



STAND OUT

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL MARKETING



COLORADO LEAGUE of
CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter Schools are Public Schools

STAND OUT

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL MARKETING



COLORADO LEAGUE of
CHARTER SCHOOLS
Charter Schools are Public Schools

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Getting Started 1-3

- A Letter from the Colorado League of Charter Schools
- Maximize Your Marketing Efforts
- Charter School Messages

What Parents Want 4

School Marketing in 4 Steps 5-9

- Define the Experience
- Retain Families
- Grow Enrollment
- Use Ambassadors

Quick Tips 10-13

- Marketing Tips
- Website Tips
- Media Relations Tips

Resources 14-18

- Define Your School Experience Worksheet
- Communication Calendar Worksheet
- Sample Retention Letter



Stand Out: A Guide to School Marketing was created in collaboration with Lisa Relou Consulting. Lisa Relou is the former Director of Internal Communications and Marketing for Denver Public Schools and has 15 years of experience marketing schools in Colorado. She is currently a strategic consultant in the field of education reform and philanthropy and specializes in collaborating with leaders and organizations to tell their story. For information contact lisa.relou@gmail.com.



GETTING STARTED

Dear Colorado League of Charter Schools Members,

For over 20 years, the Colorado League of Charters Schools has supported charter schools in our state — helping you reach higher levels of student performance and overall success by providing information, resources, and support.

From the start, we have been an organization that represents high standards for student achievement in charter public schools. We believe strongly in the power of making high-quality, public school options available to all Colorado students.

An important part of ensuring that Colorado children get the quality education they deserve is letting them know about the options available to them. As part of our marketing and communication support services, we offer you *Stand Out: A Guide to School Marketing*.

Whether you're just getting started or are already a fixture in your community, we hope this guide will be helpful as you launch or refresh your marketing efforts.

Please remember that the League is here to support you with your marketing and communications needs including:

- ✓ Crisis communications training and support.
- ✓ Media relations guidance.
- ✓ Connections to quality service providers (consultants and vendors).

Please contact us if we can be of assistance with your school's communications and marketing efforts.

Sincerely,

Stacy Rader
Director of Communications
Colorado League of Charter Schools
srader@coloradoleague.org

CONTACT US

Reach out to the Colorado League of Charter Schools for communications and public relations assistance.

Call: 303-989-5356, ext. 112

Email: srader@coloradoleague.org



SUBSCRIBE



Click [here](#) to subscribe to any or all of the following publications

- Building Healthy Charter Schools
- Business Office Perspectives
- Charter Focus Magazine
- Focal Point
- Friday Wire
- Legislative Updates
- New School News
- Professional Development Insider



“The saying “*If we build it, they will come,*” was quite appropriately proclaimed in a Hollywood-constructed field of dreams. But there are no Hollywood endings here. You have to work at getting families to enroll in your school. So when you are next approached by your school principal or communications person for a marketing budget, think of it as an investment you can’t afford *not* to make.”

Why Marketing Is An Investment For Charter Schools
By Lisa Relou, Lisa Relou Consulting
Summer 2015 Charter Focus Magazine



MAXIMIZE YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS

Whether you are starting a new school or are several years into recruiting students, make sure you are fully leveraging the information available to you through your local district/authorizer, the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado League of Charter Schools.

Quality School Options: Be sure you understand the School Performance Framework results (available on [CDE Schoolview](#)) and are familiar with the Colorado School Grades [website](#) to become acquainted with schools in the surrounding area.

Student Projections: District planning departments, especially larger districts, often have projections for how many school-age children are currently in the district and projected to be in the district into the future. Consider selecting a location for your school where there is high demand now and into the future.

Choice Trends: A good indication of whether parents are seeking additional options is district and school choice-in and choice-out data. Districts often track this information carefully. You may consider selecting a location for your school where there are high concentrations of students “choicing-out” of their neighborhood school, or where there are students “waitlisted” to attend area schools.

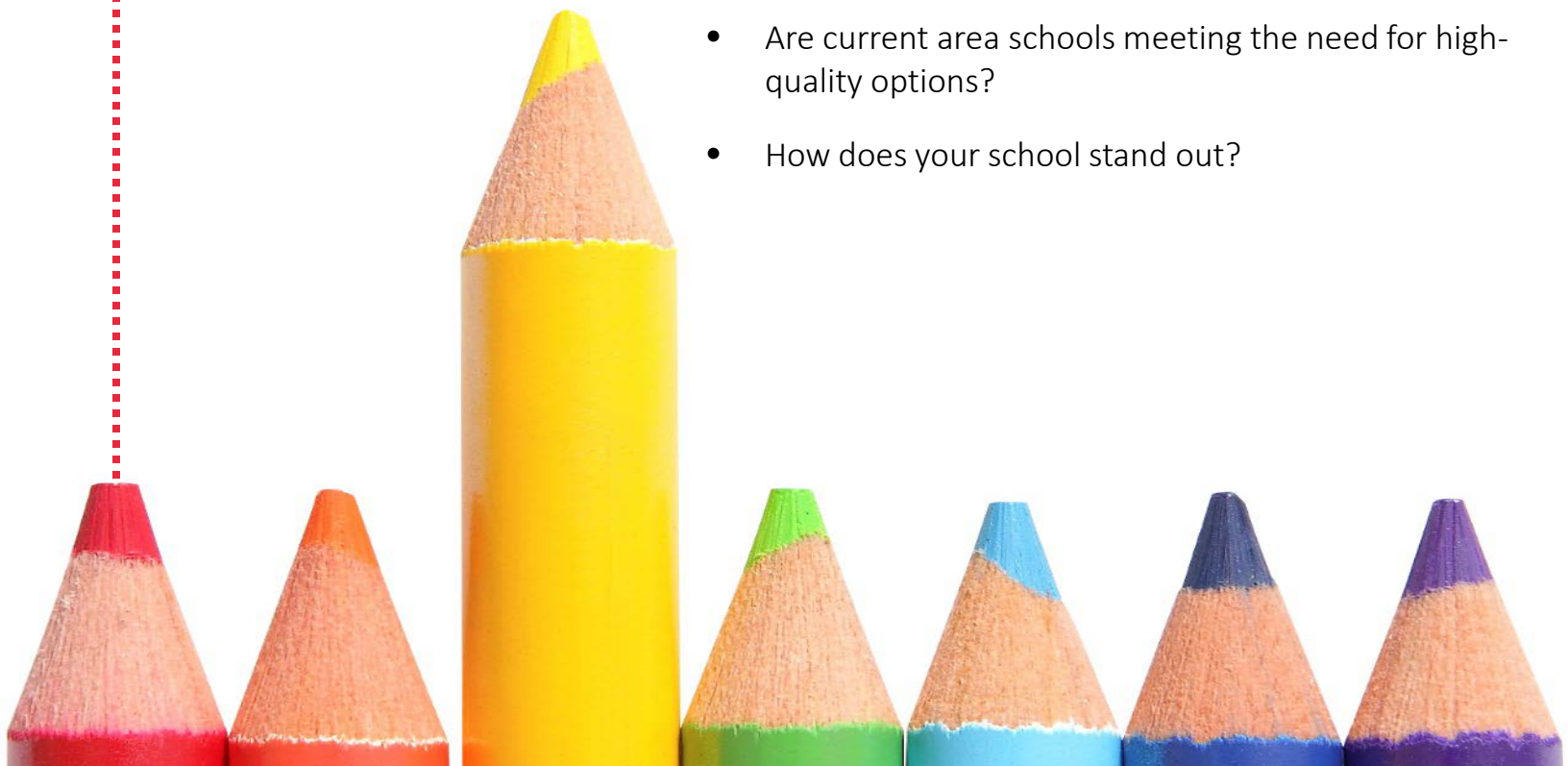
Student Contact Lists: Consider requesting student lists from your district/authorizer to use to market your school to prospective families. This is especially useful at transition years (elementary to middle school or middle school to high school) to inform families, in the market for a new school about the option you offer.



The Colorado League of Charter Schools strongly encourages you to build a relationship with your local district. Building on your mutual desire to provide high-quality school options in your community, meet with the district (including their Communications Office) to find out how you can collaborate, how you can support them, and how they can support you. In some cases, the League may be able to make introductions for you. Contact us for support.

ASK YOURSELF

- Are there enough students in the area to start and sustain your school?
- Are current area schools meeting the need for high-quality options?
- How does your school stand out?



CHARTER SCHOOL MESSAGES

Some parents are specifically looking for a charter school, others might not know the difference between a charter public school and a traditional public school. One simple explanation is to state that your school is a tuition-free, public school that, as a charter school, has the flexibility to be more innovative while still being held accountable for student achievement.

While it is important to draw distinctions between charter schools and traditional schools, it is also important to articulate what they have in common.

- ✓ All charter schools are public schools.
- ✓ Charter schools are tuition-free.
- ✓ There are no “test-in” requirements to attend charter schools.
- ✓ Charter school students must take the state assessment tests.
- ✓ Charter school teachers must be “highly qualified”.
- ✓ Charter schools offer a variety of different curriculum models.
- ✓ Charter schools serve a broad range of diverse students including low-income, racial and ethnic minorities and students with disabilities or other special needs.

For all of these reasons, charter schools are not comparable to private schools; equating the two is unscrupulous.

USE THESE WORDS

Accountability Stimulating
Effective Opportunities
Motivating Choice
Challenging Options

NOT THESE

Competition
Experimentation
Radical
Reform
Autonomy

Focus on the merits of your own school as opposed to the weaknesses of other schools. Attacks on other schools, or even a school district, generally turn parents off.

UNIQUELY CHARTER

Charter schools are renowned for creating an environment in which parents can be more involved, teachers are given the freedom to innovate, and students are provided the structures they need to learn.

Promote how your school uniquely encourages:

- Parent involvement
- Teacher innovation
- Student learning

Information on this page was created using the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Charter Message Notebook and The Language of Effective Education in American 2014 by Luntzglobal.com.



THE RESEARCH

[What Schools Do Families Want \(And Why\)?](#)

A policy brief from Era New Orleans on school choice post-Katrina
JAN 2015
By: Douglas N. Harris and Matthew F. Larsen

[What Parents Want: Education Preferences and Trade-offs](#)

A National Survey of K-12 Parents
AUG 2013
By: Thomas B. Fordham Institute Dara Zeehandelaar, Ph.D. and Amber M. Northern, Ph.D.

[Ch. 7 - Creating Savvy Choosers: Informing Families About School Choices \(HFR '11\)](#)

JAN 2012
By: Paul Teske

[Utah Charter School Study Prepared for the Utah State Legislature Executive Appropriations Committee](#)

NOV 2006
By: Andrea K. Rorrer, Ph.D., Charles Hausman, Ph.D. and Cori Groth, Ph.D.

WHAT MATTERS TO PARENTS

PERSONALIZATION

What this means for you

Clearly articulate your school's "theme" and mission and how you meet the individual needs of each student.

PERFORMANCE

What this means for you

Be transparent about performance measures such as state assessment results, Colorado School Grades, high school graduation rates, and college application/acceptance. Have exemplars of student portfolios available to show what the data doesn't.

SAFETY

What this means for you

Promote the safe and inviting school environment you provide. Highlight discipline policies and records as well as the values or principles you instill in your students.

PROXIMITY

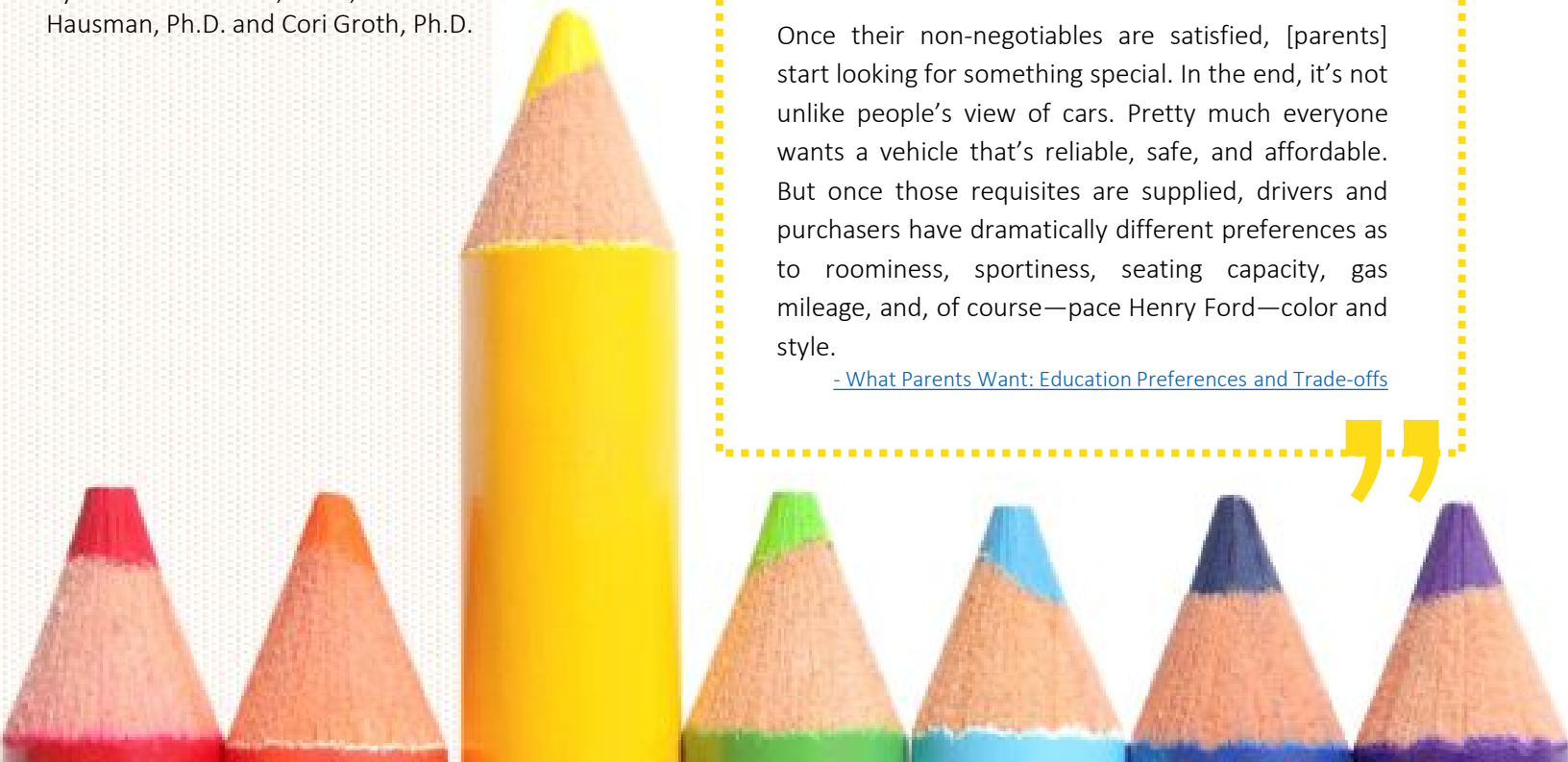
What this means for you

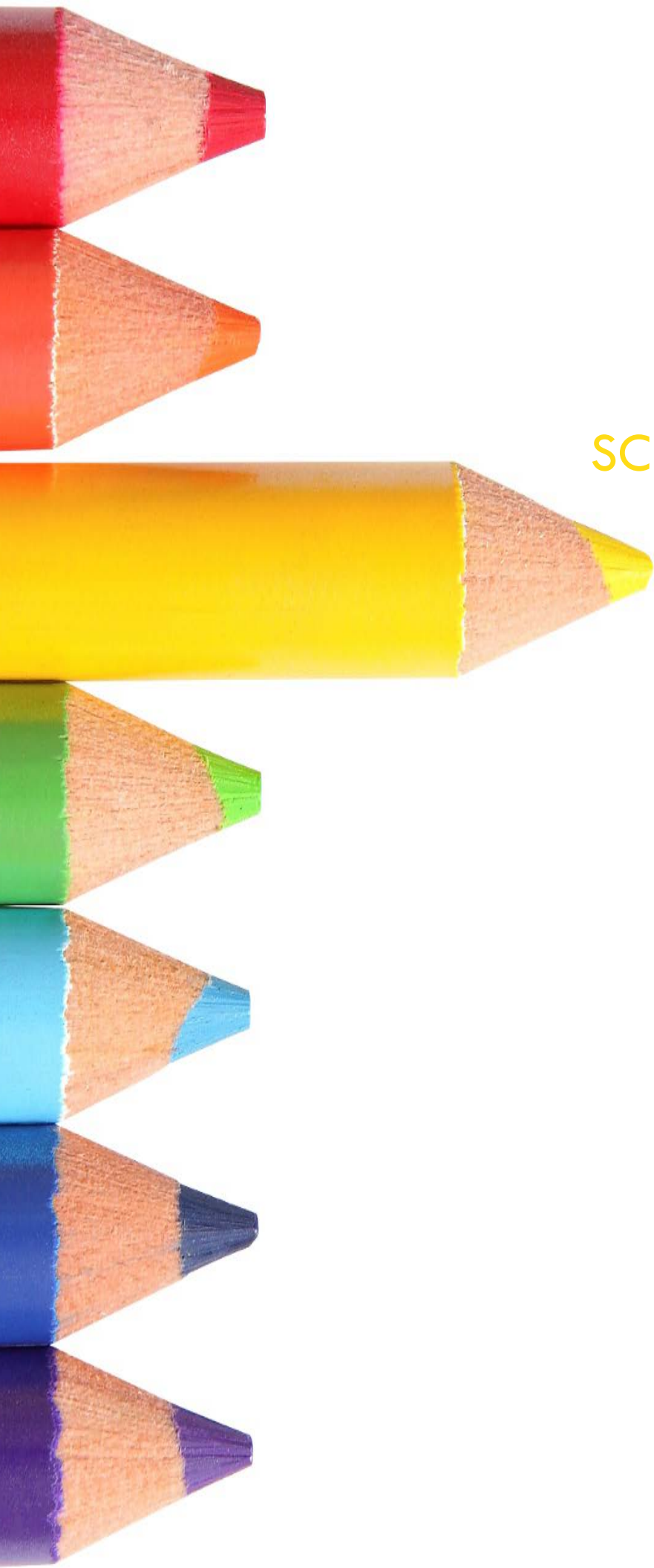
Focus on recruiting families who live or work near your school and make sure families are aware of transportation options (if available).



Once their non-negotiables are satisfied, [parents] start looking for something special. In the end, it's not unlike people's view of cars. Pretty much everyone wants a vehicle that's reliable, safe, and affordable. But once those requisites are supplied, drivers and purchasers have dramatically different preferences as to roominess, sportiness, seating capacity, gas mileage, and, of course—pace Henry Ford—color and style.

- [What Parents Want: Education Preferences and Trade-offs](#)





SCHOOL MARKETING IN 4 STEPS



COLORADO LEAGUE *of*
CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter Schools are Public Schools

STEP 1: DEFINE THE EXPERIENCE⁶

FROM THE INSIDE

Begin the marketing process by clearly articulating what makes your school stand out. Answering the following questions collaboratively with teachers, parents, and students will ensure that everyone talks consistently about your school experience.

- What words would you use to define your school experience?
- What unique programs and services do you offer?
- Why do families choose your school?
- What does the community value and expect from your school?



Click [here](#) to access the “define your school experience” worksheet.

OUT

- Aesthetics matter. When schools have the look of being cared for on the inside and outside (well maintained classrooms, building and grounds), it is assumed that the students are cared for.
- The first visit to your school establishes the tone of the relationship between the school staff and the family. **Are your front-line staff image builders or image breakers?**
- Developing a welcome packet or online resource that answer common questions is a great way to greet new students and parents.

JUST ASK

Leave out the guesswork. Ask families why they chose your school.

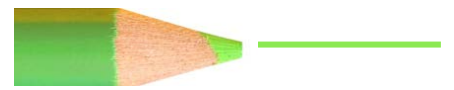


IMAGE MAKERS

- A friendly front office
- Promptly answered phones
- Easy-to-navigate website and automated phone directory
- Rapid response to phone calls and emails
- Staff is eager to show off the school
- Staff is passionate and knowledgeable about the program
- Students say hello to visitors

Never underestimate the power of a smile! 😊



You never get a second chance to make a first impression.



Information contained here can be found on pages 190-196 of *Principals in the Public* a product of NAESP/NSPRA.



Satisfaction is a rating, loyalty is a brand. An important way to assess your success is by the number of families who re-enroll every year. It is important to continue to work on your relationship with your families even after they are committed to your school.

Retain the families in your school by letting them know they are valued and asking them to stay

- Thank families for choosing your school.
- Share the unique experiences that your school offers.
- Articulate the commitment you and your staff make every day to the school's students and their families.



Click here to access a [sample retention letter](#) (also available on page 18).

Prioritize parent communication

Parents have an everyday interest in what occurs in your school, and they make major decisions that can affect your school such as whether their child remains enrolled. You should be especially sensitive to their communication needs.

- Send teacher introduction letters and/or conduct home visits at the start of the year to outline expectations.
- Share the good news. When the school does well and when students do well, let parents know.
- Send a regular school newsletter to parents highlighting past and upcoming events.
- Feature a “Board Corner” to enhance professionalism.
- Encourage teachers to communicate regularly with parents; they may consider sending home content-relevant questions for parents to ask their children about what they are learning.
- Anticipate and provide information that parents want and need (e.g., grading policy, homework requirements, discipline policy, ways to contact their teacher).
- Include parents on your list of those to be nurtured and recognized.
- Send a satisfaction survey to parents at the end of the year to gather feedback on how to improve your school experience. Communicate the results.

Information contained here can be found on pages 63-66 of *Principals in the Public* a product of NAEPP/NSPRA.



The best recruitment strategy is a great retention strategy.



Get ready Go market

- Create a one-pager about your school using your “[defined school experience](#)”.
- Evaluate your web presence (see [website tips](#)); edit descriptions of your school to best reflect your school experience.
- Mail/email recruitment letters to prospective students using lists provided by the district.
- Hold an open house for prospective families.
- Initiate a door-to-door effort.

Considering paid advertisements? Local community newspapers and Home Owners Association newsletters are budget-friendly and have the best chance of reaching your intended audience.

FOCUS ON TRANSITION YEARS

You are

- An elementary school
- A middle school
- A high school

Target

- Early childhood providers
- Elementary schools
- Middle schools

- Obtain student lists for schools within close geographic proximity in order to target your marketing.
- Target transition year teachers at nearby schools. Share information about your school and obtain information about their students. Invite them to experience your school during the school day. Invest time in cultivating and sustaining these relationships.
- Hold events for transition year students at their school and at your school. Provide opportunities for students and their families to visit and experience your school.



Click [here](#) to access school marketing tips.



Hope is not a strategy.

-Joel Book, Exact Target



STEP 4: USE AMBASSADORS

9

Ambassadors can be a tremendous asset in spreading the word about your school. They can significantly extend your marketing reach and impact.

Who are your ambassadors?

- Students
- Parents and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
- Teachers
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Board Members
- Student and Family Alumni

How you can use your ambassadors.

- As a reference for prospective students and their families.
- To lead school tours or share their experience during a school tour or open house.
- To provide positive testimonials of their experience.
- To serve as a liaison/buddy to new students and their families.
- To go door-to-door to promote your school.
- To host “meet-and-greets” in their homes for prospective families in the area.
- To address community groups such as Rotary, Chambers, Kiwanis to publicize the school, help recruit board members and create community ambassadors.

Activate your ambassadors.

TEACH THEM TO CONNECT

Teach them the skills to be a good storyteller and presenter. Provide them with the messages you want them to communicate, but encourage them to make those messages their own.

GIVE THEM A PROJECT

Align their talents, skills, passion, and knowledge with opportunities. Give great public speakers a forum and those who are extremely personable, 1-1 opportunities.

LET THEM LEAD

Ask your ambassadors to create opportunities to promote your school and let them lead in organizing them.



“

Make it easy for people to talk about you.

”





QUICK
TIPS



Dos & Don'ts

- Do be consistent by always using the same language to describe your school.
- Do use approved photos (signed release) of *your* students, teachers, and parents; ensure the photos reflect the diversity of your school and are of high-quality.
- Do feature testimonials from students, teachers, and parents.
- Do emphasize the safe environment your school provides.
- Don't use acronyms or education jargon.
- Don't make errors in grammar or spelling; have at least two people proofread all information to avoid errors.
- Don't embellish your program or school.
- Don't make disparaging remarks about other schools.
- Don't use poor quality photos.

NOTE: The [CAN-SPAM Act](#) establishes requirements for commercial messages, gives recipients the right to have you stop emailing them, and spells out tough penalties for violations.

EVERY SCHOOL SHOULD HAVE

- An engaging website with fresh content promoting positive news and the school's value proposition
- High-quality photos and logo
- A kid-centric décor

Consider investments in the following:

- Glossy one-sheet
- Brochure
- Signage (permanent and portable)
- Newsletter (hard copy and/or electronic)
- School mobile app
- Door hangers
- Direct mail piece
- Video

Launch your marketing efforts by:

- Offering tours, conducting open houses, offering shadow days
- Participating in recruitment fairs
- Initiating a door-to-door recruitment effort
- Doing a direct mail, email, or phone campaign
- Enlisting the help of a marketing professional



Make it simple. Make it memorable. Make it inviting to look at.

- Leo Burnett, Advertising Executive



GOALS

School websites have two main functions:

1

They act as an online brochure for prospective students and parents; and

2

They can improve efficiency and effectiveness of communication between a school and its families.

Your website represents your school.

It should . . . Have a friendly, appealing design that includes happy students who reflect your student population.

It should not . . . Look neglected, obsolete, or disorganized.

The following are basic pages every school website should have:

About Us

Describe the history, educational philosophy of the school, and grades served plus any affiliations, associations, accreditations, and awards the school may have received. Define what a charter school is; explicitly state that charter schools are tuition-free public schools. Include contact information for the main school office, a staff directory, and a map of your school's location.

Enrollment Information

Include an enrollment form ([click here](#) to see an example) and describe the application process, deadlines, and any openings the school may currently have.

Calendar of Events

Provide an up-to-date calendar of school-wide events and schedules for sports teams.

Documents

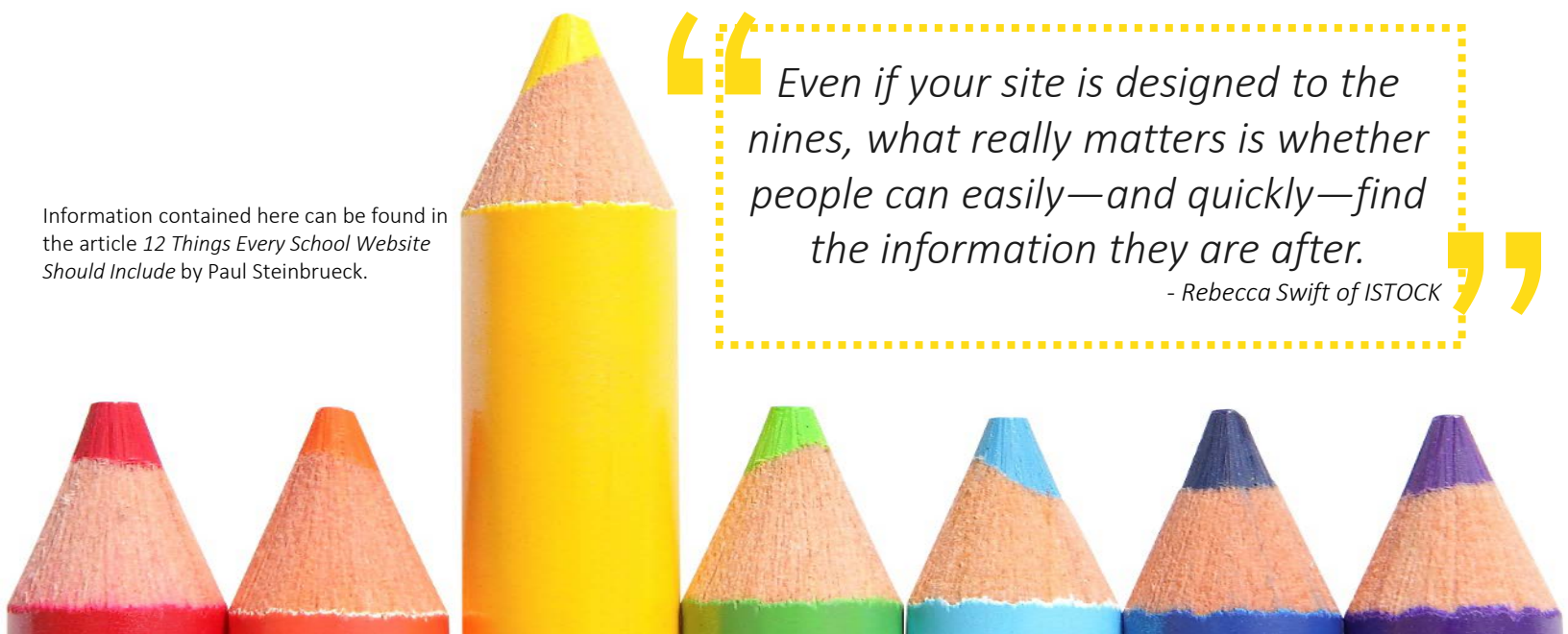
Make frequently used documents like permission slips, the application for enrollment, student handbook, lunch order forms, etc., available online. *Note: PDF format is usually the best format for these documents.*

Class Pages

Teacher should have a page for the class(es) they teach. These could be updated as often as weekly with news and homework assignments, or simply provide a link to the class syllabus.

Information contained here can be found in the article *12 Things Every School Website Should Include* by Paul Steinbrueck.

“Even if your site is designed to the nines, what really matters is whether people can easily—and quickly—find the information they are after.”
- Rebecca Swift of ISTOCK



Excerpt from: *School Public Relations for Student Success* by Edward H. Moore
Page 120

What do the media offer schools? *In a word:* credibility. The “third-party” or “outside” endorsement inherent in positive news coverage can offer a powerful boost to the reputation enjoyed by a school. But this outside viewpoint can also be a potent tool for eroding public confidence and trust when coverage is negative. Managed properly, news media coverage can:

- Endorse your school as a center of service and excellence serving the community and students with a quality education;
- Reinforce and validate your messages; and
- Provide exposure for your key messages.

6 PROACTIVE MEDIA MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- ① Select your school’s spokesperson, someone who:
 - Is on your school’s staff or board.
 - Is experienced in dealing with the media.
 - Is an effective writer.
 - Is persuasive (has good charisma).
 - Is responsive, easy to reach, willing to drop everything to respond quickly.
 - Has a good understanding of your school and about charter schools in general.
- ② Create a press kit that includes:
 - One-page fact sheet about your school.
 - Recent article or [press release](#) about your school.
 - A fact sheet about Colorado charter schools (available from the League).
 - Backgrounder (more detailed info about your school, how it came to be, etc.).
 - Basic contact information for your school, including contact info for your spokesperson.
- ③ Reach out and introduce yourself (and your school) to local education reporters.
 - Invite reporters to visit your school or be a guest speaker in a class.
 - Invite reporters for an introductory coffee meeting.
- ④ Write letters to the editor/op-eds in community newspapers or YourHub.com to promote happenings at your schools.
- ⑤ Send press releases to your media contacts when your school has big news, i.e. 100% of seniors accepted to college, wins an award, etc. Get to know your small, community newspapers who are more likely to report on school events and activities.
- ⑥ Call the Colorado League of Charter Schools’ Communications Office to brainstorm story ideas for the media.





RESOURCES



COLORADO LEAGUE *of*
CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter Schools are Public Schools

DEFINE YOUR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE WORKSHEET

In one sentence, how would you describe your school?

What is important to the people in your community?

Why do families choose to attend your school?

How do you meet the individual needs of your students?

What are two to three points of pride for your school?

What programs or services are unique to your school?

What are two words we want everyone to use to describe your school?

Write the ideal front page newspaper headline about your school:

Write a one-paragraph description of your school based on the information on the left. Balance accurate with aspirational — aspirational may bring families to your school, but it won't keep them there.

Once you have a description, ask yourself...

- Does it feel right?
- Are quick associations positive?
- Does it tell a good story?
- Will it resonate with your community?
- Is it memorable?
- Does it accurately reflect what you offer today?



COMMUNICATION CALENDAR WORKSHEET PG/1

Ensure communication remains a priority by mapping out a year-long communication calendar.

Identify who you need to communicate with



Internal

- Board of Directors / Governing Board (current)
- Staff and teachers
- Students
- Parents and their surrogates

Internal/External

- Alumni
- Board of Directors / Governing Board (past)
- Business partners
- District or Colorado Charter School Institute
- Current students and parents
- Volunteers
- Colorado League of Charter Schools

External

- City services partners
- Colorado Department of Education
- Community (broad)
- Community leaders
- Cultural partners
- Daycare/pre-school providers
- Educational partners
- Elected officials and legislators
- Funders/philanthropists
- Government agencies
- Local businesses
- Neighbors (narrow)
- News media
- Prospective students /parents
- Teachers/principals at other schools
- Youth organizations

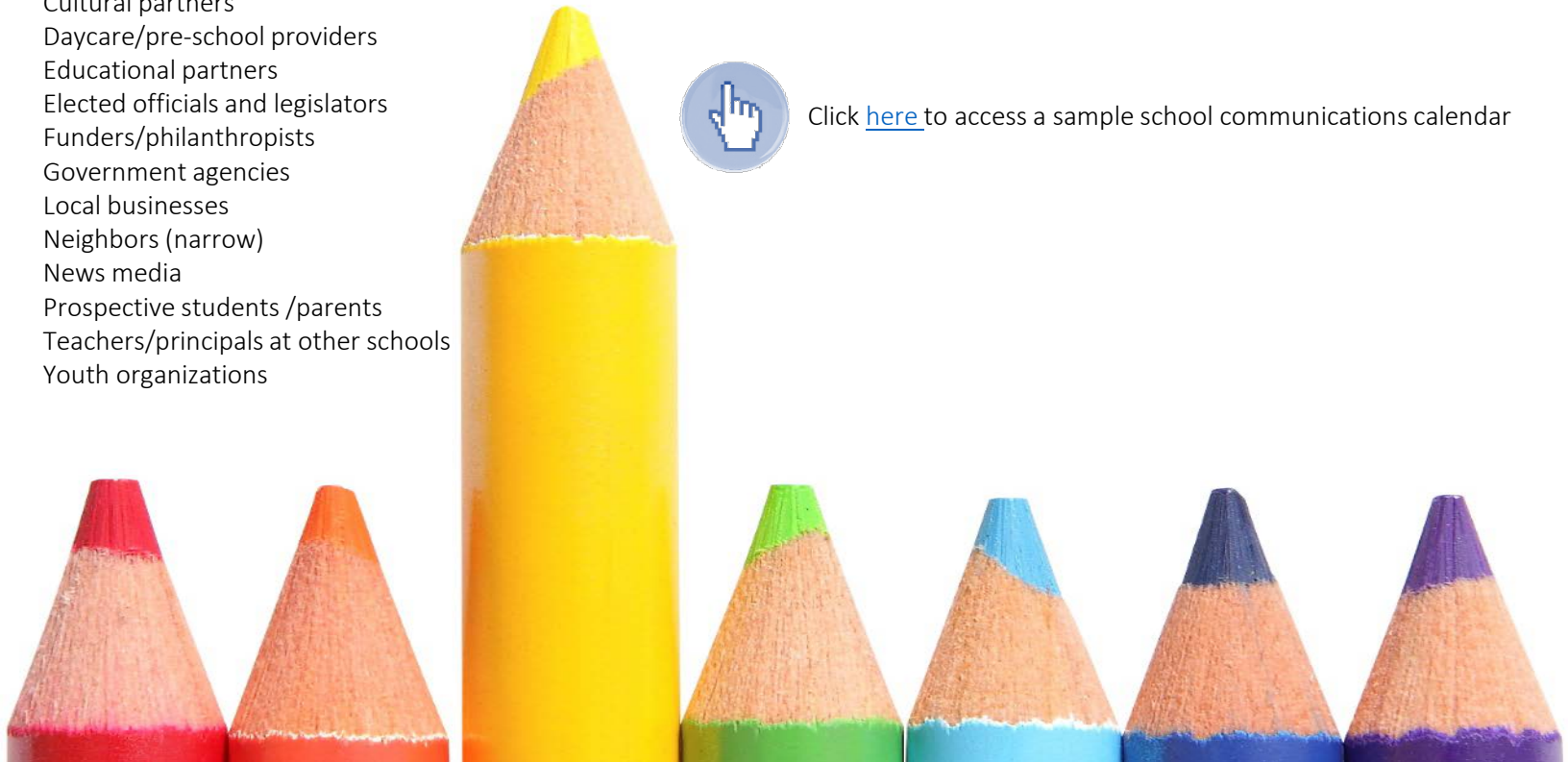
and what you are communicating.



- Back to school nights
- Breaks/holidays
- CDE School Performance Framework Results
- Choice deadlines
- End of school-year communication
- Graduation
- Grant reports
- Home visits
- Newsletter
- October count
- Parent/teacher conferences
- Planning and professional development days
- Prospective family open houses
- Re-enrollment commitment
- Report cards
- School budgeting
- School fundraiser
- School sports
- School trips
- Staffing announcements
- State student assessments
- Student recruitment
- Teacher appreciation
- Volunteer appreciation



Click [here](#) to access a sample school communications calendar



COMMUNICATION CALENDAR WORKSHEET PG/2

Identify when you need to communicate.

Map out a year-long communications calendar August through July. When recording communication events on your calendar, be sure to indicate a targeted audience. In preparing your communication, review the list of questions below.

When designing communication for each audience, ask yourself...

- What do we want this audience to do for us on this issue?
- What does this audience know of this issue now?
- What is the best way to reach this audience?
- Who influences this audience on this issue?
- What are the messages that will work for this audience on this issue?
- What are the major barriers to accomplishing our goal with this audience? How can we overcome those barriers?

Information contained here can be found on pg. 51 Principals In the Public NAESP / NSPRA



To the family of NAME,

As the school year gets underway, I want to thank you for choosing SCHOOL NAME. We are truly honored that you have entrusted us with your child's education this year. I speak for all of the staff here at SCHOOL NAME when I say that we are committed to providing our students with a **CUSTOMIZE**.

Take this opportunity to talk about your program, school culture, classroom experience, or goals for individual students and the school as a whole.

In addition to strong instruction in all core subject areas, I'm excited to share that this year your child will have the opportunity to experience **CUSTOMIZE** that will add to their learning and progress throughout the year.

What is *new* to your school this year? Take this opportunity to describe unique and engaging classroom/school experiences.

I also want to take this opportunity to stress what an important asset you are in your child's learning journey. Education is a true partnership between home and school. We count on your support and want you to know you can count on ours.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's experience or progress this year, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you again for choosing SCHOOL NAME. I look forward to working with you not just this year, but for many years to come.

Sincerely,
Principal

