

Five Ways to Build Your School's Instructional Brand and Connect with Families | EdSurge News

When it comes to telling your school's story, it's easy to cast the net wide and be satisfied with families having a general idea of what's going on. But with all of the resources, tools, and ideas we now have at our disposal, there is no reason why we can't do better. For example, you can improve upon how your school story is told by being more intentional about what you put out there. You can work backwards from the narrative you want to tell, and then disseminate information that aligns with this targeted message.

Not only can this message paint an accurate picture of your school's culture, but you can prioritize communicating with parents the instructional beliefs and direction of your school. To help you out, here are five ways to communicate what could be called your school's "instructional brand"—some involving technology, and some involving good old know-how.

For the More Tech-Savvy

Meet the Teacher Night introductory video

When was the last time a "Meet the Teacher Night" was so exciting, you didn't want to leave?

For five of the six years, Ross taught fourth grade, where he created a Meet the Teacher Night video for his school. Rather than gathering all of the school's parents and teachers for a "boring" housekeeping session, each teacher broadcasted the video from his or her respective classroom. This helped to create a more personable environment where everyone was exposed to identical information, while also maximizing the time parents could spend with their respective teachers to discuss curriculum.

The basis for the [latest video](#) was the tornado scene from *The Wizard of Oz*! Its information included the instructional approaches in which the school believes and how students will be exposed to them, both in and out of the classroom.

For families who couldn't attend, the videos were posted on the school website for viewing at later points in time.

Live (or recorded) video updates

One platform for sharing school stories that is gaining popularity across the country is a weekly video update, which can serve as a [video newsletter](#). And even better—let the kids produce it! Children are the best storytellers, and can give the community insight into the vertical trajectory of the learning and teaching that is unfolding in buildings each week.

At [Cantiague Elementary](#) in Jericho, New York, seven students from each class (as selected by their teachers) do research every week about what’s happening on each grade level, and then share those updates on camera. Families begin to see how the “blocks” of learning build on each other by grade level, and they gain insight into the instructional practices across all content areas from reading workshop to science. This can be a game changer for your community.

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As you prepare to launch your video newsletter, one tool to consider is [TouchCast](#). It is a free app and website that allows for up to five minutes of free video that can be shared with the world through the TouchCast site, YouTube or other platforms. Children and are able to add fun effects to their videos, do some basic editing to merge various segments together, and then share it beyond the context of the school.

Social media posts with daily photographs

Create a school Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook account (encourage teachers to do so also) and post about all the exciting things happening in your district, school, and classrooms. Share your story, celebrate kids, and spotlight teaching and learning!

But don’t just rely on social media text to share information; include pictures of kids in action so that you become the main storyteller in your district/school/classroom. By sharing these visual stories, we are not only giving our families a glimpse of what is happening. This in an opportunity to spotlight instructional approaches, which is valuable within and beyond the school.

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For the Less Tech-Savvy

Curriculum night

Now that you have shared the amazing things happening in your school via social media and video updates, it is time to bring the families in and have them learn alongside their

children.

One easy and powerful way to accomplish this goal is by hosting a curriculum fair for all families—either during the day or at night based on the needs of your community. Open up the classrooms and have the families work with their children in a specific content area to give them a taste of how their children learn throughout the year. Maybe they can generate an entry in the student's "[writer's notebook](#)" or conduct a science experiment. You can change it up each year! This is a great way to empower families with knowledge about curriculum, teaching and learning.

Bingo night intermission

Finally, one clever way to get parents to learn about your instructional brand is through a bit of a bait bait-and-switch—but it's not a bad thing, trust us! In Ross's previous district, one of the elementary schools held a family bingo night towards the beginning of the year. While these were just your typical bingo games, the real fun surprisingly came during the various intermissions that took place throughout the night.

Over these breaks, staff members conducted curriculum-related demonstrations. The educators shared explicit strategies for reading fluency that parents could use with their children, an overview of the school website with an emphasis on its hyperlinked instructional sites, and a look at the online portion of the district's math series. In the case of most demos, electronic handouts were made available for parents.

Is this all worth it?

Although the obvious result of the work above is creating high levels of transparency between the home and school, the byproduct is making your instructional brand clear to the entire community.

At Cantiague Elementary School, where Tony's stationed, the active presence on social media has led to our community knowing that we aim to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individual students. They know that we believe in the reading and writing workshop models, and we work diligently to make technology integration a seamless and powerful component. However, most importantly, in my eyes, the community knows that we love our kids and are dedicated not only to their academic development, but also their social, emotional and psychological growth.

Which of these five ideas resonate with you? How do you communicate your school's/district's instructional brand? Why do you think branding is necessary? Share in

the comments below!

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