

Supporting Common Core State Standards

Communicate with your community

Everyone's always talking about that school across town. You can't figure out why your school isn't the topic of conversation instead—especially when your school performs just as well. Rich Bagin, Executive Director of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), says “the reason, more often than not, is that the schools with great reputations have made a commitment to communication.”

That means that the people in your community won't talk about your school if you don't give them something to talk about. Many times, schools are only in the news when there is a problem—such as low test scores or a teachers' strike. Create a positive public relations campaign. Cultivate relationships with all the media outlets in your area and give them leads on stories showing the positive aspects of your school.

The Common Core State Standards of education are everywhere in the news. So your program to enlist family support for the standards at your school is a great place to start your positive PR campaign. It showcases your emphasis on providing students with a rigorous education that will prepare them for college and careers—ultimately making your community a better place.

Know your local media

Make contact with representatives from these media outlets:

- **Local newspaper.** Invite them to be guests at upcoming functions. Send them copies of your newsletters and press releases about events. Put the local newspaper on your email list so that they get the same information you send to parents. This will keep them aware of upcoming events they may want to cover.
- **Regional newspaper.** Even *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have local news sections. If your school is doing something really great, brag about it!
- **Local radio station.** Radio stations are always looking for local interest stories—so why not give them some about your school? Ask what types of content they would like. You could record tips for parents or send a podcast of an especially interesting class.
- **Local television station.** Send press releases about upcoming events the station may want to film, like concerts, sports, plays—and important presentations. Don't be afraid to record events yourself and send them in unsolicited. School staff and students could even offer to script and record public service announcements.



Use your school media

Remember that you have access to “news outlets” at your school as well, such as:

- **Your school newsletter.** Your newsletter doesn't have to be a huge production. It just has to provide information. Use short articles to describe school happenings and upcoming events. Consider including pictures as well. Be sure to include articles about Common Core State Standards and things parents can do at home to support their children's learning. See Section 7 for a selection of articles to get you started.
- **Your school website.** It doesn't have to be the pinnacle of technological innovation—but it does have to offer up-to-date information. Post details about upcoming events and stories about recent events. Include pictures and videos whenever possible.
- **Your school marquee.** Your marquee is a great place for news, especially if your school is located on a main thoroughfare. Think like Twitter—use short but informative messages. One school had success advertising events and congratulating students all over town by asking business partners to post notices on their company marquees.



What kind of information should you share?

A “newsworthy” story is anything new, interesting and memorable. For inspiration:

- **View “old” things from a new angle.** Did your science fair lead to an interest in STEM subjects? Surprise after-effects from a program or event are good fodder for a story.
- **Look to your students.** Why do they want to take a certain class? Is a teacher trying a technique aligned with the new standards that's leading to improved achievement?
- **Look outside of school.** Did a teacher run a marathon? Did a student host an exchange student from Germany? Even though the activities aren't directly related to your school, they're still associated—and in a positive manner.
- **Consider statistics.** Newspapers like them because they take up less space and can be illustrated with graphs or charts.
- **Be aware of the national news.** As you read a story, think about how it affects your school. Are you seeing similar trends? Or is something else affecting your school? News writers are always looking for ways to put a local spin on a national story.

Get your information out

- **Plan ahead.** Websites can be updated immediately—but it takes a bit longer to print a newspaper. So don't forget that traditional print media require lead time before they can print articles. Talk to your contact at the local newspaper to find out how far in advance they plan issues—and then submit materials accordingly. For example, you may need to submit information about your Common Core State Standards presentation in the early summer. Submit stories about school events as soon as possible after holding the event—so people don't forget it happened by the time the story runs.
- **Keep it neat.** Proofread everything you send out. Make sure there are no typos, that your printer printed everything legibly, that photos are as clear as possible, that your press releases include the correct contact information, etc. Consider making a checklist of important things to remember about contacting the media and have someone else review your press packet before sending it out. If you are including photos of students taken at school events, make sure you have signed release forms from parents if needed.
- **Be accessible.** Put your contact information on your press release—and be sure to return phone calls and emails as soon as possible. A journalist may want to ask you for more information or clarification on your story. If he's on a tight deadline and doesn't hear back from you, he may decide to replace your school's story with something else.

Notes:



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Making the case for family involvement

“We are all in this together.” This has never been more true or more important. The transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is a challenge and will take a team effort for students to be academically successful. Engaging family support as you meet that challenge will help your effort and can lead to positive outcomes.

Decades of research prove what educators have always known—that students are most successful when schools and families work together.¹ Studies have long shown the link between parent involvement and:

- Better school attendance.
- Better student behavior and attitudes about school.
- Success among children from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Stronger family-school connections.
- Self-confidence and achievement.
- Higher grades, graduation rates and post-secondary school enrollment.



With the implementation of CCSS, home-school collaboration becomes even more critical. The new standards are very ambitious and making the transition should be something you and your students’ families engage in together.



In a recent national study conducted by the Center for Strategic Research and Communication,² results from parent focus groups, representing demographically-diverse populations, indicated that very few parents had heard of CCSS. Of those who had, few were able to explain what they were. Once they became familiar with the purpose of the new standards, however, most parents reacted positively—but also had a lot of questions.

Parents are an important resource for helping your students succeed during the shift to new English Language Arts and Math standards. But they need to understand what the standards are, how they impact their child’s future—and how they can help at home. To keep families informed:

- Invite them to attend information sessions explaining the CCSS.
- Encourage them to attend curriculum events at your school, such as literacy, math and science nights.
- Invite families to attend college- and career-readiness events—even in the early grades.
- Post and update information about CCSS and testing on your website.

As much as parents want to help their children succeed, they often don't know what to do. It's been years since many of them have opened an Algebra book or studied Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." So how can they possibly help when their children are learning critical math, reading and writing skills?

Assure parents that no special skills are required. Encourage them to continue doing the things they have already been doing, such as:

- Reading with their child and making sure their child reads every day.
- Providing a variety of reading materials.
- Monitoring homework and staying on top of their child's progress.
- Asking about school every day.
- Taking an interest in what their child is learning at school.
- Staying in contact with their child's teachers, especially if their child is struggling.
- Knowing what their child is expected to know and be able to do.
- Making sure their child attends school on time every day.
- Stressing the value of education.
- Discussing goals and aspirations for the future.



When parents know that their involvement is welcome, and understand how and what their child is learning at school, they can and will work to support that learning at home.

You'll find handouts for parents in Section 7 of this kit on specific ways they can work with their children at home to support the shift to the rigorous new curriculum and promote learning at home.

In Section 7, you'll also find helpful articles to include in your school and class newsletters or post on your website about simple ways parents can help their children reinforce academic skills with simple activities at home.

¹ A.T. Henderson and K.L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Annual Synthesis 2002, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

² "Parental Involvement in Education and Common Core State Standards," Summary Key Findings: Focus Group Study with Parents of Children Attending Public Schools, Center for Strategic Research and Communication, June 2012.