

Principal Blogging Project

Information Packet

Our goal is to get 100 principals blogging in 100 days. If you are a principal interested in blogging, participating in this FREE project is easy!

- Step 1 Read over the rest of this packet, including the remaining four pages that discuss why school administrators should consider blogging.

- Step 2 Complete the online sign-up form (link available at <http://principalblogs.jot.com>)

- Step 3 Wait to hear from us. We will get back to you as quickly as we can with information about your new blog!

Participation requirements

If we set up a blog for you, we ask that you

1. Post to your community at least once a week.
2. Recognize that we are not legally or otherwise responsible for the content of your blog posts.
3. Allow us to put a link to your blog at <http://principalblogs.jot.com>.
4. Participate in two short online surveys, one in February and one in early June.

That's it! The content and length of your blog posts is up to you. We encourage you to visit some of the other principal blogs at <http://principalblogs.jot.com> to get some ideas for your own blog.

Questions or comments?

Contact Dr. Scott McLeod, Director of CASTLE, at 612-626-0768 or mcleod@umn.edu.

Why Blog As An Administrator?

Much attention has been paid to [the value of teachers and/or students blogging](#). During the week of September 4, 2006, I uploaded a series of posts at www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org that discussed the potential value of blogging by K-12 administrators. This document captures that week's worth of blog posts in a format that is easy to disseminate to school leaders. Since posting to a blog (once it is set up) is about as easy as sending an e-mail, hopefully more school leaders will see the advantages of blogging and will begin reaping the benefits for themselves and their school communities.

Although my comments during the week focused on principals, the same advantages are analogous to superintendents, technology coordinators, and other central office administrators. The series of posts stemmed from Chapter 4 of [The Corporate Blogging Book](#) by Debbie Weil.

So... *why blog as an administrator?*

Reason 1: Sharing news and events

Blogs are ideal for principals to quickly post news items for their school communities. Upcoming special events, recent awards won by students or staff, classroom highlights, reminders, lunch menus, extracurricular activities, deadlines, and other newsletter-type items are extremely well-suited for blogs and are quick and easy ways to keep a school community informed.

- [Here is an example of a news item blog post](#)
- [Here is another one](#)

Reason 2: Progress monitoring

Community members often are interested in the progress of a school's ongoing activities. Examples might include building a new facility, implementing new curricula, hiring new staff, trying to pass a levy or referendum, and other school initiatives. Regular posts to update stakeholders on the progress of these types of activities can go a long way toward building goodwill and keeping community members informed.

- [Here is an example of a progress monitoring blog post](#)

Reason 3: Status alerts

Another type of blog post might be a quick message to alert the community of a short-term problem, event cancellation, etc. Status alerts will be most effective when the community knows to go to the blog for the latest news.

- [Here is an example of a status alert blog post](#)

Reason 4: Marketing

Because they're electronic, blogs are both faster and less costly than paper communications. If the savings in paper alone aren't persuasive, administrators should consider additional advantages that blogs often have over other communication channels.

Web sites and paper newsletters are static, noninteractive, and often dated (who wants to read about something two weeks after it occurred?). E-mails, electronic newsletters, and/or listservs contribute to clogged inboxes and get caught by spam filters. In contrast, blogs are timely, interactive, and avoid some of the issues that accompany e-mail communications.

If done well, blogs can "create buzz [and] loyal customers" (p. 53). One of parents' biggest criticisms of schools is that teachers and administrators don't communicate often enough about the things that parents want to hear about. Blogs can be a great way to publicize the great things that are occurring in schools.

Reason 5: Public relations

As Weil notes, a blog is a great way to bypass local media and get "your own version of the story out there and to get feedback" (p. 52). This can be either proactive or reactive. If administrators only put out their spin after some incident occurs, the message will be much less effective. School communities are going to be much more receptive and trusting if an administrator has built up goodwill beforehand through an ongoing series of posts and dialogues about less important issues.

Frequent, transparent communication, with the opportunity to receive feedback through comments, is a strength of blogs that administrators can leverage to their school organization's advantage.

Reason 6: Community building

Blogs can be an excellent tool for facilitating feelings of community within a school organization. Whether a blog serves an internal or external audience, regular posts can keep stakeholders informed of important events as well as those incidents that might go unnoticed in the hectic day-to-day activity of schools. If you read the administrator blogs at [Lewis Elementary School \(OR\)](#) or [Mabry Middle School \(GA\)](#), you can see that the ongoing stream of news, updates, and highlights can't help but contribute to feelings of connectedness by students, staff, parents, and other community members.

Blogs are different than e-mail listservs and static web pages because they're interactive. When a principal sends out an e-mail over a listserv or posts a notice on a web page, there is no way for the school community to interact with that message. If someone has a question or comment, it either doesn't get made or it's merely a one-to-one communication with the principal via e-mail, voice mail, or telephone call. In contrast, the comments feature of blogs allows anyone to post a question or comment and thus everyone else in the community can see it, see the principal's (or someone else's) response, and add his or her own two cents to the conversation. The blog thus facilitates ongoing dialogue between multiple school stakeholders rather than being a static one-way, or maybe two-way, transmission. What blogs can do, that listservs and web pages can't, is facilitate conversation.

Reason 7: Customer relations

Of course all of this is good for customer relations. Principals who are actively and publicly interacting with school stakeholders, listening to their concerns, responding to those concerns and other questions, and generally being accessible (p. 56) are facilitating good customer relations and building goodwill within the school community. Parents, community members, staff, and students are going to feel more positively about the school when they have the opportunity to not only get frequent updates about what is going on but also ask questions, post concerns, give suggestions, etc. This openness - this overt transparency - builds stakeholder confidence and satisfaction with the direction and activities of the school.

Reason 8: Branding

As real estate agents know, perhaps the first question that relocating families want answered is "Where are the good schools?" Certain school districts, and certain schools within districts, have reputations for providing high-quality learning experiences for children. These school organizations are the ones that attract families with high social capital and high-achieving children.

Parents are increasingly checking out school web sites as part of their relocation decision-making. As noted in previous posts, the same messages from the principal that create warm, fuzzy feelings of community, belonging, and academic excitement also are perfect for outsiders who want to see what the school is all about. It would be fairly difficult for a relocating family to acquire several months worth of newsletters, e-mails to parents, etc., but the public availability of a blog ensures that everyone - existing stakeholders, relocating families, realtors, potential corporate partners, and other outside community members - can see the wonderful things that are occurring in the school building.

Reason 9: Creating "customer evangelists"

Customer evangelists are those individuals that are passionate about the school and publicly advocate for the school to others. They do this of their own volition - they are not paid to do so. These are the people that talk about how great the school is to everyone they meet. They help build the reputation and the buzz of the school organization and contribute to overall feelings of satisfaction by staff, parents, students, and community members.

Evangelists are important contributors to a school's success. Indeed, as [Malcolm Gladwell](#) and others have noted, evangelists may be the only information source that others trust and believe. Nearly everyone is experiencing overload from an unlimited variety of information sources - evangelists are the folks that capture people's attention and sway opinion.

Blogs give evangelists something to talk about. Regular updates, news items, and other highlights feed the conversations that evangelists are having with others. These people can make or break a school's reputation - administrators would be wise to feed them well on a steady diet of positive information.

Reason 10: Thought leadership

A blog can be a great place to [put thoughts out there for the community to chew on](#). Is a school considering a new initiative or an important change? Does the school want feedback on a particular topic or issue? The principal could post some information and questions on the blog and solicit community participation. This is similar to setting up a meeting with an advisory board or interested group of stakeholders, except that the potential reach is much greater since everyone in the school community can see and participate in the conversation, not just the few individuals who might attend a face-to-face meeting.

Reason 11: Advocacy

A blog also can be a good place to advocate for certain actions. For example, if state legislators were considering legislation that might negatively impact schools in some way, a principal could post a message encouraging stakeholders to become informed about the issue and let their local legislator know their opinion about the matter. Similarly, a blog can be a great place to foster community support for an upcoming levy or referendum. Regular progress updates can keep community members informed and help facilitate increased voter participation and support for the referendum.

Reason 12: Replacing the school web site

Finally, some schools are utilizing blogs to replace key sections of their web sites. Sometimes blogs [replace the school's home page](#); other times they're [a prominent link from the home page](#). Blogs would be a great tool for FAQs, for ongoing updates about athletic and other extracurricular programs, to replace teachers' classroom newsletters to parents, to [post news about upcoming or past events](#), etc. Blogs also can be used for [internal communications to staff](#).

That's it! Twelve reasons why an administrator's blog might be a good thing for a school organization. Increasing numbers of corporate leaders are seeing the value of blogging - maybe it's time your school or district considered it too!

Please contact [Dr. Scott McLeod](#), Director of [CASTLE](#), if you have any questions or comments about this document or about the original posts at [www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org](#). This document is available to the public under a Creative Commons attribution / share alike license. More information on your rights to use this document is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>.

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