

Things to consider before the school year begins

Here are a few tips for getting started. Please contact TSTA Communications at 877-ASK-TSTA if you have any questions.

Contact information: Make sure you have up-to-date contact information for your members, including a home email address, if possible. They may forget to report that they've changed campuses or email providers unless you ask. (And if there has been a change in their contact information, please pass it on to TSTA's Membership Division.)

Decide which vehicles to use: You'll most likely want a combination of push and pull. Push vehicles deliver information to your member (e.g., email or text messages). Pull vehicles require the member to seek out the information (e.g., websites, Facebook). Here's why you want both. You need a place to store files, photos, etc. (pull), but you'll also need a way to alert members to a crisis or just to let them know you've posted something new on your page. Some locals use a website; others host a Facebook page. Some communicate by text message or email; others drop written updates in mailboxes. Some produce short videos to explain an issue; others hold 10-minute meetings after school. You are the only one who knows what's best for your local association.

Facebook: A Facebook page is a quick, easy vehicle that fosters two-way communication. With a fan page (not a group), you can create a friendly URL (e.g., www.facebook.com/stopthecutsnow). Here, members can participate by sharing their photos and videos and joining in on the discussion. See "How to set up a Facebook page" for details.

Twitter: Need to send your members a breaking-news update on the legislature or call them to action on an issue before the school board right now? Twitter is a free, easy-to-use program that allows you to create "tweets," which are 140-character messages that show up on the Twitter pages of your "followers." See "How to set up a Twitter account" for details.

Listen: Your communication must be two-way. Listen to what your members say, what they want, what they need. You will build cooperation and trust, head off unnecessary conflict, and motivate and inspire them to take action.

Surveys: One way to "listen" is with a quick survey using a tool such as SurveyMonkey (free at www.surveymonkey.com). A survey can help you gauge support for an issue and collect data for a school board presentation.

Email feedback: Choosing the right email provider can help you "listen" by telling you if members are opening your emails, clicking on links, or forwarding your message. This information can help you identify hot issues, stay relevant, and identify people who might want to be more involved. Examples of providers include Constant Contact, MailChimp, iContact, and benchmark email.

10-minute meetings: Another way to listen is to ask association representatives (aka campus leaders) to hold regular 10-minute meetings for members in their

building. It will strengthen membership support, and it's are especially critical where members do not routinely use technology.

Promise it will be a 10-minute meeting, timed by the clock. Make it snappy and businesslike and rule with an iron hand. If you hold to your promise, they'll be more likely to come back next time. Let them know that if anyone wants to stay past the 10 minutes to talk to you, that's fine, but the meeting will be over. Here's what the meeting might look like:

- 3 minutes: update from local, state, and national associations.
- 3 minutes: briefing on a hot issue.
- 3 minutes: what's needed, a brief outline of where volunteers are needed and what they are needed to do, including all help available for them to be successful.
- 1 minute: success story ("We're having great success in this area/we're optimistic thanks to YOUR efforts/another local had a victory we might want to emulate. Keep up the good work!")

Video: Does anyone in your local have a video camera? Even a Flip or the video function on your phone will do. You could use video to film a school board discussion; your president talking about a current issue; individual members describing how they are making a difference in students' lives or why they love their job. Try to keep them short -- two to three minutes if possible.

Repeat the message: There's an old adage that you have to tell people something three times before it begins to sink in. For you, as communications chair, this means two things. Don't be afraid to take something that you've seen in the Briefing, Member Matters, NEA Today, or any other state/national vehicle, repackage it and send it out to your members as if it's coming from your local association. And if there's something really important coming up or a complicated issue you need to explain to your members, talk about it in your primary communication vehicle more than once – or talk about it in three different ways, maybe on your website, in your newsletter, and in a short video.