e-mail option is a standard feature on most blogging platforms. You can see what it looks like by checking out www.BurlingtonHigh.Blogspot.com.

The accolades we receive for having a blog where parents can get a daily glimpse into the happenings at our school are amazing. My fellow bloggers can attest to how easy it is to blog. If you can type a word document, then you can blog. The only extra step involved is hitting the “pub-

lish post” button. We cut back on our workload and received praise. What a deal! Whether to blog should not even be a question anymore; it really is a no-brainer.

Brag Daily

Another way to cut back on paper and make your life easier is to forget about press releases. Instead, write a blog post and send the link to the people who cover the schools at your local newspaper. Blogging allows you to brag daily about all of the great things happening in your school. You can brag about your students, your teachers, and even yourself. You have the ability to be the number-one source of news about things happening in your school.

Here's what will happen after you start your school blog. The newspapers, which have also moved away from paper, will start to take information from your blog without you having to call them. They will start to call you about things that they are reading on your blog. I guarantee this will happen because it is exactly what happened in Burlington. In fact, Boston.com, the local major news

source run by the *Boston Globe*, runs a direct feed of material from the high school blog and the high school principal's Twitter account.

Create an Audience

I made a conscious decision to post heavily about athletics and other cocurricular activities during year one. Because our community is very supportive of those student endeavors and the blog allowed us to get out the news faster than any newspaper, that tactic worked well. In addition, we made sure to follow up on major news and events with a phone message to all parents that includes a reminder to check out the blog for more details. Finally, we posted at least two items so that there would be new information routinely and through all of this, we monitored the blog hits daily to ensure that the new communication process was working.

After a short time, the traffic to the blog became pretty consistent, averaging about 1,000 hits a day during the school week. With those regular visitors to my blog, I was able to move the agenda and start talking about topics related to teaching and learning at our school (i.e., school improvement plans, 1:1 computing plans, schedule changes, and the like). The blog also provided a place for parents to get updates and ask questions during emergencies. We actually had one situation in 2010 where a threat

caused an early dismissal and led to a number of questions from parents. Having a space where parents knew that they could get the latest news on the situation was a huge timesaver. We posted a clear explanation of what led to the dismissal and included plans for the next school day that ensured the safety of our staff members and students. The blog not only outlined all of that, but it also gave parents a place to ask follow-up questions and get a timely response. The blog saved us hundreds of phone calls and shortened the period of anxiety for parents.

Blog

There is no downside to blogging for administrators. So I will leave you with one last question: what are you waiting for? From experience, I can tell you that parents, students, and the community will love you for it. When the students see me around taking pictures of things that they are doing in class and in cocurricular activities, I often hear them say to one another, "He's blogging you." I also enjoy getting e-mails from staff members and parents asking me to post something on my blog about a student or a group of students.

Blogger and Word Press are two common platforms for bloggers to get started. Don't hesitate to reach out if I can help! You can find me on my new blog LearningInBurlington.Blogspot.com. **PL**



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