



*A guide to connecting
with stakeholders*

PRINCIPAL

COMMUNICATIONS

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THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Office of Public Relations works to support the Tuscaloosa City Schools in a variety of areas, including, but not limited to:

- Brand Management
- Community Outreach
- Crisis Relations
- Internal Communications
- Media Relations
- Radio & Television Production
- Social Media Management
- Special Events
- Strategic Communication Planning
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Website Content Management

While this guide is not meant to be comprehensive, it is meant to provide district and school administrators with an overview of areas where this office can support you.

We have included tips in which you may find helpful and look forward to helping you meet your communications goals.

ONLY A PHONE CALL AWAY



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Each of the members of our three-person Office of Public Relations will be connected with a set of schools to serve as a consultant with whom you can develop your communications strategy. Connect with any member of our team, but know that one person will work with you to become aware of your successes and challenges. They will also help you meet your communications goals by offering ideas and support.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

There are essentially three ways news becomes news:

- The media makes it news, so we respond.
- Lawmakers create legislation that changes our behaviors, so the media turns to us for a response.
- We create our own news and share it directly with our own stakeholders. And in some cases, reporters cover it!

Creating our own news is the most exciting, because this is where we can frame the discussions happening in our own community. By understanding this, you can be more successful getting out your key messages.

Presently, the system uses a mix of earned media (items local reporters cover), paid media (purchased advertisements) and controlled media (district-owned/operated resources), to communicate with our stakeholders. In the age of digital and social media, we no longer have to rely on a reporter to get the news out to our stakeholders: We can do it ourselves!

However, you must know your audience. Who are they? Where do they go for information? What messages have meaning for them? Can you motivate them to take action? How do you know if the channels of communication you are using are working?

**CHALLENGE YOUR SCHOOL
TO TELL YOUR OWN STORY
TO YOUR OWN STAKEHOLDERS THIS YEAR.**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The sound practice of public relations starts with a solid plan. Connect with the Office of Public Relations to help you develop a strategic communications plan to address a need in your school. We'll use the Four-Step Process which includes Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (RPIE) to help you craft your plan! As educators, you are already doing this type of work. See what we mean?

EFFECTIVE TEACHING & LEARNING	EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS
Formative Assessments	Research
Lesson Planning	Planning
Instruction	Implementation
Summative Assessments	Evaluation

Not for the faint of heart, a strategic communications plan shouldn't be used to get a story in the newspaper or more folks to attend an event. The strategic communications plan should be considered another tool in the tool box to address a key issue for your school based off your data. Chances are, there is already an issue before your school on which you want to work.

You can help us help you by answering the following questions:

- What is the issue to be addressed?
- Who, specifically, needs information from you on this topic?
- Where are you successful in reaching these audiences?
- When do you need your audience to act on the information you provide?
- Why should your audiences care about the issue at hand?
- How do you think you can best reach these groups?

Building an effective strategic communications plan takes time. The best advice is to start early.

PRo Tip: Sound PR means you are being strategic with your work and it connects to a greater goal.

LOGOS & MORE

The Tuscaloosa City Schools has developed a strong, visual identity system. The consistent use of our visual identity system reinforces the brand's design. The logo gives the education system a fresh and modern appeal. Tuscaloosa City Schools helps prepare students for a bright and successful future. With that in mind, the crisp green apple and color was chosen – bright and bold. Fresh and modern. Further, the system has secured a trademark of the logo to protect it.

When using elements of the TCS visual identity system such as logos, wordmarks, symbols, and color palate, it is important to make sure no item is altered through recolorization or disproportionality.

Logos are available for use by employees for projects at www.tuscaloosacityschoools.com/branding. Before using logos, please consult the TCS Graphic Standards and Logo Use Guide, available in The Stem.

Should you need TCS logos for a commercial printing project, please coordinate your work and send projects for review to the Office of Public Relations to ensure brand consistency **before** printing.

PRo Tip: Effective use of our brand communicates our message. Incorrect use of our logos weakens our brand.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Community Relations is a category of Public Relations which deals with the relationships you have with key stakeholders groups. Your efforts in these areas could look like any of the following:

- Partnership Development
- PTA or Community Meetings either on campus or off
- Speaking Engagements
- Fundraising

Before you start any community relations efforts, try the following:

- Determine the outcome you want
- Plan your key messages, specific to the audience you will address
- Figure out the best way to connect with the audience
- Listen! Give the audience a chance to give you feedback.
- Give a call to action

Any community relations effort you host on behalf of the system or your school should be planned ahead of time. You should never just “speak off the cuff.”

PRo Tip: Even if you are familiar with the topic on which you will speak, practice ahead of time.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Believe it or not, special events provide an opportunity to reinforce key messages of your school or our system. Any special event hosted is chance to put our best foot forward, and therefore, should be well planned in advance.

The Office of Public Relations routinely assists and/or plans the following special events:

- Institute Day
- The Apple Awards
- Retirement Tea
- Scholars' Dinner
- High School Graduations
- Board Recognitions
- Community Meetings

For ideas on how to improve your special event, contact the Office of Public Relations.

PRo Tip: Special events not only celebrate our people, but show the connection to our work.

SCHOOL WEBSITES

Each school in the Tuscaloosa City Schools has been provided a school website to communicate key messages to stakeholder. Further, the system offers an annual stipend for school level webleaders to maintain the sites on behalf of their respective schools.

The school website is the first place many of current and prospective parents visit to learn more about your school. That's why it is imperative that school websites be maintained at the school level.

As the principal of a school, it is encouraged that you work with your webleader to ensure that key messages are communicated on your website in a timely fashion and that outdated content is removed. In the digital world in which we live, failure to keep sites updated casts your schools in an unflattering light and reflects poorly upon the district as well.

The system does employ a Digital Communication Specialist/Webmaster to serve as a liaison between your webleader and the district. The DCS is there to offer support and to serve as a sounding board for webleaders in person, by phone or email or in a hidden area of the website. Webleaders also have access to technical support through the content management system. These resources are provided to assist webleaders in communicating the school's key messages.

On a routine basis, all school sites will be evaluated and feedback will be provided to the webleaders. This measure of accountability ensures that all school sites are maintained. Continued lack of attention to the website will be referred to you as the principal for addressing and if necessary, stipends **may** be withheld.

PRo Tip: Work with your webleader to develop key messages for your website.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has leveled the playing field. As many great things as we have happening in the Tuscaloosa City Schools daily, we will not get coverage every day. Remember there are more than 50 K-12 schools in our community, and you are competing for the same access to traditional news media they are. And this doesn't even begin to consider the institutions of higher learning in our community. By participating on social media platforms, you can connect directly with your stakeholders and engage with them daily.

The Tuscaloosa City Schools employs a social media strategy: we are actively looking to share key messages related to our goals to accomplish and concepts we want to reinforce. Our decision-making features the metrics Facebook and Twitter provide: who's looking at our content, when they are looking at our content, who's sharing our content, and if they moved to action by clicking a link to our website.

If your school is active on social media, then it should have a strategy for the types of content to share. If your school is not on social media, you may have to think about it, especially when you consider these facts:

- 82%** said TCS Facebook page was a very informative or informative source of information. (TCS Communication Survey, 2016)
- 72%** of online American adults use Facebook. (Pew Research)
- 52%** of online adults now use two or more social media sites. (Pew Research)

While people will visit your website to see what you have to say about your organization, they turn to social media to see if their friends are validating what you say. Social media is a free and easy way to be part of the conversation.

The Office of Public Relations can provide training to help you develop a social media strategy for your school based on your goals.

PRo Tip: Break the media filter by breaking the news directly to your stakeholders on social media.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Sometimes you want media coverage and sometimes, the media wants you! Each school has designated a school PR rep. This person can be a conduit through which information is shared with the Office of Public Relations. Principals are always welcome to reach out to the Office of Public Relations directly if any of the following happens:

- **An incident occurs on campus in which you need to notify parents or could result in garnering attention from reporters**
From crafting key messages or scheduling automated messages to parents and employees, we are here to help!
- **If a reporter contacts you directly for a good or a bad story**
The protocol for the Tuscaloosa City Schools is that reporters go through the Office of Public Relations which will contact you to schedule an interview or decline it on your behalf. Should a reporter contact you, either inform the Office of Public Relations or re-route the reporter to the Office of Public Relations according our protocol. This is one way, the Office can help you make efficient use of your time.
- **If you are working with a partner agency to promote a collaboration**
Whether it is an innovative pilot project with a professor from The University of Alabama or your school is the recipient of a grant award and the other agency wants to involve the media, let the Office of Public Relations know. This way, we can all be on the same page.
- **If you are have an item on which you would like media coverage**
You may want to contact Office of Public Relations for help in strategizing the best way to get coverage.

The Office of Public Relations is available to provide media coaching tips to help you get camera ready!

PRo Tip: Calm your nerves for media interviews by seeking media interview training from TCS!

START SPREADING THE NEWS!

The Tuscaloosa City Schools has a news tips line where schools can share their good news. By clicking the link either on your desktop or found in The Stem, you can share possible stories directly with the Office of Public Relations, the media and our Board of Education.

Reporters in our community have found this tool to be helpful as we have been successful in getting TCS news covered, especially when reporters find the story pitches meet their newsworthiness standards. Here are the six commonly accepted items on which newsworthiness is determined:

- **Timeliness:** Did it happen recently or will it happen in the near future? Few reporters will cover something that happened weeks ago.
- **Proximity:** This is the local news angle and means that it's happening right here in our community.
- **Impact or Consequence** What is the significance of the story?
- **Novelty or Rarity:** The more unusual or out of the ordinary the story, the better. In journalistic arenas, it's not reporting the story where a dog bites a man, but rather one where man bites a dog.
- **Conflict:** Chances are, when there is a conflict story, the media will reach out to us, not the reverse.
- **Human Interest:** These are the stories in which we are drawn to an emotional response whether we laugh, are moved to tears or say "Awww!"
- **Prominence:** This is essentially is a famous person being involved with your event. But remember, your definition of famous may not be the same as a reporter's.

Few stories will feature all six, but most will have a couple of elements of newsworthiness. But just because a reporter doesn't choose to cover the story doesn't mean it is not still a great story to share with your stakeholders. Be your own news agency and use your website and social media channels to share content directly with your audiences.

PRo Tip: Pitch stories which meet newsworthiness standards to maximize the potential of coverage.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

From time to time, the unexpected happens. That's why it's important to have a plan in place to respond to your stakeholders, which could include parents, staff members or even the media. The Office of Public Relations is on standby to help you reach these key groups in times of crisis. This assistance could come on site at the scene of the crisis or through consultation.

Following the procedures of Incident Command, you must designate a spokesperson. This individual will serve as the media point of contact until support from the Central Office arrives, including the Public Relations Coordinator.

PRo Tip: In the event of emergency, you take care of your people, we'll take care of the media for you.

AUTOMATED MESSAGING

As the principal, you should have a variety of tools available at your discretion to connect with your parents and staff members. The automated messaging system is one such tool to help you communicate via phone, text messaging or email. It should not be your only tool in your communications toolbox!

However, a rule interpretation of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) indicates that schools cannot use automated messaging systems without express consent of the individual responsible for paying the bill. TCPA does provide for one exemption: calls/texts necessary to communicate health and safety issues.

Therefore, it is recommended that automated messaging systems not be used for routine reminders which could be communicated through other channels. Here are some best practices for using the automated messaging system:

- Plan your messages to communicate weekly.
- Limit using your automated messaging system to once a week.
- Keep your messages short by limiting your topics and recording messages which are less than one minute in length.
- It is worth repeating: plan your messages to communicate weekly.

Online training is available through the provider where you can learn how to use the platform. It will also be worthwhile to use the metrics available through the platform to understand your message's reach in an objective way.

- How long was your message's total length?
- How long was the average length of playback?
- Was the number of people who reacted to messages what you consider satisfactory?

The answer to those three questions will provide vital feedback as you craft better, more effective messages.

PRo Tip: It's important to note that just because a message is sent, doesn't mean it has been received.

SURVEYS & SUCH

Stakeholder engagement contributes to the success of our school system. The Tuscaloosa City Schools routinely seeks the feedback of key stakeholder groups as it develops and refines the policies for students, parents and employees.

On large-scale issues, we include survey work as part of our development process through feedback and suggestions to inform our decision making. In an effort to close the loop, TCS reports the findings to the Board of Education and the public.

Additionally, the Tuscaloosa City Schools keeps the conversation going through the Let's Talk! platform where stakeholders can share questions, comments, concerns or compliments anytime, day or night. Let's Talk! also allows us to respond. Occasionally, you may receive feedback from stakeholders on an issue through the platform. You should react and respond, but more importantly acknowledge the question, comment, or concern. If it's a compliment, then by all means, share it with your employee for a job well done.

Should your school need or want access to the survey tool features, please contact the Office of Public Relations for credentials and to arrange for training.

PRo Tip: Use survey data to refine your practices to show accountability with stakeholders!

AUDIO & VIDEO SERVICES

The Tuscaloosa City Schools is fortunate to have its own video production services—one of only a few systems in the state of Alabama! This feature allows us the opportunity to produce video and audio segments to distribute on local television, radio and social media.

Since 1998, the system has produced *Inside Tuscaloosa City Schools*, a 30-minute television program designed to communicate system updates, student achievements, innovative instructional techniques and sports highlights.

This source of controlled media allows the system to tell its own story, even when members of the media will not. It should be considered an opportunity for you and another channel of communication available to you.

Inside Tuscaloosa City Schools airs Monday-Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. and Thursday-Friday at 6:30 p.m. on Comcast channel 20 and UVERSE channel 99.

Further, the system has received a radio license from the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, to operate a local radio station. WTUS-LP 103.3 currently plays a mix of jazz music and system announcements. Consider this another channel of communication that may be used to share key messages.

PRo Tip: Watch Inside Tuscaloosa City Schools to learn what's happening in our schools!

PRESENTATIONS

Anytime you present, it's an opportunity to share information about the system's direction or your school's direction. Because of long-standing relationships, we as administrators have a variety of groups before which we can present or are asked to present.

When you speak to community groups, make sure you are able to communicate effectively about what we are doing in our schools for students. The Office of Public Relations can assist you in providing district-level presentations you can present or access to downloading TCS PowerPoint templates to create your own.

Here are five simple ideas to creating better presentations:

1. Be considerate of your audience's time. No one appreciates long presentations. No one.
2. Never apologize to the people in the back of the room by having too much content in too small of a font.
3. Make numbers big, bold and beautiful to call attention to them.
4. Simplify your slides. This can be done with the effective use of white space and by not including sub-bullet points.
5. Learn how to use color appropriately for emphasis.

If you are presenting on behalf of your school or our district, remember you represent all of the district's employees, parents, students and school board members. If you have questions on how to effectively create, present or want a review of your presentation, connect with the Office of Public Relations—just be sure to allow us enough time to review and provide sound feedback!

PRo Tip: Be considerate of your audience's time.



OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

WWW.TUSCALOOSACITYSCHOOLS.COM